The making of Leadership and the Humanities

The editors welcome you to the inaugural issue of Leadership and the Humanities. With our partners, Edward Elgar Publishing and the International Leadership Association, we hope with this journal to fill an important lacuna in the existing literature on the study of leadership.

1 THE DEFINITION PROBLEM

We begin with first principles. The very definition of ‘leadership’ is contested, but in the pages of this journal we encourage a broad conceptualization that allows for the widest possible spectrum of analysis. We propose an understanding of leadership as an asymmetrical (albeit interactive and mutual) influence process that serves to articulate, clarify, and facilitate the accomplishment of a group’s (organization’s, community’s, society’s) objectives (including, importantly, survival). Thought of in this way, it becomes clear that leadership in some form or another exists essentially any time humans come together to accomplish things. Such a definition permits – indeed, invites – studies of the phenomena of leadership that include not only a fixed focus on ‘task accomplishment’ or ‘member satisfaction,’ but also the consideration of broader matters such as the dynamics of context, the philosophical ‘meaning’ and moral implications of leadership and its objectives, and the impact of leadership on people, both in groups and considered as individuals.

‘Leadership,’ the Pulitzer-Prize-winning scholar James MacGregor Burns famously observed, ‘is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.’1 While scholars from many disciplines, especially in the social sciences, have striven mightily to bring insights to the field, contributing many significant findings, Burns’s paradoxical lament remains largely true, not so much due to a deficiency in research, as because of the complexity and variety of the leadership phenomenon.

In academic research, the field of leadership studies, particularly in the United States, has been dominated and shaped since the middle of the twentieth century by the social sciences. The disparate domains of the social sciences – anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, sociology, and related disciplines – comprise a multitude of different approaches and epistemologies. But it is fair to say that the main current of social science academic work self-consciously mimics (or ‘adopts,’ to use a friendlier word) the methods of the natural sciences, attempting to simplify complex social reality by isolating and identifying variables that explain as many observations as possible, and then developing generalizable, testable propositions. (The main dissenting social science tradition – post-modernist scholarship with its related critical studies – interestingly also looks for inspiration beyond the social sciences, to a radical

post-empiricist perspective in the humanities). Social science fashions come and go: a former generation’s *Homo Economicus* and rational actors have given way to contemporary interest in behavioral models and bounded rationality. But over time the social sciences have produced impressive understanding of many aspects of leadership dynamics, including the importance of the group context, dyadic relations and other intragroup interactions, perceptions and decision-making heuristics, emotions, gender, charisma, culture, communication, bureaucracy, and more.

Yet for all of the virtues of the social sciences in terms of methodological rigor, burgeoning models, theoretical formulations, and a steady stream of insights into leadership dynamics, we believe that a significant gap remains in how leadership today is explored, engaged with, and understood. And we believe that addressing this gap requires bringing the humanities in as a full partner in leadership studies. The disciplines of the humanities – to include (but not necessarily be limited to) history, literature, classics, philosophy, religion, law, ethics, languages, the fine and performing arts – have the potential to make an enormous contribution to our understanding of the phenomenon of leadership. For example, historical research allows us to investigate leadership in all its messiness: the swirling and dynamic interplay of constantly changing forces and occurrences, all impacting – and being impacted by – those most unpredictable of actors, human beings. In short, the study of history poses questions and investigates issues that reveal the complexity of leadership. Likewise, literature and the fine and performing arts explore the richness and depth of our common humanity, while philosophy and religion help us to confront our deepest moral questions and dilemmas as we face the challenges that leadership inevitably poses for us. Finally, the fine and performing arts remind us continually of two critical aspects of leadership: first, the essential cultural context within which leadership occurs, and which gives leadership specific meaning and significance in specific contexts; and second, the semiotic and symbolic dimension. Leadership is never reducible merely to power relationships or influence processes. It possesses a powerful symbolic and meaning-making element. From this perspective, as with our other perspectives, the humanities and the social sciences – especially sociology, anthropology, and psychology, with regard to meaning-making – both contribute to a deeper understanding of the leadership phenomenon.

The examples are as limitless as the humanities themselves: hence the need for a journal such as this to bring together such insights in an accessible manner. Our goal is not to replace or overthrow the social sciences, but to help argue for – and demonstrate – a new fusion of disciplines. Leadership is a collaborative, relational activity, and we believe that the study of leadership must likewise be a dialogue, especially a dialogue across lines often perceived to be rigid and impermeable boundaries.

That is the overriding aim of the new journal. The leadership phenomenon engages all aspects of the human condition, a subject that the humanities are particularly equipped to address. Moreover – and readers will inevitably see this as they peruse this and future volumes – studies that give us profound insights into the phenomenon need not have ‘leadership’ in the title, or, for that matter, address it as a primary theme. To take one example from this issue, Peter Kaufman explores how the legendary Roman leader Coriolanus has been portrayed by Plutarch, Machiavelli, Shakespeare, and even modern film interpretations. In the depictions of his life, Coriolanus emerges as an enigmatic and controversial leader, but these later depictions are also to be understood as a function of the historical times and challenges of his portrayers, from Plutarch to the present. Thus Coriolanus has served as a leader whose relationship with the people has been hailed or despised by those chronicling him, in part due to the perceived leadership
challenges of the contemporary moment of the evaluation. In this way, we – who are on
the receiving end of such scholarship – can draw upon it to come to a more informed
understanding not only of the many lessons Coriolanus has to teach us about the rel-
ationship between leaders and the people, but also the role that context and perceptions
can play.

2 MANAGEMENT AND THE METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEM

The field of leadership studies as an organized and self-identified field is a relatively
recent occurrence in academe. Burns’s seminal work, Leadership, was published in
1978. The Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond was
founded in 1992. And the International Leadership Association held its first confer-
ence in 1999. Prior to these recent 2 or 3 decades, when leadership was studied it
tended to be studied most extensively and systematically within the field of business
education, where ‘management,’ rather than ‘leadership,’ was the dominant term. The
impact of this tradition of management education remains powerful. It will be useful to
consider, therefore, whether a humanities perspective has anything to contribute not
simply to contemporary leadership studies, but to the powerful tradition of managerial
and business leadership research and education on which much of the modern field of
leadership studies rests. If the argument can be made – as we believe – that the hum-
anities have something to contribute even to managerial and business studies and edu-
cation, then the case for the present enterprise will be even stronger.

Traditional managerial education, originating with the practical and engineering
perspectives of Fayol and Taylor in the early years of the twentieth century, and reach-
ning full development in the middle of the twentieth century, tends to view business and
organizational leadership as a technical, quasi-scientific activity. The mainstream
research supporting this view tends to root itself in a narrowly empiricist, ahistorical,
and a-cultural frame. But it is important to note a persistent, long-standing counter-
theme in management education, which has repeatedly called for a broader, more
humanities-oriented approach to the study of leadership and management, even in a
business context. Peter Drucker, the key figure in the development of modern manage-
ment research and education, was himself deeply educated in the humanities. Drucker
contextualized his exploration of modern management by drawing not only on seminal
human-relations-oriented management thinkers like Chester Barnard and Mary Parker
Follett, but also on the relevance to modern management and leadership studies of a far
older tradition of thought, stretching back to figures like the medieval political writer
Sir John Fortescue, and even further back to Plato and Xenophon, whose Cyropedia,
Drucker opined, was ‘the first systematic book on leadership, … and still the best book
on the subject.’

More recently, scholars like Joseph Badaracco, while working within
a business school academic setting, bring a humanities perspective to the study of lea-
dership ethics, and the power of narrative and literature to help explore leadership in
different contexts.

In recent years, the call for a rethinking of management education and research has
gained energy. In a study published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement
of Teaching, Anne Colby and her co-authors argue for a much greater and more rigorous
integration of the liberal arts and humanities into business and managerial education.\(^5\) ‘Rethinking undergraduate business education,’ as the title of their volume puts it, means asking whether the traditional structure of managerial–financial–business education really produces the kinds of leaders the contemporary world needs. Colby and her Carnegie co-authors call for a new perspective that includes complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity, and interdependence: it calls, in short, for the kind of exploration and discovery that the humanities enable.

The humanities especially matter to leadership studies, we believe, because they’re about trying to explore, make sense of, and capture something about individuals’ and communities’ lives, strivings, aspirations, thoughts, and deeds. If you like, call it the John Dos Passos or Walt Whitman perspective – literature about people at work – because it’s in artists like these that this exploration is easiest to see in its full agentic vigor. But this explorative quality inheres in all the humanities, even in more contemplative, interior, hesitant, or private work (Willa Cather comes to mind, among many other writers and artists).\(^6\) We believe there is a vast, largely untapped opportunity for us to bring the lively energy and contemplative power of the humanities to the study of leadership.

And that, in closing, is our intention in the pages of this journal. We invite all academics to share their explorations, ideas, and discoveries. Leadership is a complex, indispensable, and above all richly human activity. To study it means to weave together disparate domains of knowledge, fields of practice, and distinct methodologies into an ongoing conversation among scholars. We hope to contribute important voices to that conversation. And we encourage you – as a reader, a commenter, or an author – to join in.

Antonio Marturano, J. Thomas Wren and Michael Harvey

---

REFERENCES


Machiavelli’s people and Shakespeare’s prophet: the early modern afterlife of Caius Martius Coriolanus*

Peter Iver Kaufman
Professor, George Matthews and Virginia Brinkley Modlin Chair in Leadership Studies, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, USA

Both Machiavelli and Shakespeare were drawn to Livy’s and Plutarch’s stories of the legendary field commander turned political inept, Caius Martius, who was honored with the name Coriolanus after sacking the city of Corioles. The sixteenth-century ‘coriolanists’ are usually paired as advocates of participatory regimes and said to have used Coriolanus’s virulent opposition to power-sharing in early republican Rome as an occasion to put plebeian interests in a favorable light. This article objects to that characterization, distinguishing Machiavelli’s deployment of Coriolanus in his Principe and Discorsi from Shakespeare’s depiction of Coriolanus and his critics on stage. The essay that follows puts Machiavelli’s and Shakespeare’s comments on Caius Martius in the context of the ‘factious practices’ they deplored in late medieval Italy and Elizabethan and early Stuart England, respectively.

Keywords: ‘Coriolanus’, faction, Livy, Machiavelli, plebeians, Plutarch, republic, Shakespeare, tribunes

Niccolò Machiavelli and his Prince surface in many leadership studies that draw upon the humanities. Il Principe passes as an apology for early modern absolutism yet still prompts lively discussions of modern government and political morality. Its model sovereign is imperious, often cruel, and always controversial in the classroom. The book’s fifteenth chapter couples statements expressing two sentiments responsible for Machiavelli’s reputation as rogue and realist. The first advised princes to learn not to be good (imparare a potere non buono). Machiavelli conceded that the illusion of being virtuous serves princes well, but dissembling and treachery are more reliable ways to snatch and keep power. So much for the rogue; Machiavelli, the realist, was about results. He prefaced his non buono with promises to steer clear of abstractions and imaginary regimes. He is commonly said to have spawned political science by relying on the concrete, stocking his counsel for sovereigns with examples extracted from antiquity and lessons learned from contemporaries’ and from near neighbors’ mistakes and successes. He relied, that is, on what was or had been done rather than on the hypothetical or hyped up. To show how (and explain why) effects excused

* I thank Professor J. Thomas Wren for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay. And, with abiding friendship and respect, I dedicate it to Tom on the occasion of his retirement from our faculty at the University of Richmond’s Jepson School and with appreciation for this journal, an endeavor he and his colleagues have just launched.
princes whom their tactics accused, he declared that he would go directly to tangible truths (andare direto alla verità effettuale della cosa).

Despite his reputation for using the expected results or ends to justify princes’ meanness, his counsel was more than a brief for cruelty. His less well known Discourses on Livy present a set of insightful reflections on leadership in republics. He turned to the early Roman republic to illustrate the promise and peril of broadly participatory regimes. And one figure, Caius Martius Coriolanus, whose notoriety owes more to Shakespeare than to Machiavelli, gave the latter a chance to explain how effectively people could be mobilized to keep republican governments from capsizing.

But Coriolanus was and still is a controversial figure. Livy and Plutarch pieced together from sources, now lost, his reputation for exceptional valor, especially during the siege and sack of the city of Corioli. Caius Martius’s superior added ‘Coriolanus’ to his name, commemorating the victory and commending its principal architect. Patricians in Rome were delighted; plebeians were not. As Caius Martius, Coriolanus opposed empowering them. As Coriolanus, he refused to defer to them, and deference was necessary if, as patricians in the senate expected, their nominee was to become one of Rome’s two consuls.

But Coriolanus’s disdain for commoners made them resentful. He was vilified, tried on trumped-up charges, nearly executed, and banished from Rome. As the story came to Livy and Plutarch and, from them, to Machiavelli and Shakespeare, Coriolanus was moved by plebeian ingratitude to join and lead Rome’s enemies to the very gates of the city he had served. Rome was saved, in large part, by his mother’s pleas. But sparing those who had evicted him meant betraying their (and his former) enemies who subsequently befriended and trusted him. They repaid his betrayal and killed him.

Coriolanus’s fate would have made for just another interesting, generally unverifiable story from archaic Rome, had interpreters not drawn from his misfortune different implications for the conduct of leadership in a republic or for the virtue or viciousness of republican regimes. This paper juxtaposes two different interpretations – the first, Machiavelli’s, was written early in the sixteenth century; the second, Shakespeare’s, nearly a century later – to discuss their reasons for repossessing and redeploying Coriolanus. I want to consider how and why Machiavelli, the early modern diplomat, sifted the origins of the Roman republic to underscore the importance of developing adequate means to express ordinary citizens’ resentments and, thereby, to temper the tyranny he sometimes seemed to sanction in his Prince. We also want to learn why Shakespeare, the early modern dramatist, doubted the value of republican initiatives. Undiplomatic Coriolanus was an antagonist in the diplomat’s Discorsi. His abrasiveness stirred popular opposition, which, when properly channeled, demonstrated the effectiveness of the plebeians’ and of their tribunes’ discretion. But, as the playwright’s protagonist, Coriolanus was contemptuous of plebeians and their tribunes. Coriolanus, the play, ends badly for him. But his contempt prompts us to discuss dilemmas still facing leadership studies that assess relationships between leaders and

1. Citations refer to chapters in Machiavelli’s Prince (Il Principe), for which consult http://www.classicitaliani.it. As noted, its advice on learning to be deceitful and its attachments to the historical and practical are yoked in chapter 15. Principe, chapter 18, considers the value of simulated virtue. Machiavelli’s Discourses on Livy’s Ab urbe condita libri, his history of Rome (Discorsi sula prima deca di Tito Livio), can be accessed at the same website. Citations here refer to book, chapter, and section. Discorsi, 1.9, 2 suggests that a practice’s effects frequently excuse a practitioner’s apparent wickedness, accusandolo il fatto, il effetto lo scusi. Here, translations from Machiavelli and, later, from Livy’s Ab urbe condita, accessed at www.thelatinlibrary.com, are mine.
the led in republican governments. And his contempt will eventually tempt us to enroll him among other disgraced yet discerning prophets in the history of political dissent. Machiavelli hunted for tangible truths about republican Rome in Titus Livy’s history, which circulated in the first century CE. It siphoned information from predecessors who relied on legend and subsequently lost sources to rehearse what is now called the city’s ‘conflict of the orders,’ a struggle that supposedly attended the transition from regal to consular government in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, BCE. Reportedly, at the time, plebeians and patricians were at odds – the former extorting concessions from a senatorial elite. Livy and his sources, however, are now said to have exaggerated the plebeians’ influence and, ‘afflicted with numerous anachronisms,’ cannot be used to reconstruct the socioeconomic texture of archaic Rome. As for ‘the conflict of the orders,’ which Machiavelli considered essential for good government, its extent and character during the first decades of the republic are impossible to determine with confidence. Some scholars suggest that Coriolanus was then confronting and criticizing an assortment of near destitute urban artisans and tenant farmers, a diverse, economically disadvantaged plebeian ‘front’ that seceded or went on strike to acquire political representation and a larger share of available wealth. But the apparent success of their efforts may indicate that they were led by affluent landowners and citizen soldiers able to afford the equipment necessary for military services and eager to check the patricians’ power.2 And, as Emilio Gabba notices, ambiguities and inaccuracies not only skewed whatLivy wrote about the plebeians in the young republic but also affected the way his sources defined patricians. Gabba thinks the ‘codification’ of the Roman aristocracy occurred long after Coriolanus and the elites would have encountered commoners’ agitation and their tribunes’ demands. Hence, historians ought to approach all Roman sources for that stretch very cautiously, _moltoprudenti_.3

Well into the twentieth century, however, most scholars accepted what Livy wrote about the early republic as ‘highly reliable.’4 So we should not expect Machiavelli to have been unduly skeptical. Besides, Livy’s story of Coriolanus’s insolence and of the plebeians’ reactions was too good to be untrue, which is to say that it fit Machiavelli’s preconceptions and purposes. Livy had retrieved the political tensions that led, through the Roman tribunes’ robust interventions, to the city’s defensible verdict against Coriolanus – and to the restoration of order in Rome. In effect, Livy substantiated Machiavelli’s claims that mistrust among the elites enabled commoners and their representatives to stabilize republican government. No wonder Machiavelli ‘made the history of Titus Livy his Bible.’5

And that ‘bible’ demonized Coriolanus. The context was significant. Livy explained that quarrels between plebeians and patricians were resolved after Rome’s last king had been deposed and when commoners were granted the right to select tribunes to protect their interests. But crop failures in local fields, the arrival of corn from patricians’ Sicilian estates, and prices charged by the patricians prompted Rome’s commoners to demand price controls. According to Livy, Coriolanus proposed to use the crisis to cancel the concessions that, in his estimation, the plebeians had extorted from the senate. If they wanted to return to the prices that pertained when corn was plentiful, commoners, he submitted, must relinquish their newly acquired prerogatives and return full authority to the patricians.6

Coriolanus’s blunt ultimatum and exploitation of the famine is thrown into greater relief in Livy’s story by his description of another patrician’s tact and tactics; his Menenius Agrippa reassured commoners that the patrician senate and moneyed interests it represented were vitally concerned with plebeians’ wellbeing. The elites were comparable to a body’s belly, Menenius explained; although more conspicuously industrious members of the body politic may suspect that the stationary stomach was idle, it was not; the belly, much as Rome’s affluent elite, was busy, wisely distributing nourishment. Livy mentions that the commoners were fond of Menenius; however, his analogy was not an unqualified success. Plebeians’ anger somewhat abated, yet they consented only to negotiations, the result of which were the concessions that Coriolanus deplored.7

Livy’s sympathies are with the commoners, and that obviously appealed to Machiavelli. They had protested peacefully. They forced the senate to negotiate by leaving the city, settling provisionally several miles away. They gave no other provocation, yet the suspense, Livy says, was paralysing. Plebeians, who had not ‘seceded’ and were left in Rome, were frightened that they might become targets of the city’s patricians. Plebeians and patricians alike were tormented by the prospect that a Rome so divided, fear-filled, and, in effect, immobilized, might fall prey to its enemies. The senate concluded that reconciliation was required for Rome’s defense. Historian Christopher Mackay claims that the senate’s next steps – allowing commoners to elect tribunes – marked ‘the beginning of the corporate organization of the plebs as a kind of state within the state.’8 But, as we learned, many of Mackay’s colleagues are unsure that sparring partners in early fifth-century Rome should be identified with relatively homogenous ‘orders’ or ‘states.’ Machiavelli, however, had no such reservations. He saw a new and desirable order emerging from ‘the conflict of the orders’ in archaic Rome. Livy seems to have been far less sanguine about the new order, although Thomas Baier thinks he was disposed to award ‘ultimate authority’ to the vox populi, if commoners could achieve sufficient unanimity to speak meaningfully with a single voice.9

Livy’s sympathies are not easy to locate. Janet Chaplin seems sensible maintaining that his ‘distillation of history into exempla’ was meant to chart ‘a way out’ of the difficulties he and his first readers were experiencing.\(^{10}\) Still, in his account of the emerging republic, Livy seems to use Coriolanus as an example of how to anger commoners and create difficulties, giving Machiavelli a chance to use Coriolanus as an occasion, not an example – an occasion to show how well the early Roman republican government worked. Coriolanus, as we just discovered, was unpopular for having proposed that grain be withheld until the plebeians were prepared to give up the authority they and their tribunes had lately acquired. Predictably, the plebeians were furious; had they rioted, Coriolanus would have been slaughtered, patricians would have taken precautions for self-defense, partisans of both sides, driven by fear or indignation, would have turned an incident into a feud, destabilizing Rome’s new republic.\(^{11}\) But tribunes, wasting no time, Machiavelli emphasized, summoned Coriolanus to argue his case, answer objections, and accept punishment. Unlike officials in the Republic of Florence, who provided their citizens no forum in which to vent their anger (sfo-gare), the tribunes in Rome found an effective way to spare their city the turmoil suffered by Machiavelli’s.\(^{12}\)

Livy’s Coriolanus was an exemplary soldier. He and a small squadron not only repelled a Volscian attack but carried the battle to his enemies, capturing the city of Corioli – and capturing, for Caius Martius, his cognomen.\(^{13}\) Later, during a crisis precipitated by the senate’s concessions and brought to a boil by Coriolanus’s incivility, he was banished from Rome, joined the Volscians, all but supplanted their commander, and led their troops to avenge their previous humiliation – at his hands – and to settle his score against those who banished him.\(^{14}\) Neither Machiavelli nor Livy appears to have been interested in the mechanics of the military maneuvers, yet both noticed that Coriolanus shrewdly sought to intensify ‘the conflict of the orders’ by plundering commoners’ properties in the countryside and leaving those of the patricians untouched. Machiavelli admired the strategy. Commanders should sow dissension among enemies, he averred, coupling Hannibal with Coriolanus, two adepts waging psychological as well as bloody wars.\(^{15}\) Coriolanus clearly met Livy’s expectations that field commanders lead by example (pugnando quam adhortando); belligerent action rather than talk inspired soldiers whose advance, in one of Livy’s stories, was suddenly stalled by the death of a valued comrade.\(^{16}\) Livy’s Coriolanus – exceptional at action, excellent at soldiering – was an awkward talker, as he was in Petrarch’s sketch and would be in Shakespeare’s tragedy, ‘a brilliant general lost in the tricks of politics.’\(^{17}\)


\(^{13}\) Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 2.33.

\(^{14}\) Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 2.39.

\(^{15}\) Machiavelli, *Dell’arte della Guerra* 6, accessed at http://www.bibliotecaitaliana.it.

\(^{16}\) Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 2.46.

\(^{17}\) Christopher Pelling (2002), *Plutarch and History*, London: Duckworth, p. 240. Whether Pelling’s observation is accurate with respect to the historical Caius Martius is impossible to
That observation, as it applies to Petrarch’s Coriolanus, is Christopher Pelling’s, with whom Machiavelli would have disagreed. The new regime in Rome, having expelled the city’s king and just begun to program an emerging republic, was neither tricky nor treacherous. It was heading in the right direction. Two consuls were elected annually. Candidates were candid, not deceptive. Leaders were virtuous and resourceful. When patricians threatened to deprive the plebeians of their prerogatives – as Coriolanus did – tribunes protected both, and, doing so, they preserved civility in the city as well as citizens’ rights. Machiavelli was heartened by the results attributing everything good about Roman government to the plebeians’ discontent and tribunes’ interventions. His enthusiasm was undiminished by what Livy and others reported about the senate’s ability to frustrate tribunes during the fifth century. He saw no abyss open between the plebeians and patricians in the immediate aftermath of Rome’s regal period. What mattered to him was that tribunes had stopped Coriolanus’s bid to compel commoners to surrender their political advantages and status and that tribunes continued determinedly to preside over what John McCormick now imagines to have been a ‘procedurally formalized popular discussion of and judgment over … the lives of the grandi.’ Machiavelli admitted that plebeians occasionally became overbearing, yet the greater danger, he continued, originated with the patricians, whose youth looked for chances to reassert their caste’s political dominance. Even parents acknowledged that their children often were ‘too savage,’ nearly toppling the tribunate. But the office had survived for centuries in Rome, and Machiavelli lamented that fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Florence had nothing comparable. Archaic Rome’s tribunes, agitating ‘against ambition and insolence,’ he claimed, constantly revived republican virtues. Plebeians were ambitious, susceptible to temptations to improve their lot, economically and politically, but, conceding as much, Machiavelli nevertheless trusted that they were a safer bet than their patrician neighbors to be discerning and prudent. The early modern Venetians, having deposited power with patricians, were less well governed than the Romans who handed over considerable authority to the plebeians (nelle mani della plebe). The Romans had discovered that commoners were unlikely to be driven by a desire to dominate. Non essere dominati; liberation, not domination,

18. Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.20.
21. John P. McCormick (2011), Machiavellian Democracy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 72. With plebeians’ backing, then, the tribunes allegedly checked the ambition of the grandi (or nobility), which would otherwise have corrupted the republic soon after its onset. See Machiavelli, Discorsi 3.11, 1.
22. Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.46 for the savagery and 1.49 for the lament. McCormick (2001), ‘Machiavellian Democracy: Controlling Elites with Ferocious Populism,’ The American Political Science Review, 95, 297–303 compares patrician and plebeian overreaching, stipulating that the latter, unlike the former, never sought to dominate the government. McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, p. 61 adds that Machiavelli’s criticism of patrician ambition was ‘fairly faithful’ to Livy, whereas his ‘fulsome praise of the people and apologetic approach to their mistakes are departures from Livy’s account.’
23. Machiavelli, Discorsi 3.1, 3.
24. Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.58, 3.
25. Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.5, 1.
was the plebeians’ foremost concern, and, for Machiavelli, that priority was the factor that would keep the fabric of republics from being ripped by factions and greed. The people’s contempt for them, notwithstanding his exceptional and exemplary lack of ambition, was enough to condemn him, to rally Livy’s and Petrarch’s plebeians as well as Machiavelli against him.

Here, Machiavelli was staking out an anomalous, if not also an awkward, position. To be sure, there was no sixteenth-century groundswell of opinion favoring Coriolanus, but Francesco Guicciardini, for one, suggested political tensions were unhealthy, that governments galloped toward disaster when influential theorists countenanced discord between the multitude and the moguls. Laudare le disunione, to praise friction was ludicrous. Studying late medieval Italy, Machiavelli probably agreed. He deplored the sectarian spirit among early modern patricians. The case can be made that he was hunting for a leader — in John Najemy’s terms, for a ‘redeemer-reformer’ — to reformulate laws and revive respect for republican virtù in Italy. Coriolanus was as far as one could be from becoming a model for Machiavelli’s ‘messiah.’

Few if any adaptations or interpretations of Shakespeare’s Coriolanus cast the protagonist as a redeemer or reformer. But the play’s plebeians and emergent Roman

26. Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.5, 2 and 1.5, 4, which predicts the infection, assuming that plebeians might be tempted to avenge themselves by despoiling patricians who despoiled them: ‘che gli loro scorretti e ambiziosi portamenti accedano, ne’ petti di chi non possiede, voglia di possedere o per vendicarsi contro di loro spogliandoli, o per potere ancora loro entrare in quelle ricchezza e in quelli onore che veggono essere male usati degli altri.’

27. Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.58, 4.


31. Machiavelli, Istorie Fiorentine 3.4: Si Vivea in Sospetto Grandissimo e Temevasi per Ciascuno Ogni Rovina. The Istorie was and is accessed at http://www.bibliotecaitaliani.it. It does not repeat the claim Machiavelli’s Discorsi made, that tension between plebeians and patricians was what historian Gisela Bock calls ‘the dynamic force for expansion and empire’; ‘Civil Discord in Machiavelli’s Istorie Fiorentine,’ Machiavelli and Republicanism, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 201. Indeed, the Istorie can be read as an appeal to ‘repress strife’; see Alfredo Bonadeo’s (1970) still valuable ‘The Role of the People in the Works and Times of Machiavelli,’ Bibliotheca d’Humanisme et Renaissance, 32, 368.

over patricians Cosimo Rucellai and Zanobi Buondelmonti, the Discorsi’s dedicatees, convincing them of ‘the honest and decent rather than insolent and licentious nature of the people’ so that the two would rally support for ‘a more popularly participatory republic’ in Florence.

36. Barton, Essays, p. 149.
‘real necessities’ to a scramble of trivial pursuits, which Coriolanus calls ‘unstable slightness.’

‘General ignorance’? Machiavelli’s commoners are so shrewd that they are hardly ever deceived (quasi mai s’inganni). The political intelligence, ignorance, and shrewdness of any population, of course, are eminently debatable. As one of Shakespeare’s characters in Coriolanus says, ‘our virtues lie in the interpretation of the time,’ and interpretations of the time, even at that time, varied. Those in the streets responsible for the so-called ‘Arab Spring’ have been lionized as courageous, liberal paladins of political freedom and simultaneously vilified as rabid Islamists and terrorists. Likewise in sixteenth-century England, the authorities disagreed about commoners’ political intelligence, steadfastness, and virtue. Commoners’ competence was an issue in the 1540s – and again in the 1570s – as the religiously reformed debated the role of the laity in parish government. Tudor magistrates and ministers encountered lay refugees from the Continent who were accustomed to broadly participatory parish regimes. They hired and fired pastors. A few English church officials, including Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, were intrigued by that arrangement, but their fascination with the polities of those ‘stranger churches’ led to no innovative, democratic practices. The English laity played a prominent part sustaining worship services during Queen Elizabeth’s first years, after many Catholic priests were dismissed and while diocesan authorities sought religiously reformed replacements, but lay lectors retired – as ordered – as soon as replacements were found. The subject of popular participation resurfaced thereafter at Cambridge, in discussions of church discipline. William Fulke introduced the idea that all people affected by decisions ought to have some say in sifting them (quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus debet), but that ‘ought’ was unpopular among the influential.

37. For Shakespeare’s Coriolanus, I cite the second signet edition of the 1623 text, the first folio (New York: Signet, 2002) by act, scene, and lines; hence, in this instance, 3.1, 109–110, 138–139, and 146–147.

38. Machiavelli, Discorsi 3.34, 4.


42. British Library, Additional MS. 19398, fol. 59.

43. British Library, Cotton MS. Titus C VI, fols. 19v-22r. Many of the ‘influential,’ scholars now stress, had an interest in having their say in their realm’s rule. Historians excavating that interest call England a ‘monarchical republic’ and locate what we might call lobbying efforts among some outspoken bishops and courtiers to secure Elizabeth’s agreement to fulfill what they deemed her duty. In that connection, see Patrick Collinson’s (1994) seminal study of quasi republican ideas in his Elizabethan Essays, London: Hambledon, pp. 31–56 and the papers collected in The Monarchical Republic of Early Modern England: Essays in Response to Patrick Collinson, John F. McDiarmid (ed.), Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. Also consult Rosamund Oates’s (2012) ‘Puritans and the Monarchical Republic: Conformity and Conflict in the Elizabethan Church,’ English Historical Review, 127, 819–843, which reconfirms that ‘a republican instinct existed within the monarchical state’ (p. 820), but which also makes it clear, by omission, that leaders attracted to quasi-republican ideas were unconcerned with commoners’ participation, which Fulke advocated (omnes … omnibus).
When Shakespeare was still in Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1580s, and into the 1590s when he was settling in London, discussions of popular participation in policy-making were generally contained within discussions of church staffing and liturgy. What risks would attach if congregational decisions required commoners’ consent?44 Would ordinary people recognize the extraordinary gifts needed to manage colleagues and crises? Hugh Grady suggests Shakespeare’s Roman plays, including Coriolanus, pondered the problems posed by putting ‘great’ leaders ‘in a popular political context.’45 Perhaps Livy and Plutarch sniffed around those issues as well. An early Elizabethan admirer of the former, William Painter, thought that Livy had emphasized the intolerance of the mob, which would have torn Coriolanus ‘in pieces,’ had the tribunes not intervened to save him.46

‘Downe must the nobilitie goe’; Matthew Sutcliffe, dean of Exeter Cathedral, issued his warning, predicting what would happen to ‘the great,’ if government of the local churches were entrusted to ordinary congregants. He evoked the disturbances on the Continent during the 1530s that followed (and, he alleged, had been occasioned by) the religious radicals’ experiments with participatory parish regimes. In 1590, when Sutcliffe published his warning, England’s elites had some – but small – reason to fear the fate that, according to Painter, awaited Coriolanus, inasmuch as at least one dissident, who wanted to cut the hedges that the landed gentry planted to enclose arable land (keeping commoners and their livestock out), proposed ‘cutting down [the] gentlemen’ as well.47

But Coriolanus is politically imprecise. Hugh Grady counts it as one of Shakespeare’s two ‘world-weary’ plays. It does not consider politics to be ‘an invigorating positive force,’ Grady says, yet it seems incorrect when he characterizes the play’s and playwright’s take on archaic Rome’s and on early modern England’s politics as ‘amoral’ rather than immoral. The protagonist’s opposition to the early republic is, after all, near fanatical.48 Disingenuously, tribunes shift the blame onto him. They may seem, at first, to be justified calling him self-absorbed, ‘insolent, o’ercome with

44. For example, A Briefe and Plaine Declaration concerning the desires of those faithful ministers that have and do seeke for the discipline and reformation of the Church of England (London, 1584), pp. 106–107, on congregational consent. The authorship of Briefe and Plaine has never been settled with certainty. William Fulke, who favored a broadly participatory parish regime during the Cambridge debate, is one of the leading candidates. Elizabethan puritanism’s most systematic theologians, Dudley Fenner, is the other.
45. Grady, Shakespeare, p. 45.
47. The dissident’s threat is quoted in John Walter’s (1985) ‘A Rising of the People? The Oxfordshire Rising of 1596,’ Past and Present, 107, p. 101. Economic hardships drove commoners to agitate for relief, so much so that Chris Fitter (2000), in ‘The Quarrel is between our Masters and us, their Men: Romeo and Juliet, Dearth, and the London Riots,’ English Literary Renaissance, 30, 154–183, seems justified locating an ‘epidemic of disorder’ in the 1590s. And we should not forget that Shakespeare’s Coriolanus was first staged only a few years after Guy Fawkes was discovered with nearly forty barrels of gunpowder beneath the chamber where the House of Lords, King James, and his son and heir were scheduled to assemble. Only a handful of conspirators was involved in what became known as the ‘powder plot,’ but fears that commoners’ dissatisfaction was widespread and volatile prompted James’s Council to contemplate precautions, for which see Conrad Russell (2011), King James VI and I and his English Parliaments, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 47. For Sutcliffe’s (1590) mock valediction, ‘downe … goe,’ consult his Treatise of Ecclesiastical Discipline, London: Bishop and Newberie, pp. 186–187.
48. Compare Grady, Shakespeare, p. 47.
pride, ambitious past all thinking, self-loving." But playgoers know that Coriolanus was not after power. Nominated consul by the senate, he nonetheless disdained its ritual celebration of his heroism. He left the senate’s chamber instead of staying to hear his ‘nothings monstered’ in a colleague’s speech. He lacked tact and charm yet seemed genuinely humble. He only reluctantly agreed to display his wounds in the market to rally popular support for the nomination, then rapidly repented turning his scars into a sales pitch. His mother and Menenius, his mentor, would have had him stoop to conquer – that is, to win the plebeians’ affection – but he held that pose poorly and for only a short time. ‘Deficiencies’ of that sort have been tabulated by historian James Kuzner, who relates them to the play’s position on political pageantry, and specifically to its protagonist’s objections to republican politics. Kuzner and others underscore the obvious, that Coriolanus ‘stand[s] outside the social compact,’ but Kuzner most emphatically argues that Shakespeare has his man reject the ‘state’s controlling fictions,’ rituals, and rhetoric, because they, in effect, take away subjects’ voices even as they pretend to take them seriously. Coriolanus will not conform to expectations. He will not be ‘made meaningful.’ ‘Acknowledged agency, of which the people seem so covetous,’ says Kuzner, is, for Coriolanus, inauthentic.

We cannot confidently infer what Shakespeare thought about personal authenticity from his Coriolanus’s transparency and impetuosity. But we may say with certainty that protagonist (and possibly the playwright) would not have endorsed Machiavelli’s classification of citizens’ street demonstrations and secession, which forced patricians’ concessions as bargaining tactics that stabilized the government. In Shakespeare’s play, the tribunes did all the bargaining for the people, inciting otherwise agreeable citizens to rebellion to increase the tribunes’ leverage with the senate. Coriolanus as consul, they said, would make citizens ‘of no more voice than dogs that are often beat for barking.’ But, in effect, and certainly in the end, the tribunes, not Coriolanus, steal the commoners’ voices. True, the latter regretted the senate’s concessions that created the tribunes, but those tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, take liberties with the protagonist’s impatience with plebeians’ demands, turning it into something comprehensively misanthropic – and turning him into the people’s ‘fixed enemy.’ Historian John Roe’s observation is on the mark: Shakespeare’s Coriolanus ‘makes popular, conspiratorial Machiavels of the tribunes, whereas Machiavelli sees them as men of principle, whose disinterested application of the law’ gets the new republic off to a good start.

49. Shakespeare, Coriolanus, 4.6, 30–32.
50. Shakespeare, Coriolanus 2.2, 78.
53. Compare Livy, Ab Urbe Condita 3.2 with Machiavelli, Discorsi 1.4, 1.
54. Shakespeare, Coriolanus 2.3, 220–222.
55. Shakespeare, Coriolanus 2.2, 256–257.
In Machiavelli’s narrative, Rome’s plebeians were ready to attack the recklessly candid Coriolanus; the tribunes save him from them. In Coriolanus, Shakespeare’s tribunes, at first, call a crowd to ‘bear him to th’ rock Tarpeian and from thence unto destruction cast him.’ Reading Plutarch’s account of the agitation that attended the creation of the Roman republic, Shakespeare was acquainted with ‘seditious’ tribunes. Furthermore, allegations of sedition were very much in the air in early modern England and in the minds of two of the realm’s sovereigns. Elizabeth I silenced statesmen in the Lower House of Parliament claiming to represent the concerns of ‘the commonality’ in the late 1570s and 1580s, trying to legislate a further reform of the established church. Then and subsequently, the queen expressed her displeasure whenever her courtships became subjects for parliamentary debate. King James I was hostile to members of Parliament whose seemingly interminable debates were, in his estimation, stunts to avoid enacting what he most desired, a more perfect union between his two kingdoms, England and Scotland. But before we compare the tribunes’ management of the electorate in Coriolanus with the representatives of ‘The Commons,’ we should be alert to the imperfect character of representation in Parliament. Local elites controlled the elections to the House of Commons. The possibilities for genuinely participatory regimes almost exclusively aired in debates about parishioners’ prerogatives. So ‘free consents’ and ‘free elections,’ historian Oliver Arnold suggests, were phrases that seldom if ever could be applied to the Elizabethan and Jacobean parliamentary elections. Arnold may be correct ranking Shakespeare among political radicals determined to speak out about commoners’ lack of voice. The playwright may well have expressed his displeasure in Coriolanus, suggesting that Rome’s plebeians should ‘never have traded in their rebellion for representation,’ as Arnold indicates, but I think his simpler argument is more defensible – specifically, his judgment that Shakespeare’s play displays its maker’s fears that ‘the representatives of the people might be oppressive masters rather than guardians of liberty.’ On stage, this certainly is Coriolanus’s reading of the commoners’ masters and, I will suggest, it was prophetic.

But Machiavelli, for his part, was unworried about such potential popular usurpers. From what he learned about the Roman republic, he concluded that, in hundreds of elections during its hundreds of years, the citizens chose no more than four wicked tribunes or consuls. Shakespeare approached the problem of representation from a different angle. He found that Rome’s tribunes wickedly manipulated the plebeians, who were too trusting and easily gullible; Mikail Hörnquist suggests that ‘the Rome of [Shakespeare’s] Coriolanus is an archaic state which still has a long way to go before becoming the perfect republic Machiavelli speaks of in the Discourses.’ His Coriolanus berates the senate for having ever set the city on that course. His mother scolds him for being ‘too absolute,’ for criticizing concessions, and for failing to

58. Plutarch’s Life of Caius Martius Coriolanus was available to Shakespeare in Thomas North’s translation. For ‘the two seditious tribunes,’ see his Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, 2nd edn, London: Vautrollier and Wight, 1579, pp. 243–244.
60. Hörnquist, Machiavelli and Empire, p. 195. For Machiavelli’s assessment (non fece quattro elezioni di che quello si avesse a pentire), see his Discorsi 1.58, 3. But also see McCormick, ‘Controlling Elites,’ p. 307, analysing another section of the Discorsi (1.48), which appears to acknowledge commoners’ gullibility. Nobles present a slate of first-rate patricians and second-rate plebeians for commoners to consider. They select the former, ‘confirm their virtue,’ and ‘do not see through the nomination strategy.’
comprehend that ‘policy’ dictates compromises. His mentor Menenius agrees, adding that the protagonist’s ‘nature is too noble for this world.’61 On both counts, nobility and insurrection, Coriolanus exhibited traits that we tend to associate with prophets disenchanted with the reigning rituals and routines of their time and place, because they failed to inspire virtue and justice. Prophets’ disaffiliation means that they can never be at home in their homelands. Coriolanus comes to us dishonored, disaffected, and nearly throttled after the first three acts of Shakespeare’s play, at which point, having been banished, he leaves Rome for ‘a world elsewhere.’62

He does not vanish from the stage. The final two acts have him in the company of his former enemies, the Volscians, leading them to the gates of Rome. But a delegation dissuades him from attacking. His mother, wife, and young son shame him for having turned on the city that turned on him. The tribunes wrongly and wickedly accuse him of ambition, and, although his actions during the final acts could be construed as corroboration, neither Shakespeare nor Plutarch would give Coriolanus’s self-interest and ambition much play.63 But, plausibly, the playwright’s ambition and irritation with commoners got stage time in Coriolanus. Historian Robert Ormsby imagines that dramatists who were also entrepreneurs may have been restless. The success of a play and the fate of a theater company could depend on audiences that were ‘comprised of the socially and mentally unfit whose judgments,’ if we may trust literature that was patently antitheatrical, were ‘mutable and harmful.’ Shakespeare’s Coriolanus, in the first scene of the first act, echoes that estimate: ‘with every minute you do change your mind and call him noble that was now your hate, him vile that was your garland.’ Did the playwright rake into his character’s contempt his own displeasure at having the whims of ‘the vulgar sort’ to some extent control his plays’ reception and profit margin?64

Stephen Greenblatt usefully reminds us that Shakespeare, whose investments were nearly as dependent on the fickle, ‘vulgar [or common] sort’ as on early modern aristocratic patronage, was, unlike Machiavelli, a man whose leisure was gladly spent among commoners. Machiavelli once wrote ‘with disgust of the vulgar arguments and stupid games he was forced to watch’ after he had been forcibly retired from the diplomatic

61. Shakespeare, Coriolanus 3.1, 254 (‘too noble’); 3.2, 39 (‘too absolute’).
63. Compare Shakespeare, Coriolanus 1.1, 259–262 and 3.1, 80–81 with Plutarch, Lives, p. 261. Carson Holloway (2007), ‘Shakespeare’s Coriolanus and Aristotle’s Great-Souled Man,’ The Review of Politics, 69, 358–360, probes usefully for Coriolanus’s motives, noting his ‘ironical self-deprecation’ and ‘detachment from praise.’ ‘What, then, is Coriolanus’s primary motivation,’ Holloway inquires, answering that, ‘animated by a kind of earnestness regarding nobility, or concern with virtue for its own sake,’ Coriolanus ‘calls to mind true magnanimity, which is more concerned with truth than with what people think.’ Rummaging for the motives Shakespeare packs into his protagonist, Holloway probes usefully, but he is far from unique on that count. See Norman Rabkin’s still valuable efforts to explain Coriolanus’s ‘absolute allegiance to his ideals’ and to contrast it with others’ ‘temporizing,’ for which see Rabkin (1966), ‘Coriolanus: The Tragedy of Politics’ Shakespeare Quarterly 17, 195–212, but also consult Patricia Meszaros’s (1976) ‘There is a World Elsewhere: Tragedy and History in Coriolanus,’ Studies in English Literature, 16, 280, which seems to have implanted ambition in Coriolanus yet to have deprived him of political savvy: ‘because “politics” does not exist for him,’ she avers, ‘he can recognize neither the need to assure his control of the state by accommodating himself to the expectations of the populace nor the need to handle Brutus and Sicinius with circumspection and outmaneuver them in their bid for power.’
service and ‘rusticated’; ‘his only relief came in the evenings,’ Greenblatt continues, drawing on the desolation expressed in one of Machiavelli’s letters. At night, the Florentine would come alive in his library with ‘his beloved authors,’ Livy and others of that time. ‘At last [Machiavelli] had companions fit for his intellect,’ Greenblatt imaginatively yet, I think, correctly editorializes, adding – also correctly – that ‘nothing could be further from Shakespeare’s sensibility.’ If the playwright ever ‘showed signs of boredom at the small talk, trivial pursuits, and foolish games of ordinary people,’ we do not know of it.65 Such observations and ‘editorials’ would seem to sabotage the interpretations on offer in this study, although one can envision Shakespeare’s familiarity with pub culture breeding contempt for commoners who presumed to exercise political leverage and – perhaps even more easily – see Machiavelli’s purported ‘disgust’ with ‘the vulgar’ in rural Italy, leading him to romanticize citizens’ participation in the early Roman republic. On these matters, however, we traffic in guesses rather than certainties.

But of one thing we can be sure. We know what some ordinary people, in Southwark, just outside the Globe Theater, were talking about when Shakespeare contemplated Coriolanus. Bits of evidence left by litigation tell us that, a few months before the play was first performed, ‘common people and handicraftsmen’ from the parish of St Saviour (now Southwark Cathedral) sued to have a say during their vestrymen’s selection of churchwardens. Parishioners had asked Parliament to inquire why representatives from the congregation were systematically excluded from deliberations.66 Suits of this sort were rare. There are few traces of parishioner resistance elsewhere.67 But the resistance at St Saviour’s is a matter of record and would have been hard for Shakespeare to have missed, even had he not set foot in the church, in which, at about that time (1607), he buried his brother Edmund. For theater financier Philip Henslowe, one of the playwright’s competitors, and actor Edward Alleyn were members of the vestry, voting funds from ‘the parish stock’ to cover costs incurred in the struggle against ‘the common people.’68

Those parishioners-turned-plaintiffs may have played no part in Shakespeare’s retrieval of republican Rome’s plebeians. A vestry’s insistence that popular participation in deliberations was ‘unprofitable and inconvenient’ may have had nothing to do with a somewhat similar view that Coriolanus expressed onstage.69 But, conceivably, both Shakespeare and the vestrymen at the parish church of St Saviour knew of the opinions expressed by Thomas Bilson, who, as the bishop of Winchester, had authority over the vestry and the precincts around the Globe Theater. Before the parishioners at St Saviour sued for ‘voices’ during deliberations, their bishop praised the earliest Christian church’s authorities for having restrained commoners in their congregations from ‘intermed[ling]’ with the selection of leaders. ‘The rashenesse and rudenesse of the many [who] are often ledde rather with affection than with discretion’ and their fondness for ‘faction and flatterie’ he maintained, disqualified them from having say or ‘sway’ in personnel or policy decisions.70 Bilson’s reservations were anticipated.

68. London Metropolitan Archives, Parish Records, 92/Sav/450, 414.
‘Factious practice,’ Dudley Fenner claimed, could be prevented. Leaders could be trusted to channel commoners’ concerns, and commoners could be trusted to realize that their corruptible reason had to be trained to make accurate assessments of the predicaments facing their congregations and their kingdom.71

Selfless, trusted leaders training and representing self-aware and discerning commoners: Shakespeare’s Coriolanus could not imagine that scene. Machiavelli did. Can we, knowing what we know about the influence of faction and flattery? Researchers refer to ‘motivated reasoning’ to describe the ostensible suspension of political judgment that seems all too familiar as citizens fit their perceptions to partisanship. Discussions of the accuracy of information and the wisdom of policy are ‘suffused with antagonistic meanings that transform utilitarian policymaking into occasions for symbolic status competition.’ And this leads to what Dan Kahan calls a ‘neutrality crisis.’ Kahan writes about jurisprudence and judges’ impartiality yet applies what he says about the latter to the ‘cognitive illiberalism’ of ordinary citizens – to the electorate. Its leaders polarize political conversation to retain the loyalties of followers who oblige by letting their leaders’ self-interest determine their own.72 Coriolanus calls such commoners ‘fragments,’ as we know, and he decries their servility and changeability.73 As populist interpreters of the play say, the crowd onstage is not always subservient. Individuals venture a word or few, momentarily expressing an independent and generous judgment and challenging their tribunes to herd more effectively. But they do, and the fragments in Coriolanus inevitably fall back in line. Geoffrey Cohen reminds us that ‘one of the most durable lessons in social psychology is the power of group influence,’ and groups or factions award a decisive ‘filtering role’ to their partisan leaders. Ordinary citizens or commoners are led to think that they are forming opinions, but they are only choosing sides, or, to be precise, choosing the same side. Motivated reasoning is relentless.74

Machiavelli’s people, protected by their tribunes, defined and asserted their interests, sustaining a tension between the elites and themselves, the populares, that safeguarded their republic. Shakespeare’s prophet, Coriolanus, judges the people unfit, easily manipulated (or ‘motivated’). Machiavelli trusted that, unlike elites, ordinary citizens would never let faction trump discretion. Shakespeare’s Coriolanus – and, conceivably, Shakespeare himself – foresaw that they would. The early modern views just summarized are clearly at odds with each other, although by no means clear cut. Kahan and Cohen, whom we just left, for example, seemed to substantiate what might pass, albeit not without contestation, as a ‘Shakespearean’ mistrust in the independence as well as the intelligence of an electorate composed of ordinary citizens, but that mistrust is packed in the play alongside the playwright’s criticisms of the plebeians’ leaders, the tribunes, and their ‘too noble’ yet ‘too absolute’ critic, Coriolanus. Machiavelli’s people and the tribunes are treated favorably, yet ferocious partisanship and conflict – rather than goodwill or enduring consensus – preserved their republics.

71. See Dudley Fenner (1585), Sacra Theologia Sive Veritas Quae est Secundum Piatatem, London: Dawson, fol. 121r; Fenner (1587), Defense of the Godly Ministers against the Slan- ders of Dr. Bridges, Middelburg: Schilders, pp. 61–71; and Nicholas Bownde (1608), The Unbe- levefe of St Thomas the Apostle, Cambridge: Legge, pp. 60–67.
73. Shakespeare, Coriolanus 1.1, 223.
Here, Shakespeare and Machiavelli have been introduced as proponents of competing visions of the virtues and political liabilities associated with citizens’ deference and defiance. What they advocated, as they repossessed Coriolanus – and the crisis his candor and contempt precipitated – affords us an occasion not only to contextualize two influential reappropriations or reinventions of early republican Rome but also to reflect on the challenges posed to leadership and to leadership studies by the development of participatory regimes.
On complacency, corporate cliffs and power distance: global leadership ethics from gender and cultural studies perspectives

Marco Tavanti
Associate Professor, School of Public Service, DePaul University, Chicago, USA

Patricia H. Werhane
Wicklander Professor of Business Ethics, Director, Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, DePaul University and Ruffin Chair of Business Administration, Darden Graduate School of Business, University of Virginia, USA

Focusing on corporate leadership, this paper will discuss four factors that often thwart nondiscriminatory ethical leadership: complacency, the ‘glass cliff’ effect, the role of power distance relationships, and globalization. Complacency, the most prevalent, is probably the most obvious factor. The concepts of the ‘glass cliff’ – how women in leadership positions are associated with a higher risk of failure (Ryan and Haslam 2007) – and ‘power distance’ – the way power is perceived and distributed (Hofstede et al. 2010) – both offer relevant perspectives to ethical leadership in the transforming environment of the twenty-first century. We will argue that three of these phenomena (and there are others) contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality in leadership positions, and thus unfair distributions of power and influence that are not reflective of populations in the workplace nor in the community. It will turn out, however, that globalization actually can have a positive effect on improving gender distribution of leadership, so long as one recognizes what is needed to be an effective and ethical global leader.

Keywords: gender, women, leadership, glass cliff, corporate cliff, complacency, power distance, leadership ethics, cultural studies

To deny one’s freedom or the equal rights of others bring into question one’s self, since one’s own freedom comes out of that of others. (Werhane 1996, p. 17)

1 INTRODUCTION

Part of the focus of ethical leadership is concerned with the moral and systemic issues connected to gender equality and diversity inclusion in organizational management and leadership positions and whether and how inclusions or exclusions are fair (Ciulla 1995; Ciulla et al. 2005; Werhane and Painter-Morland 2011). At the same time, in this age of globalization and the growth of what many call the ‘Knowledge Era,’ the idea of a ‘good’ (ethical and competent) leadership is dramatically changing. Society is no longer accepting a leader as merely an individual with charisma and knowledge and who leads or cajoles followers. Therefore, the demand for ethical leaders who are not merely part of a hierarchy is increasingly becoming a model for ‘good’ leadership.
In commerce, despite the obvious fact that half the population of any community is female, the number of women in business leadership is scarcely increasing. According to Fortune magazine, women hold 4.2 percent of Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 CEO positions, but this number has only slightly increased in the last 10 years (Sellers 2012). Globally, the data is similar. According to a recent Grant Thornton study, globally women in senior management have increased only 2 percent from 19 percent to 21 percent since 2004 (Grant Thornton 2012) and a number of other studies have shown the systemic factors contributing to permanence and variations in the glass ceiling effects that lead to the exclusion of women from leadership positions (for example, Barreto et al. 2009; Bennett 2002).

Focusing on corporate leadership, in this paper we will discuss four factors: complacency, the ‘glass cliff’ effect, the role of power distance relationships, and globalization. Complacency, the most prevalent, is probably the most obvious factor. The concepts of the ‘glass cliff’ – how women in leadership positions are associated with a higher risk of failure (Ryan and Haslam 2007) – and ‘power distance’ – the way power is perceived and distributed (Hofstede et al. 2010) – both offer relevant perspectives to ethical leadership in the transforming environment of the twenty-first century. We will argue that three of these phenomena (and there are others) contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality in leadership positions, and thus unfair distributions of power and influence that are not reflective of populations in the workplace nor in the community. It will turn out, however, that globalization actually can have a positive effect on improving fair gender distribution of leadership, so long as one recognizes what is needed to be an effective and ethical global leader.

2 CHALLENGES TO ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

2.1 Complacency and social identity

One of the gravest and most deeply rooted challenges to ethical leadership is complacency. Silence conquers courage when faced with unethical choices especially in the gender and cultural issues. Throughout history, acceptance of inequality in the workplace has been apparent; it has become second nature to the extent that distinguishing the difference between ethical and unethical choices seems impossible. Some people still today choose the comfort of the status quo over change, even when they acknowledge that there is something unfair about the paucity of women leaders in organizations. Furthermore, leaders often perpetuate this complacency by promoting people who look and act most like themselves (Rosener 1997). Thus, equal opportunities for women and minorities are thwarted even for the most talented.

A more nuanced version of this sort of complacency derives from social identity theory. According to these researchers, leaders are often chosen from ‘the way[s] in which perceptions of leadership emerge as a result of the shared social identity of group members and the needs and interests that arise from requirements to enact that identity in different contexts. According to this analysis, a leader must be seen to epitomize what it means to be an ingroup member, and only a prototypical group member (i.e., one that maximizes both intragroup similarity and intergroup differences ... is likely to be able to influence and lead the group’ (Ryan and Haslam 2007, p. 552). Thus, according to this thesis, ingroups will be likely to choose or follow leaders who are part of, or seemingly cohesive with, that group. Since most companies today, both in the United States and globally, have male leaders, the ingroup that leader forms
is likely to choose colleagues and successors who are similar to themselves. Thus diversity is truncated and male dominance in leadership positions continues unabated both in the United States and elsewhere. To counteract these tendencies, many of which are often implicit and not deliberate, in some European countries – such as Spain and France, for example – companies with more than 250 employees are required to have 40 percent women on their boards by 2015 (Grant Thornton 2012, p. 10).

Interestingly, according to Catalyst, a nongovernment organization that studies workplace diversity, when there are three or more women on the board of a company or in the executive suite, that company is more likely to have a diverse management. And, for those who think that diversity is simply a concept made up by human rights specialists, in those companies with at least three women leaders, the return on investment in those companies is up to 33 percent higher than in their non-diverse counterpart companies (Catalyst 2012). So complacency in any form not only thwarts equal opportunity but is costly as well.

### 2.2 The glass cliff phenomenon

A second phenomenon that confuses if not sidetracks ethical leadership is the ‘glass cliff.’ The glass cliff refers to [a practice wherein] women [are] more likely to rise to positions of organizational leadership in times of crisis than in times of success, and men [are] more likely to achieve those positions in prosperous times (Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010, p. 433). A glass cliff appointment is ordinarily a ‘precarious leadership position in an organization in crisis’ (Rink et al. 2012, p. 1306) and sometimes present in an organization that has been deemed hopeless by Wall Street or its financiers. Thus, the expression ‘glass cliff’ because the chances of rescuing this organization from bankruptcy or closure are slim at best, and therefore accepting such a position threatens one’s status or reputation as a successful leader. Many believe that women are often put into these power positions not because of their corporate knowledge or their ability to complete a task, but because, it is alleged, women are gullible enough to accept leadership positions in times of crisis, where often men are not, and where sometimes their adversaries hope for failure. There is some evidence, although not conclusive, that more women than men are offered and accept glass cliff positions. And the results of these appointments are not always encouraging (Rink et al. 2012; Ryan and Haslam 2007).¹ Let us look at two examples.

One example of the ‘glass cliff’ occurring in the workplace is the case of Kate Swann, appointed CEO of a British company, WH Smith (Ryan and Haslam 2005, p. 83). Ms Swann’s duties at the time of her appointment were seen as impossible to accomplish – that is, to restore the company to its pristine condition. In the eyes of her employers, she was the perfect candidate to blame if the company’s image was not restored. Ms Swann became CEO of WH Smith in 2003 while the company was rapidly losing market share, and job cuts and other difficult tasks were necessary ‘to turn the company around and restore the retailer’s fortunes’ (Ryan and Haslam 2005, p. 83). While Ms Swann made a remarkable turnaround for the company, she took over at one of the toughest economic times in the company’s history. In addition, the distinct leadership and management attributes in societies and sectors characterized by higher ‘masculinity’ dimensions (Hofstede et al. 2010, ch. 5), where gender roles

---

¹ Rink et al. (2012) challenge the conclusion that glass cliffs are most often given to women, but their study comes from data collected from students and thus is less reliable than it should be.
are clearly distinct and ‘men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success; women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life’ (ibid., p. 535) contributed to harsh judgments of women leaders making tough decisions.

A second example of the ‘glass cliff’ occurring in the workplace is demonstrated in a quote by Ms Marcegaglia, the first woman to lead Confindustria, ‘the most important Italian major industries association’ (Tavanti 2012, p. 295). While commenting on her own leadership as a woman, Ms Marcegaglia stated, ‘It took them nearly 100 years to appoint a woman, and they chose the worst economic moment’ (Tavanti 2012, p. 295). While not all women notice the injustice of premeditated promotions in the workforce, Ms Marcegaglia did. It is unfortunate that these schemes are accepted in today’s society.

Interestingly, according to their recent study, Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) claim that, while studying women in crisis leadership positions is important, equally important is to study the fact that men are more likely to be appointed when there appears to be a greater chance for organizational success. So it may be that this is not pure discrimination. Rather, Bruckmüller and Branscombe contend, it is also possible that women are perceived as more capable of handling organizational crises while men are perceived as better at handling projects that appear likely to succeed. Again, these are stereotypes, but these stereotypes may have an effect in leadership choice (Bruckmüller and Branscombe 2010, for example p. 448). So choosing a woman in a glass cliff situation may not always be because of discrimination but rather, sometimes, because of her talents at handling tough situations.

According to Rink et al. (2012), social and financial resources also influence perceptions of glass cliff positions. From their study, they conclude that while both men and women consider financial and social resources when contemplating a glass cliff position, women worry more about the available social resources – that is, whether their peers and subordinates will accept them. Without that acceptance, women would be less likely to accept a precarious position. Men, on the others hand, according to this study, focused more on financial resources, without which they would be much less likely to accept a glass cliff position (ibid.). This evidence supports other studies that conclude that women tend to have a more collaborative rather than hierarchical leadership style (Rosener 1990; Werhane 2007b), so that for women social resources would be key to reversing a downward spiral in a precarious organization.

The ‘glass cliff’ phenomenon is evident in numerous companies; should it continue to be accepted? Are there not men capable of crisis management and women capable of managing successful companies? The problem is that stereotyping abilities from a gendered perspective is not only discriminatory but also obstructs the use of good talent in either situation. While inequality anywhere should be unacceptable, is there an alternate lens through which to look at this problem? One way to alter perceptions of the ‘glass cliff’ is for women to take this sort of promotion as an opportunity to change the culture of the workplace. By accepting leadership positions in difficult times and excelling in these trenches, one could change the culture at work and in society, as well as the mindsets of the men previously anticipating their demise. These actions could change the course of women in leadership all across the world. What women do in the United States could positively promote change in Italy, for example.

Women like Kate Swann accepted the challenge and blazed a new path for her future. Swann came into power at a difficult time, but against all odds she excelled where others could not. By the end of her term at WH Smith, she was seen as a legend.
Now, as she moves on to her next endeavor, she is regarded as an excellent leader. Ms Swann was promoted at the wrong time, but she was determined to succeed against all odds.

What we can conclude from looking at glass cliffs is that women have the ability to lead organizations in a variety of situations. But we must avoid stereotyping them and also avoid stereotyping men. Women do not necessarily have this ability solely because they are women, but, according to a recent study of women leaders, they have this ability because they ‘created a successful leadership style that worked well in diverse environments’ (Werhane 2007b, p. 177). It is not gender that allows one to be a successful or non-successful leader, it is one’s ability as an individual to be innovative and to ethically guide others. Women and men can do all of this and more, because of their abilities as human beings, not because of gender (Werhane 2007b).

2.3 Power distance

A third challenge to diverse ethical leadership is that of ‘power distance.’ This cultural dimension attempts to measure differences in the perception, acceptance, and expectations in social inequality and authoritarian relations in organizations. According to Hofstede et al. (2010, p. 532), power distance is ‘the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally’. Since all cultures are different, the acceptance of inequality varies from culture to culture. It is important also to understand that ‘different cultures are apt to have different understandings of leadership’ (House & Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program 2004). While some may believe it is acceptable to have inequality in the workplace, other cultures see this as unimaginable. ‘Status differences are universal, but cultures treat them differently’ (Johnson 2011, p. 385).

An example of cultural persuasions on ethical leadership illustrating the concept of ‘power distance’ is connected to the Roman Catholic Church in Italy. ‘The dominant presence of the Roman Catholic Church has deeply influenced Italian cultural values and its tolerance to unequal distribution of power commonly known as power distance’ (House & Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness Research Program 2004, p. 519). There has been, for hundreds of years, the acceptance of workplace inequality. ‘Italians accept and somehow expect that some groups in society are more powerful than others. They act accordingly in their exercise of leadership and in the follower’s acceptance of it’ (Tavanti 2012, p. 290).

This brings to light a powerful aspect of cultural inequalities: the beliefs of the followers. Is it unethical if the followers, who are being discriminated, accept this discrimination as a way of life? The answer to this question entails wondering whether and how we should make moral judgments across cultures, and what the limits those judgments should be. Are cultures or countries autonomous, and should they be; or are there situations that require such judgments or even interventions? It is not the scope of this paper to answer that, but surely when there is genocide, rape, or systemic discrimination of one class, race or gender, such judgments are not without merit.

Focusing within the leadership models in the United States, various organizations have different leadership power structures. Most of the high technology companies in Silicon Valley, for example, have, by and large, flat leadership structures and a virtual absence of power distance. Other companies have more hierarchical, even dictatorial, leadership styles where followers are treated as such. The most famous example is Al Dunlap (often nicknamed ‘Chainsaw Al’), who in the 1990s ruthlessly led first Scott...
Paper, then Kimberly Clark, and finally Sunbeam. In each case he fired thousands of workers and treated all employees with ruthless disrespect. Another famous ‘dictator’ CEO was Leona Helmsley, who in the 1990s ran Helmsley Hotels with an iron fist, treating her employees like servants and firing any employee who made even the smallest mistakes (Time 2010). These companies are also less likely to be diverse, as the Catalyst studies have shown.

Strong power distance relationships create a followership mentality that can be lethal both to a fair distribution of power and positions, and to corporate performance. The more general conclusion is that ‘a community, any community, that fails to recognize persons as individuals as well as social beings with both individual rights and responsibilities for each other, is a community of less-than-persons who fail to recognize the core requirements of community and who they are as individuals’ (Werhane 1996, p. 23).

2.4 Globalization

The fourth challenge of ethical leadership in the workplace is the dramatic growth of globalization (Robertson and White 2003). In the wake of building a more globalized world, there are many aspects that cross cultures and countries. Cultural and gender beliefs from one country tend to positively or negatively impact other countries around the world. In the past, there was a time when industrialized countries did not immediately impact each other. However, we are not separate any more. What one country believes on ethical leadership, in the sense of gender issues and cultural issues, will inadvertently spill over into other countries across the globe.

The complexity of increasingly globalized organizational structures and institutional frameworks requires a deeper look at unethical leadership practices. Leadership in global organizations requires both a systemic vision and a collaborative organizational dynamics model. There are a number of reasons why these two characteristics are important. First, in a global setting, leaders are faced with a wide variety of diverse political, social, and cultural challenges that cannot be dealt with merely by using management tools that are culturally biased or narrowly focused. Moreover, system-thinking is a prerequisite to ethical leadership since it demands that one not ignore, and indeed give fair attention to, diverse populations and cultural mores. As Uhl-Bien and others have argued, global leadership requires what they call ‘complexity leadership’ defined as ‘a complex interactive dynamic – a network-based process in which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating’ (Uhl-Bien, et al. 2007, p. 110; see also Werhane 2007a).

Traditionally, leadership has been defined hierarchically as ‘individuals who significantly influence the thoughts, behaviors, and/or feelings of others’ (Gardner and Laskin 1995, p. 6). Given the complexity of leading in diverse cultures in much of the contemporary literature, ethical leadership, and in particular global leadership, are identified with transformational or collaborative leadership where there is not a simple hierarchical leader–follower dynamic. Rather, leaders think of themselves or are thought of as coaches partnering with their managers and employees in a collaborative effort to create value added, however it may be defined for that organization. ‘In this model, leadership is an interactive, dynamic, and mutually interrelational process between leaders and managers, where each participant contributes to the vision and progresses toward change in the company. The most effective global leaders will be those who are not only visionary, but who are used to working with a diverse population collaboratively rather than in
a traditional leadership–follower dynamic’ (Werhane 2007a, p. 433). Interestingly, various studies have identified this style of leadership as predominantly a feminist style and most often demonstrated in women leaders.

If this analysis is correct, there should be – although we have not yet experienced it – a growing demand for women leaders in global organizations. Similarly, since global leadership requires that one deal across cultures, race, religions, and ethnicities, a more diverse leadership team is best equipped for these operations. Thus ignoring women and minorities rather than placing them in leadership positions is both unfair and economically unsound logic if an organization is to succeed in a global environment.

3 OVERCOMING ETHICAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Many scholars believe we are capable of being transformed and having our minds altered for the betterment of society only if we are confronted with the existence, needs, and humanity of others. Taking a moment to examine the needs and desires of someone else as an equal human being can lead to better ethical practices and choices. Stated differently, ‘How we define ourselves is clarified only when we confront other human beings as human beings’ (Werhane 1996, p. 18). Whether we view others as equally important and valuable determines our capacity as ethical leaders. ‘If each of us is pursuing his or her own interests without regard to others, there is little likelihood that we will honor promises or reciprocate except when it is in our self-interest to do so’ (ibid., p. 19). A way of changing the engrossing grip of inequality is by taking it upon oneself to change, and expecting one’s followers to do the same. An ethical leader is someone who embodies her personal values, expects the same from those around her, and ‘continually tests these values against social norms, organizational consistency, and outcomes’ (Werhane 2007a, p. 433).

When dealing with cultures of different types it is best to keep an open mind, choosing to believe that one’s own perspective is not always the right choice. Every culture and company can benefit from globalization and the cultural shifts that come with it by choosing to become more culturally aware, instead of fighting off the unknown.

These are lovely ideas but in the hard-core world of global commerce, sadly they are likely to be ignored. And thus, with some exceptions, questionable leadership practices may persist. However, let us step back and imagine we are part of this hard core, and as a bottom-line-focused corporate executive our objectives are to grow our markets and increase our return on investment in a variety global markets. But if this is the case, then both the Catalyst data on women leaders and the demand for complex leadership in global markets demonstrate the need for more diverse leadership. Thus a smart company and a visionary executive, merely keeping self-interest in mind, should seek and hire qualified women and minorities. Otherwise that executive will be cheating shareholders, and that too, is unethical.

4 CONCLUSION

Concepts like complacency, the ‘glass cliff’ and ‘power distance’ offer insights into defining models for discriminatory and otherwise unethical leadership. Ethical leadership is about those individuals in positions of authority who through collaborative leadership can improve workplace dynamics and organizational success by hiring qualified diverse managers. The advent of a global economy challenges companies
to recalibrate their social identity and rethink their leadership models. More is expected of global leaders in the twenty-first century, and it is their duty to take the challenge and reformulate tired hierarchical male-dominated leadership agendas. Without adopting a new agenda that honors a diverse workforce and leadership team, no global company will be able to compete in world markets. It is society’s duty to hold every leader accountable for their actions – not only their personal actions, but the actions and beliefs they bring into the workplace and to society.

REFERENCES


The ruling classes and the experience of fear

Alberto Abruzzese
Emeritus Professor of Sociology of Cultural and Communication Processes, University Institute for Modern Languages (IULM) of Milan, Italy

The inner crisis in the governmental capabilities of today’s leaderships reveals their reputational failings, despite social imaginaries being even more split between historical institutions and daily life. In order to interpret the increasing clash between financial capitalism’s economic-political dynamics and democratic values (ethical, aesthetic and political), it does not suffice to have a cultural and professional training linked to the modes of writing, which is the medium that reflects humanity’s and modern individuals’ historic background. It requires stopping the progressivist thought of civilization as well as its practices and its regimes of sense.

Keywords: leadership, reputation, writing, humanism, fear, sacrality, power hungriness

Neither, however, everything we read in the holy scriptures was in fact written before the advent of the Lord, if not to announce his advent and to prefigure the Church to come, that is to say the people of God through all the nations that is his body. … [T]he things that have been written before, have been written for our instruction and have been a representation of ours … (St Augustin, De Catechizandis Rudibus, III, 6; IV, 7)

When we read, someone else is thinking for us: we merely repeat his mental process. It is like when the student learns to write with the pen going over the pencil marks of the master. So when one reads, most of the thought-activity has been removed from him. Hence the palpable relief we perceive when we stop to take care of our own thoughts and move on to reading. While we read, our head is truly an arena of unknown thoughts. But if we take away these thoughts, what’s left? So it happens that those who read a lot and for most of the day, in the meantime relaxing with a carefree pastime, little by little lose the ability to think – like one who always rides a horse and eventually forgets how to walk. This is the case of many scholars: they have read to the point of becoming fools. (Schopenhauer 1851 [1974])

The image is perhaps the only remaining link with the sacred: with the fright caused by death and sacrifice, with the serenity that comes from the covenant between those who are sacrificed and those who sacrifice them, and with the joy of representation which is inseparable from sacrifice, its only possible ford. … Between the alertness of judgment and the immersion into the cells, with the black presence of pleasure, there exists a transition that I would compare to thought: not to the reasoning-calculation that combines, argues and decides, but to irruption of the sensible into the signs, to the etching of the signs into the sensible. … Isn’t this precisely that passage of thought into suffering and eroticism, which was sensed in every age, beyond the domain of religions, as essence of the sacred? (Kristeva 2011)
1 INTRODUCTION

The national and international background of the themes covered in this paper is the deep crisis of governance capability of the ruling classes (in terms of content and media) and the decline of their reputation in the face of a collective imagination that the media has developed in forms ever more divorced from the reality of social relations, and from the knowledge and practices of historical institutions. Against this background – now marked by the epochal clash between the economic and political dynamics of financial capitalism and the ethical, aesthetic, and political values of democracy – we address some crucial points in the terminal crisis of the models of intellectual and professional growth and maturation that are still bound to writing, a medium and metaphor for the world, based on the totalizing and anthropocentric contents of Humanism.

The conceptual leap we need to grasp in order to break the deadlock of the educational agencies, both public and private, can only consist in a radical shift from the prescriptive sphere of social ethics to the experiential sphere of the individual. This is a goal that can only be achieved by breaking the religious and social traditions that education continues to transmit, even though they have been exposed by now as emptied of all meaning: so much so that they are the main cause of the failure of the leadership, its ineptitude and inanity, if not its blatantly dishonest and criminal life.

Finally, we speculate as to what the individual can resort to that is just as powerful as a religious spirit (both traditional and secular). And this can only be the realm of the sacred: the primordial place in which the human condition is shown first as fear of the world, then as struggle for survival, and finally as the will to power. The representation of this not-yet-civilized humanity, forced to recognize its irredeemable longing for violence and pain, devoid of all original or future hope and salvation, requires a complete erasure of the progressive thought of civilization, or at the very least a separation from its practices. It requires an inner resistance to the dominant values of organized communities, to their regimes of sense.

2 THE DOUBLE TRUTH

The three epigraphs shown at the beginning of this paper provide a line of reasoning: since the intellectual and professional education of the ruling classes is still linked to writing as a medium and as a metaphor,1 the epochal leap to seize, so as to break its religious and social traditions, consists in deciding what can be found just as intense and powerful, which will allow each of us to immerse in it our own thought.2 What, if not the secret sphere, deprived of language, of the sacred? Of suffering and sensual pleasures? And therefore of the person: the place where the human condition is shown as fear of self and of the other, the need to survive, and then the will to power, violence. This is a place with neither grace nor hope.3 By simplifying and

1. See Abbruzzese (1996); Bolter and Grusin (1999); De Kerckhove (2008); Eisenstein (1979); Frasca (2005); Harris (1986); Havelock (1963; 1986); Illich (1993); Innis (1950; 1951); Landow (1992); McLuhan (1962); Moretti (1996); Ong (1982).
3. For the definition of person we refer – with some divergence, however – to the fundamental contribution of Roberto Esposito (2012); for the analogy between the idea of grace and the secular idea, see Bloch (1959).
We want to argue here that, in the historic transition from traditional media to personal–digital media, the historical contents of education are definitely inadequate to obtain in practice any actual social innovation (assuming, but not taking for granted, as we will discuss later, that this really is the leap forward that humanity needs). Even in the face of an increasingly technological world that is changing ever more rapidly, for decades the educational and academic institutions – the set of agencies that govern schools and universities – have tried to adapt to the complexity of contemporary systems by resorting to all sorts of gimmicks and to low-grade opportunism. These actions, however, have invariably conformed to the methods of political reformism: to re-form, that is to give new shape to the same old content. To reform, in order to restore and preserve. A theory of the historical monument and a protocol of immutable cultural heritage. Protected by law. So conceived, reformism cuts across several different powers and several different ideologies. The result of democratization processes triggered by market dynamics on a global scale, it concerns the ambivalence of human nature – torn between desire and fear of the unexpected – and of institutions whose controlling officers draw sustenance for their own survival from the habituinary substance of inhabiting, from its emotional limits, its fears. The vision that spurs reformism consists in the exercise of a double truth. On the one hand, this is expressed in a substantially negative assessment and conceptualization of technology, and specifically of the technological media. This is even more true now that, from all directions, they saturate human life and every form of its material and immaterial...

4. To apologize for a process of simplification and schematization is a custom, when – as in this paper – there is a lack of space to articulate and cite the academic discourse in its fullness. Incidentally, however, it seems to me that, compared to other ‘academic’ approaches – and so, as in my case, compared to sociology (discourse on society, on vertical and centralized forms of territoriality) – mediology (discourse on communication, reworked starting from the post-industrial media, that is to say from horizontal and decentralized forms of territoriality) should be able to take into account the processes of personalization and slowing-down/acceleration (of space–time disorientation) of traditional knowledge while those processes progressively shape themselves into the practices of the web. In these everyday interactions, an irreparable fracture of the values embodied in education and dissemination takes place: from the collapse of the contents transmitted from the top down comes the strength of contents that will gradually upset the original intentions. Literacy is thus reversed into de-literacy (as a transition towards other forms of expression) and dissemination is reversed into de-dissemination (as a transition towards other forms of local vernacular idioms, towards other emerging dialects). These inversions of communication, these critical innovations, must therefore be read also outside of the usual social prohibitions which are based on the purely statistical revelation of the phenomena of de-schooling and neo-literacy, and which are analysed according to paradigms still based on the alphabet and on the school.

5. The regimes of double truth are rooted in the abandonment of the regimes of the sacred, of a truth that lies in the inexplicable, that withholds itself from human knowledge, and in the emergence of a religious spirit that cleaves between the earthly and the heavenly nature of the individual. Christianity represents the highest degree of this dual nature, which is already sanctioned in the Old Testament with the invention of an extraordinary tale: having tasted the forbidden fruit of knowledge, and – as much iconography has suggested – of pleasure, the human being is expelled from the Garden of Eden, a world in which, in the image of God, there exists no need to be thrown into the pains of childbirth and work, of death and desire. Already, in the first exodus, the dialectic is marked, between the city of man and the city of god, between heaven and earth: the principle of hope that arises with the sacrifice of a God who became a man so that mankind, forever and ever since that rite, will always recognize itself as both divine truth and mundane truth.
reproduction. On the other hand, it is expressed in an instrumental assessment of the market, of its economical and political dynamics, which are assumed to be vital both for technological development and for the civil society.

In the first case, what prevails is the institutional need to step out from the unstoppable encroachment of technologies that the educational models of the modern subject depict as alien and therefore inhuman. In the second case, the state of necessity of the individual, the will to power of the human being, prevails. Therefore, in the latter case, there is a prevalence of the original innate violence that the societal models of history have channeled and structured – both rationally and irrationally\(^6\) – along the progressive line of a present time of compromise and of a salvation to come. The dialectics of civilization have marched along the axis of this double-crossing between positive and negative ideologies.

3 THE NONSENSE OF THE SACRED

The path traced by Jürgen Habermas in the early 1960s is essentially progressive:\(^7\) it goes from the pseudo-collective mental representations (virtually representative, parliamentary) designed by the elite readers of the eighteenth-century press, to the conjuring-up of public opinion, to its actual birth in the form of civil consciousness. An ideally universal set of rights and interests. On the contrary, however, the path in which the western world was finally confined consisted, and more and more consists, of a return of public opinion into the order of the institutional media within the tendentially chaotic

\(^6\) From our mediological point of view, the trial undertaken by the royal committee to scrutinize the true scientific value of Mesmer’s medical practices – a trial that ended with a verdict sanctioning the method and its results as unscientific, but that still resulted in a resounding recognition of the powers of imagination – is the best example of the fact that, during the era of the Enlightenment, the lines of rationalism and those of non-rationalism became intertwined into a single form of development, into the same dramaturgical script.

\(^7\) See Habermas’s *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (1962), an essay that somehow comes just a few years after the publication of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno and Horkheimer 1947), the same years that yielded the first essays on the media by McLuhan. This contribution, however, disregarded a passage, a brief but extraordinarily important piece from that fundamental contribution to the critique of cultural industry (so close to and yet so far from Walter Benjamin’s pages), in which, after having supported the thesis of a radical and irreconcilable opposition between mass culture and high bourgeois culture (a thesis that even to this day has been the driving one among the most politically committed intellectual class), Adorno and Horkheimer mark a far more significant, though less fortunate difference. Their discourse in fact leads them to pinpoint the incompatibility between the contents of civilization – in which they include the culture of the media as well as the highest intellectual and aesthetic traditions – and the expressive experience of the historical avant-garde: the only ones to recognize the substantial non-sense of modern society. Since then, the debate about technology has continuously focused – comprising several different critical positions, at times basically positive, at times leaning towards the negative – on the relationship between technology and the empowerment of the individual and of civil society, away from an unjust, servile life. And this debate has very often distinguished two different forms of progress, depending on which technological choices are made, basing such distinction on the separation between good and bad technologies, rather than, as would be only slightly more correct, between a good and a bad use of technology in itself. See also: Adorno and Horkheimer (2002); Benjamin (1983; 1999); Benkler (2006); Carr (2010); Habermas (1991); Kelly (2010); Lanier (2010); McLuhan (1994); Rodotà (2004); Shirky (2008); Weinberger (2007).
sphere of the mental representations induced by the market media, and of the centrifugal multiplicity of its objects of consumerism. The civilizing thrust of the first path (from the reader to the voter) and the barbaric thrust of the second path (from the person to the consumer) collide, and at the same time contaminate each other at the point of intersection between two different forms of awareness: conscious and unconscious, with both of them permeated by strong emotional perturbations.

There has therefore been a constructive phase, in which the dominant medium on the formation of social identities was reading, but from this, gradually and progressively, we have reached a destructive stage, which today is at its apogee, in which the forms of representation are precisely de-structuring the relationship between public as citizenship and the public as territory of individual consumerism, as tribal regimes of desire. We are faced with a double movement between opposing values (what has value and therefore is important, has to be; hence the things through which to see and hear the world). Values expressed on a global scale through the Western model of development. These are two opposing tensions, often merged into each other, between human and inhuman, need and desire, order and disorder: a force field, however, in which the particular virulence of profoundly anti-modern processes and practices are emerging (often adopted in a purely reactionary, ‘realistic,’ attitude and therefore still bound to the contradictions of modernity). The arena of this intersection between values of opposing signs, but belonging to the same, unique, history of modernization processes, is now represented by the territory of digital networks: that is to say, by the fluidity of interpersonal relationships in which the human, animal, destinies are now more and more devoted to hyper-consumerism,8 and the fates of the economic and political apparatus of power – which in turn are devoted instead to the hyper-control of social life, to its enslavement – may both be advantaged by virtue of a media prowess that is technologically much more ductile than previously.9 To continue with such simplifications: the relationship between writing and image, public opinion and entertainment,10 has kept changing with the unfolding of modern times, managing

---

8. In light of this passage, the divergence of technological development between public interest and private interest can be explained. And one of the most eloquent signs of this divergence is the political crisis that expressed itself in the sharp rise of populist tendencies – previously considered typical of pre-modern, obsolete power systems – even within historically established democratic systems, and firmly based on the principles of parliamentary representation. See: Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008); Asor Rosa (1966); Capelli (2008); Eco (2006); Flores d’Arcais (1996); Taggart (2000); Taguieff (2002); Tarchi (2003).

9. Compared to the proven functionality of analogic media (photography, cinema, radio, and television), that is to say, compared to the high degree of compatibility with which the quality of the medium has corresponded to the quality of the political–economic system that generated it, the languages of the web seem to be freer to perform widely divergent tasks. But this may be due merely to the fact that these new languages are still in the negotiation phase that has also characterized the stabilization of the functions assigned to the earlier media. The vast literature on networks is debating this point exactly: whether they are a vehicle of newness or, instead, an expression of its negation. The debate should be addressed mainly considering its contradictions. For example, it should be focused on the fact that the ideological ‘continental divider’ is in truth a category wholly typical of the modern tradition, that is – the new, which incorporates a set of values that, while opposing each other, have in common the same vision: the progress of the individual – intended as emancipation and liberation or hope of liberation from social constraints that limit one’s freedom of thought.

10. The highest point of the critique of the relations of symbolic production among the systems of western life is to be found in the analyses produced by the situationists, who radicalized in a militant direction the paths of Frankfurt thought (see Debord 1995). In fact, they acted in an
to retain for nearly two centuries a certain balance between rational and instrumental civil functions; the functions strictly tied to the media conformed to the regulatory and educational spirit of writing; and the emotional functions (irrational, socially evasive, and transgressive) of the market media – that is to say, the media founded on the arcane nature of goods, the symbolic density of consumerism, of pre-modern forms of religion and worship. The cultural industry, from the Great Universal Exhibitions to the classic Hollywood movies, have transformed writing from a power device based on reading to a control device for the production of images scripted according to its canons, and its great or trivial narratives. In the terminal phase of television and finally in the floating life of the web, we have gone from the religiosity of the collective mental representations, from its exceptional ability to mythologize everyday life to an infinitely more complex relationship between writing and images: the proliferation of images that have become the hegemonic device in terms of consumerism has enslaved writing by marginalizing its historical functions while strengthening its market functions: the narratives of television fiction series of the latest generation are now springing from images that script themselves, that write the screenplays about themselves. The original root of the relationship between writing and reading, which for so long had a hegemonic role in society – with forms of power and intellectual figures mandated to implement them on the technical and aesthetic levels – has collapsed. The regenerated myth of mass culture declines and causes the decline – while still exalting it as much as possible – of its own power in a realm that is increasingly less a symbolic order compatible with the social order, and that is becoming less and less a direct instrument of shared political reality. The religious spirit – even the most mundane, disenchanted, secularized – shatters like a mirror. The viewer self-consumes, being absorbed and dominated by the sense of the sacred that is produced in the ever more radical imbalance between bodies and flesh: between the ideology of needs, based on which the public and private institutions negotiate their social contracts, and the inexhaustible drive of desire, which, as such, in its sidereal dimension, has no way to find, or find again, nor to invent any satisfaction, be it earthly or divine. The extremely long duration of the processes of secularization is being completed on the ‘other side’ of the modernization processes that have marked its most extreme, radical phase. These processes have had their genesis in the linear development that tied together the classical tradition and the Judeo-Christian one, which in turn led up to Humanism, a form of religiosity able to achieve the same social effectiveness, the same political solidity, despite being split between the sky and earth, between the city of God and the city of Man. Now, however, all kinds of religiosity, even outside the Christian world, give room – surrender territories – to the nonsense of the sacred (paradoxically, here the cusps of the blindest fundamentalism are reached, intentionally abstract way, aiming to achieve the same purity of the abstractions of the capital; paradoxically, this was therefore the most compatible method of intellectual production with the public (propaganda) and private (advertising) policies intended to shape the collective mental representations. Such policies aimed at fully subjecting the symbolic space by occupying the whole sphere of its expressive relations: the entertainment (of society) and the society (of entertainment). A process that in its rigor had to renounce the aesthetic gratifications of the historical avant-garde, related to the recognition, albeit by negation, irony, and dissolution, of the forms of social interactions staged by showbusiness and even by the institutions themselves (for example: the museum).

11. See: De Certeau (1984); Durand (1960); Maffesoli (1996); Morin (1962; 2005a; 2005b).

12. For this seminal distinction between body as social entity and flesh as its psychosomatic and emotional extension, see: Esposito (2008; 2011); McLuhan (1962; 1964).
the forms of the deepest disenchantment, and the most hybrid forms, both monotheistic and polytheistic, of religions invented in a scenario similar to science fiction). Without taking into account this momentous transition, it is impossible to rethink any content and vehicle of cultural and professional education.

4 THE REMAINS OF THE CIVILIZATION

Within the above described post-historical transitions, we have to frame the issue of the ruling classes in the present Italian (and also global) situation, in which they have fallen to the lowest levels of disrepute. They, themselves – albeit in an often exceedingly rhetorical, and too rarely self-aware mode – recognize their own loss of reputation, and yet the analytical tools they use seem to exacerbate this problem, rather than solve it. Italy, anyway, is a privileged field of analysis because of its extremely severe condition. Its cultural institutions exist in a social context that, while occupying the high end of modern development, is also emblematic of a territoriality swept by deep anti-modern currents. These are so extreme as to uncover truly post-modern scenarios. Such scenarios, at least for the time being, are indeed hidden within, or removed from, more robust social systems that still manage to flow steadily within the riverbanks of their own history. The need for the ruling classes to regain a good reputation forcibly raises a question: can these classes rebuild a reputation through their traditional structures and their educational models? Are these structures and models – so unwilling to divest their ideologies of identity, rooted as they are in modern society and in its ancient traditions – able to recover some efficacy without resorting to anti-religious contents? Outside of institutions such as schools and universities, as well as outside of the corporations, can the collective media-induced mental representations provide an alternative way, in terms of representation of the contemporary world and thus of the creation of the critical content necessary to educate and train the ruling classes? Here we can answer only by transforming the complexity of these questions into assertions (and, thus, subjects on which to open a discussion): the current ruling classes’ thought is constrained by an unchangeable anthropological substrate (it would be like asking a freshwater fish to live in the sea); the introduction of anti-religious thought in an institutional context requires a very long period of time, and is totally impractical unless the processes of research and training are put into place in an unprecedented way (for instance, resorting to genius, or avant-garde, or viral strategies); the mental representations of the consumerist media are basically schizoid. This unveils a radically post-human world, less and less religious, and more and more primal and savage, which nonetheless holds onto the present social habits and, even if with lower efficacy than in the past, keeps them alive. This everyday affectivity, which anyway is part of the social and institutional fabric that supports it, is called directly and indirectly to act as a placebo able to induce the delirious spaces of desire to live together with those forcibly required by common sense, by need, by necessity. In other words, it provides no direct means to address the social life, other than to bear it; and, perhaps, it stimulates an inclination to simulate its final and complete catastrophe, to become addicted to its end. It is a desperate exodus (with pleasure replacing hope) that transforms the forms of superficial entertainment into a slow inner mutation. And as such, if endorsed by the instrumental thinking, this mutation becomes, if anything, its more sophisticated prosthesis. Otherwise it constitutes an experience that lives elsewhere. It becomes a part of the remnant, that ‘in the beginning’ civilization has only considered as a theatre stage for a god, be it human or divine.
To touch here upon the theme of reputation, in such a dramatic situation, in Italy and throughout the world, forces one to look, at the same time, to the present and to the future. It forces everyone who feels responsible for their human and social environment to continue their profession, their role. They may do that in the immediate present, but they are forced to think of themselves with equal urgency in a radically different way from the one in which everyone is now, and always will be, forced to think as a social identity. In short: the state of necessity here has to be opened to the cohabitation between two forms of responsibility, while these are so irreconcilable as not to allow any mediation between them. One, imprisoned in a modern religiosity, and the other locked instead in its tragic impossibility of accomplishment, in its own non-sense: into the sacredness of the pain of existing, that the religious spirit at once denies and produces, and translates into hope. What I am trying to summarize here in a few notes, envisions such long periods of time as to clash with the practical emergencies imposed upon us by the world we live in. True. However, equally true, but far more aberrant (and doomed to failure), is the illusion of those who believe they can restart the use of skills adequate to our present time only by slight day-to-day revisions of the educational quality of the existing institutions. Certainly, it will not be possible to recover in a few years – maybe not even in a few decades – all that has been dissipated, and, more importantly, removed since the attempt at rebuilding the post-atomic twentieth century. Then, it is necessary to escape the reformist syndrome which has destroyed the university in its attempt to conform it to the changes in the same part of the world for which it was born; and in so doing has deprived it of the opportunity to produce, and therefore anticipate, paradigm shifts elsewhere, outside of the history and the society of modern times. Elsewhere: in the self-questioning of the person, and not through listening to the otherness that the devices of individualism have opposed to it deploying every possible dialectic skill (the contemporary ‘decadent’ thought is filled with rhetoric about the other, and such rhetoric is but an alibi for modern subjects’ stubborn will to survive).

The space of the person who sees himself, manages to find himself, beyond anthropocentrism disintegrates every historical and social tie: for this reason, this endeavor has to be attempted only after having first of all revealed the failure of Humanism, of all the contents that have been the pillars of Western knowledge, which still form the pillars of the very idea of scientific community. To proceed along this path, unless – made wise by the evidence – one has the courage to make a clean sweep of all knowledge accumulated to date, it is necessary to face the huge work of the re-interpretation of Western thought. It is also necessary to reassess in a political sense (the sense of inhabiting) those solitary and dazzling pages that between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had reached – albeit almost always under some sort of underlying, desperate hyper-humanism – a high

---

13. To begin with the overcoming of every ethical horizon of collective content – related to solidarity, universality – it is not only the idea of the original community (derived from that totalitarian horizon that is again and again retrieved and re-utilized at every growth-crisis of society) to be revealed as impossible, but it is also the idea of scientific community, because, when bringing the thought of ethical dimension into the person, not only the uniformity of action and intent of a group or class, but also its uniformity of method as well as the whole of its shared content, does not hold, must not hold. See: Agamben (2005); Bauman (2001); Esposito (2004); Hardt and Negri (2009); Nancy (1996); Sennett (2012).

14. See, for example, Max Stirner, famous above all for The Ego and Its Own (1995), who also wrote Das unwahre Prinzip unserer Erziehung oder der Humanismus und Realismus [The False Principles of Our Education or Humanism and Realism] (1911).
degree of awareness of the limitations of Humanism and of the lies implicit in every religion. So it is also necessary to deal with the ambiguous twentieth-century grandeur of psychoanalysis and its practices: an innovation of thought that has taken care of the non-sense of the individual but, ultimately, in its own disclosure, doing this simply in order to adapt the individual to the non-sense of society.\textsuperscript{15} And, finally, to demystify the post-industrial turning point of some Marxist traditions that, finding the subject of the conflict in the \textit{naked life} of the people instead of in the proletariat, substitute universal love for class-hate.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} This ambiguity explains the more intellectual and even visionary ‘American’ side of the Frankfurt School, in which Freud was used to interpret the disease of capitalist society and the self-liberating impulses of those who objected to it, both in individualistic and generational terms, while remaining within the revisionist logic of the same values of civilization (see Hor-kheimer 1947). It also explains the interplay between the artistic avant-garde and psychoanalysis, since the latter has provided a veritable repertoire for and about the collective imagination, emphasizing the difference between the emergence of the ‘unconscious’ and the realism of the traditional models of social control on the forms of representation; see for instance the surrealism of Breton, etc. Finally – although the relationships between psychoanalysis and upper-class bourgeois culture have now been supplanted by those between the middle classes and the therapeutic care-system of the ordinary discomfort of the consumer society – we observe the unveiling of the ambiguity between the psychoanalytic analysis of a person and an ideological clinical discipline, which remains substantially religious even when it is secular and civil. See, for instance, Massimo Recalcati (2007; 2010).

\textsuperscript{16} On this point I elaborate on some of my participation in the annual workshops of the CEAQ, previously published in \textit{Les Cahiers Européens de l’Imaginaire}. The protagonist of the re-channeling of class hatred towards love as an original critical dimension is Toni Negri (see the chapter ‘Governing the revolution,’ in Negri and Hardt 2009). This passage recalls Foucault’s lectures at the University of California at Berkeley in 1983, a year before his death, which are collected in \textit{Fearless Speech} (2001). For parresia we mean the obligation to tell the truth at one’s own risk, the typical formula of right-and-duty founded on human freedom (Socrates’ act). Although formulated by the political canon of Athenian democracy, and taken up by Christianity and finally by the democratic ‘national interest,’ this concept has been gradually adapted – religiously, socially – to the idea of katechon (St Paul) as a waiting time for the ultimate truth: a politically opportunist time, progressist necessity, revival of a ‘better’ that is perpetually to come. The current dismay and daze of policies, and of social and cultural institutions when faced with the might of a crisis that no public agency is able to control, now makes it possible to presume to be able to evoke the utilitarian wisdom of the katechon, thus reverting to more radical, less wait-and-see and compromisory virtues. But it also brings us to interpret – in a purely moralistic and ideological way – parresia as the urgency to claim the truth of values that will contrast new (after the rapture of the collective myths) with prevailing forms of power. Their cruelty. Their mercilessness. In essence, this return of intellectual militants to a sort of priesthood – as truth-seekers, who in this search are satisfied and want to satisfy the others in the name of a new faith, of a more authentic and promising liberation of the human being – seems to resort to parresia as the right to speak one’s own truth even when, especially when, such truth states something contrary to the established power. But these were exactly the freedoms granted by modernity, the purpose of democracies which, however, have not reached a good end. And therefore it seems to me that the ‘to say what has to be said’ should instead bring forward the socially unheard of, the thing that causes the ‘death’ of every other presumption of life. Of every other faith, be it secular or religious. The etymological meaning of episteme – that is, truth, in Greek – tells us that what is worthy of parresia is ‘what stays up, holds, by itself,’ with no need to be supported by any authority except itself. And thus, without resorting to doxa – that is, propaganda, religion, power. If this is the meaning of the word parresia as a finally resolutory word, I do not see the possibility of any other truth that is not within the indubitable, absolutely unchangeable nature of human suffering: its desire for power and, with it, inseparable from it, the pain, the suffering it produces. \textit{Parresia} is
an irrevocable ‘knowledge of pain,’ to keep in mind whenever the language of the human being intends to build the meaning of its own freedom upon the difference between the human and the non-human world. In other words, we must ask ourselves whether it is not necessary to inaugurate a divorce between the acts of thinking and doing of society. To revoke humanism as basic science for the education of the person and the ruling classes. To separate as much as possible the pain of the flesh from the roles assigned to their bodies. To force thought towards this hypothesis of personal, ‘inner work’ means also to meditate on some issues that modern society has left unresolved. First of all, what capitalism is: to verify whether the idea that the evil empire resides in the mode of production of machines and worldly goods or, rather, whether it is in human nature, or more precisely in the craving for power that makes it part of the non-human nature, before and after the era of capitalism (on this going past the economic capital towards deeper forms of sovereignty, see, beyond the imaginative thinking proposed by Bataille 2007).
REFERENCES

Esposito, R. (2008), Bìos: Biopolitics and Philosophy, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press.


Recalcati, Massimo (2010), *L’Uomo Senza Inconscio. Figure Della Nuova Clinica Psicoanalitica*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina.


Stirner, Max (1911), *Das unwahre Prinzip unserer Erziehung oder der Humanismus und Realismus [The False Principles of Our Education or Humanism and Realism]*, John Henry Mackay (ed.), Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.


Personating leadership: Shakespeare’s *Henry V* and performative negotiation

Kristin M.S. Bezio  
Assistant Professor of Leadership Studies, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, USA

This essay examines early modern notions of ideal and problematic leadership through the lens of Shakespeare’s *King Henry V*. The piece argues that critical depictions of Henry as either charismatic or Machiavellian are reductive; Henry’s success as a monarch derives from his ability to balance necessary authority with what I term ‘performative negotiation.’ In this model, Henry’s publicly constructed persona serves as a means of ‘negotiating’ his sovereignty with his subjects, but also acts as an exemplum for the present and future monarchs of England.

Keywords: Elizabeth I, Henry V, kingship, leadership, literature, performance, Shakespeare, succession crisis, theater

Narratives of both leaders and leadership appear frequently in works of literature, from children’s stories to the great works of the Western literary canon (Shushok and Moore 2010; Nehls 2012). Since ‘leadership is rooted in storytelling’ (Nehls 2012, p. 64), it should be natural for leadership scholars to turn to literature for examples of and arguments about leadership. William Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, based on the historical successes of the fifteenth-century English king, is deeply concerned with the complex nature of leadership. Particularly when considered in relation to its original context, *Henry V* indicates the complicated and often vexed relationship between Shakespeare’s audience and their Elizabethan monarch. In 1599, the date of the play’s inaugural performance, the presentation of monarchy on the public stage was an act of political speech, subject to critique from authority even as it was itself able to (cautiously) participate in contemporary sociopolitical discussions of the nature – and appropriate limitations – of monarchy (Axton 1977). By examining *Henry V* as an allegorical representation of English monarchy, we are shown a picture of sovereignty that is simultaneously idealized and fallible.

This paradoxical interpretation of Shakespeare’s most successful king is reflected by the fact that despite Henry’s obvious position as a military and political leader, there is still some scholarly debate over whether his reputation as ‘the mirror of all Christian kings’ (II.0.6) is the product of effective or manipulative leadership (Rabkin 1977; Pye 1990; Deats 2004). The crux of the contention is that Henry is a consummate performer who appears in multiple guises: a captain concerned about the well-being of his soldiers, an actor who assumes the guise of a commoner, and a king who threatens the city of Harfleur with atrocity, orders the execution of the French prisoners of war, and nevertheless still spurs his men to great victory at Agincourt.

1. All *Henry V* citations are from the 1995 edition shown in the reference list.
Within the play, the adoption of these multiple roles permits Henry to negotiate the responsibilities and expectations of sovereign leadership; on stage, these multiple ‘performances’ complicate Shakespeare’s representation of ostensibly ‘ideal’ sovereignty, and reflect contemporaneous debates on the ideologies of absolutism and limited monarchy.

In Shakespeare’s play, Henry appears as the embodiment – the ‘personation’ (Gurr 1980, p. 98), to borrow an early modern term – of leadership transferred by the player through both discursive and extra-linguistic (bodily) means onto the theatrical stage. Wills (1994) downplays the importance of both authors and actors in leadership terms, suggesting that ‘An actor is not, as such, a leader. The appreciation of an audience is not motion toward some goal shared with the actor’ (p. 30). Yet the early modern public stage was as much a political forum as it was a locus for entertainment. In 1586, in her address to Parliament on the 12th of November, Elizabeth publicly acknowledged the intimate link between theatricality and the enaction of sovereignty:

for we princes, I tell you, are set on stages in the sight and view of all the world duly observed. The eyes of many behold our actions; a spot is soon spied in our garments; a blemish quickly noted in our doings. It behooveth us therefore to be careful that our proceedings be just and honorable. (Marcus et al. 2000, p. 194)

The ubiquitousness of the overlap between the political and theatrical in early modern London led to the censorship of any play depicting a living monarch, out of concern for drama’s ability to influence the populace into revolt.

Perhaps the best example of this relationship is the 1601 staging of another of Shakespeare’s histories, Richard II (1595/6). Montrose (1996) notes that ‘On the afternoon of Saturday, 7 February 1601, Shakespeare’s company performed at the Globe a “play of the deposits and kyllyng of Kyng Rychard the second” that was presumably – although not incontrovertibly – Shakespeare’s Tragedie of King Richard the second’ (p. 52; State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth 278.85).

The intent of this performance was to incite popular support for the rebellion of Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex, against Elizabeth. Although it failed in its goal of motivating the populace, the fact that a play was used in the attempt illustrates the correlation between the theatrical and the political in the minds of early moderns. Montrose (1996) explains:

To the Elizabethan government, the spectacular failure of Essex in his attempt to arouse the Queen’s subjects in the streets of London may have suggested that the players’ performance of their playwright’s play was probably innocent of seditious intent. Such a response on the part of the Privy Council would have implied not that the theatre was politically ineffectual but, on the contrary, that it was powerful indeed. (p. 54)

Elizabeth herself is said to have confirmed the influence of the theatrical over the political in a comment to William Lambarde immediately following the incident, proclaiming, ‘I am Richard the Second. Know ye not that?’ (Axton 1977, p. 2). By thus confirming the allegorical significance of a staged monarch to the direct criticism of and even rebellion against the enthroned monarch, we see the importance of such representations to early moderns. Within this complex context, the player’s role as leader is that of transmission vector for the author; through his depiction of Henry in Henry V, then,

---

2. During Essex’s trial, both Sir Gelly Meyricke, one of Essex’s supporters, and Augustine Phillips, an actor in the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, testified that the play had been commissioned with the intent of inciting the audience to rebellion (Craig 1912, p. xii).
Shakespeare interrogates the extant political ideologies of sovereignty, specifically the competing claims of absolutism and participatory limited monarchy.

English monarchical tradition, predating the 1066 Norman Conquest and extending up to the late fifteenth century, was one of participatory limited rather than absolute monarchy (Baumer 1966, p. 5; Birdsall 1967, p. 37; Nenner 1977, p. 33; Eccleshall 1978, p. 2; Starkey 2006, p. 19). Participatory limited monarchy was not – as has been suggested by some critics – a step toward democratization; rather, it was, as both medieval and early moderns understood it, still a monarchy, albeit one that acknowledged the rights of subjects, both noble and common alike. It wasn’t until the accession of Henry VII (Henry Tudor) in 1485 that absolutism gained a significant foothold in English political ideology (Baumer 1966, pp. 6 and 21; Myers 1982, pp. 299 and 323; Starkey 1986, pp. 15–16). 3 Henry VII’s assertions of the ‘disposition of God’ and ‘manifest, certain and authentic revelation’ of sovereign authority remained largely unquestioned by Tudor subjects until the Henrician Reformation in the sixteenth century (Smith 1996, p. 93). Under both Mary and Elizabeth, the debate escalated as political tracts and poems sought to argue for the legitimacy of deposition and tyrannicide, yet both queens continued to press the ideology of divine authorization (Montrose 2006). Elizabeth repeatedly and publicly reminded both Parliament and subjects that ‘princes be set in their seat by God’s appointing,’ ‘God hath made kings,’ and ‘God hath made me to be a Queen,’ although with the caveat that ‘this I count the glory of my crown, that I have reigned with your loves’ (Marcus et al. 2000, pp. 54, 268, and 337). By 1599, the discourse of Tudor absolutism was well-established, although in practice monarchical authority remained limited by both Parliament and the Privy Council (Bezio 2013). The result was the continued public discussion – held in speeches, in print, and on stage – of sovereignty (Sommerville 1999).

This conflict is reflected in Shakespeare’s problematic depiction of Henry V, and echoed in later interpretations of both his character and the play as a whole. In Henry V, Henry’s leadership is rooted in contradictions that have long vexed literary scholarship, but have been largely absent from treatments of the play in leadership studies. Leadership scholars characterize Henry as an icon of rhetorical, military, sovereign, and even (sometimes) proto-democratic leadership, but they are preoccupied with Henry as a positive figure of rhetorical skill, personal accountability, self-confidence, and affinity with the common man (McCombs 1992; Discorfano 2003). Even when leadership scholars acknowledge Henry’s paradoxical nature, they tend to efface problematic behavior with the caveat that Shakespeare’s good kings, ‘like Hal, learn from their pasts’ (Cronin and Genovese 2012, p. 113), characterizing Henry as a leader who ‘knows himself, knows his world, knows how to appeal to people, and knows politics. He is prepared to govern’ (ibid., p. 113). But this polished version of Henry does an injustice to Shakespeare’s awareness of the intricacies of rule and leadership. Interestingly, much critical work in literary studies demonstrates an equally problematic desire to paint Henry as a Machiavellian ruler whose primary interest is in expanding and maintaining his power, even at the expense of his nation and his humanity

3. Although there had been attempts by earlier monarchs to enforce absolute rule, the barons (and, later, Parliament) always refused to acknowledge such authority, and the resulting clashes inevitably produced legislation strengthening the rights of subjects and limiting those of the king. The earliest recorded such document, known as the ‘Anglo-Saxon Magna Carta,’ is dated 1014 in response to Æthelred’s attempts to curtail baronial power; the most famous, of course, is Magna Carta itself, a ‘restorationist act, seeking to bind the King in the standard medieval ways’ (Elshtain 2008, p. 66).
(Hazlitt 1920; Rackin 1990; McEachern 1994; Parolin 2009; Pittock 2009). If Henry is not as straightforward a good leader as has been argued among leadership scholars, neither is he as devious as many literary scholars purport. Rather, each field seems to have focused on only one aspect of sovereign leadership as Shakespeare has embodied it in Henry: leadership studies on the external, public figure Henry wishes to present; literary studies on the internal conflicts through and over which Henry must triumph in order to present his victorious façade. Shakespeare wants his audience to recognize both.

Part of the problem with Henry arises from the uncertainty of his legitimacy. On the one hand, he inherited the throne from his father, Henry IV, by means of primogeniture. On the other, because of his father’s usurpation of Richard II’s throne (staged in Richard II), Henry has a tenuous claim for traditional leadership, at best. Shakespeare focuses on this illegitimacy in Henry’s private remarks before the battle of Agincourt:

HENRY V Not today, O Lord,
O not today, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown. (IV.i.289–291)

In these lines, Henry reminds Shakespeare’s audience of what they have already seen in a previous play: the deposition and murder of Richard II, whose death haunted Henry IV in the form of rebellion and guilt, and whose body Henry V reburied in Westminster Abbey in order to atone for his father’s sins (Strohm 1996, p. 88). Shakespeare’s audience would also have been familiar with the sequence known as the First Tetralogy (1 Henry VI, 2 Henry VI, 3 Henry VI, and Richard III, dated 1590–1593), which chronicles the events following Henry V’s death, including the Wars of the Roses and the crowning of Henry VII. These earlier plays blame the Lancastrians for the disruption of Yorkist lineage, resolving only in the unification of the two houses with Henry Tudor’s marriage to Elizabeth of York. In refusing to ignore the problematic nature of Henry’s claims of traditionalism, Shakespeare requires his audience to look beyond royal blood for legitimacy. For an early modern audience facing the end of a dynastic era, the possibility of finding effective leadership external to traditionalist claims was a hopeful one. However, this outlook also necessitated an ideological shift away from the doctrinal claims of absolutism cultivated and perpetuated by the Tudors (Nenner 1977).

By 1599, Elizabeth I had been on the English throne for 4 decades – many subjects (including Shakespeare) had known no other monarch – and refused to name an heir. The Queen was over 65 years of age in a time when the average adult lifespan was in the 40s, and the nation faced potential civil war should the succession remain unsettled at the time of her death (Shapiro 2005, p. xv). There were several possible heirs to the throne, including James VI of Scotland, the five female descendants of Henry VIII’s sister Mary, Arabella Stuart, the Spanish Infanta, and the Earl of Essex. Of these, most were not serious contenders, although the fears of invasion from both France and Spain produced a great deal of English anxiety at the close of the sixteenth century. Although Henry VIII’s will indicated a preference for the Grey line (from his sister Mary) over the Stuart (from his sister Margaret), the Stuarts seemed to be the preferred inheritors (and not simply because of our hindsight knowledge that James ultimately acceded to the English throne). But despite friendly correspondence with James and pressure from Parliament and the Privy Council, Elizabeth refused to designate an heir, producing speculation and fears of both international and civil conflict (Bezio 2013).

By the composition of Henry V, it was clear to everyone that primogeniture would be unable to provide the next monarch, and the discussion of sovereignty intensified as
speculation (and suggestion) increased. While the populace had no control or input, pamphleteers – like the Catholic Robert Parsons – advocated for particular candidates and attempted to reassert traditional claims of limited participatory monarchy, perhaps as a preemptive warning to potential claimants that the English nation would not tolerate tyranny or exploitation. Up to this point, Shakespeare’s history plays, too, seemed to advocate caution for potential future monarchs through negative exempla such as John or Richard III. Henry V, however, distinguishes itself from Shakespeare’s other histories by depicting a successful king. Interestingly, Henry V also does not conform to the doctrinal absolutism or claims of divine endowment being disseminated by Elizabeth, encouraged by official sermons, and published by the leading contender for the English throne. The political alternative to failed primogeniture we find in Henry V is leadership based upon performance, a concept that echoes Elizabeth’s public recognition of her own role as an actor, while also claiming political influence for the medium of theater itself.

In fact, the primary purpose of the opening Chorus in Henry V is to highlight the need, on the part of both the actors and ‘Henry,’ for the audience to accept the image he personates:

CHORUS Suppose within the girdle of these walls
Are now confined two mighty monarchies,
Whose high upreared and abutting fronts
The perilous narrow ocean parts asunder.
Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Into a thousand parts divine one man
And make imaginary puissance.
Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hoofs i’th receiving earth.
For ’tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings. (Prologue.19–28)

The Chorus entreats the audience to supplement the deficiencies of the theatrical genre with their imaginations. Because the play’s setting cannot be represented realistically on the stage, the audience’s willingness to participate imaginatively becomes crucial to theatrical illusion (Weimann 1978). The Choric apology of inadequacy caters not only to dramatic convention, but also this paradigm of imaginative participation:

CHORUS pardon, gentles all,
The flat unraised spirits that hath dared
On this unworthy scaffold to bring forth
So great an object. (Prologue.8–11)

The audience must be willing to both engage with and accept the fiction being offered to them on the ‘unworthy scaffold’ of the Globe’s stage.

Within this description, the Globe Theatre becomes a microcosm not only for France and England, but, as its name implies, the world. And by extension, all that is contained within it – stage, players, and even audience – become imaginatively identified with macrocosmic corollaries outside the theatrical confines of the playhouse. This conception – known as the theatrum mundi, or world-theater – was reflected in the physical as well as ideological space of the theaters themselves, and was

4. James’s two treatises, The Trew Law of Free Monarchies (1598) and Basilikon Doron (1599) were published and disseminated in Scotland, although he would have them reprinted following his accession to the English throne in 1603 (McIlwain 1918).
widespread throughout Europe and England by the late sixteenth century (Bernheimer 1956). The canopy overhanging the stage was known as the Heavens, and the under-stage space accessible via trapdoor, Hell, while the scaffolded stage itself stood in for the mortal ground (Hawkins 1966). The metaphor was not limited to space; as Bernheimer (1956) explains, ‘the path was prepared by corresponding doctrines about the nature of theatrical audiences’ (p. 225), a point reinforced by Cohn’s (1967) definition: ‘The theatrum mundi topos differs from the scena vitæ [life-scene] by its inclusion of an audience. Though both topoi incorporate world-stage and man-actor imagery, theatrum mundi reaches out to embrace an extramundane audience’ (p. 28). The presumption of audience inclusion in the theatrum mundi is that they must have a corellational role in the macrocosmic world to that which they occupy in the microcosm of the theater.5

In the microcosm created by Henry V, the audience – in part because they already conform to this demographic – spectates the doings of both the great and the lowly, acting as the throng of subjects of both England and France. And if the audience becomes the populace within the play, then their naturally analogous role beyond the theater’s walls is also that of populace, the subjects of the English nation allegorized by Henry V. Through both imaginative participation and the invocation of the theatrum mundi, Shakespeare uses Henry V to engage in contemporary debates about leadership by presenting his audience with Henry as a problematic – both positive and negative – representation of the national anxiety over the question of Elizabethan succession.

In the audience’s criticism or approval of the play – ‘your humble patience pray, / Gently to hear, kindly to judge our play’ (Prologue.33–34) – we find yet another correlation to the external political world. The interplay of performance and audience acceptance or rejection suggests a means of ‘negotiating the terms, rather than the fact, of their subordination’ (Braddick and Walter 2001, p. 42) within the early modern sociopolitical hierarchy. This concept – which I term ‘performative negotiation’ – relies upon physiological and verbal cues to transmit an image of leadership which the subjects-as-audience choose to accept or reject. Braddick and Walter (2001) discuss the early modern relationship of leadership role to audience acceptance explicitly in terms of ‘negotiation’:

Lordship, gentility and magistracy were all social roles demanding active representation of the power the role claimed. To assume a social role is necessarily to enter into a negotiation with the audience or audiences for the enactment of the role. To exercise office, gentlemen had successfully to lay claim to a particular social role defined in terms of wider expectations and symbols of power. This constrained their freedom in the role. As office-holders they were engaged in an exercise in impression management, and their credibility in office rested to a large degree on the reception of their performance. (p. 27)

The description offered here of leadership as ‘social roles demanding active representation’ relates to an understanding of leadership as explicitly performance-based. In essence, nobles, courtiers, officials, and even monarchs were expected to exhibit the traditional behaviors, costumes, and discourse associated with their rank. Early moderns were so concerned with the integrity of such public performances that the government passed sumptuary laws designed to restrict apparel to specific classes and ranks.
Braddock and Walter (2001) suggest that these trappings of power were integral to the recognition of that power by those subordinate to it, a relationship that appears explicitly in Shakespeare’s Henry V.

Goffman (1959) similarly describes performance as ‘the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers’ (p. 22), emphasizing the interplay between the performer’s actions and appearance, and the audience’s reception of those actions. Discorfano (2003) refines this definition to be specific to leadership, stating that ‘a leader can and often will actively manipulate his or her image and any surrounding drama to play on our imaginations’ (p. 11). This methodology of image manipulation – also termed ‘image building’ or ‘Impression Management’ (Goffman 1959; Gardner and Avolio 1998) – was also a practice in which monarchs in state were expected to engage. This required not only the sovereign’s performance, but also the audience’s willingness to accept that performance as viable.

This relationship between leadership performance and follower (or audience) acceptance has also been remarked upon by Gardner and Avolio (1998), who suggest that charismatic leaders succeed by ‘embodying the core values of the groups, organizations, or societies they represent, which promotes follower identification’ (p. 34). Gardner and Avolio (1998) further suggest that ‘Although followers primarily occupy the audience role’ in this relationship, ‘they are far more than passive targets for the leader [Impression Management]. Instead, they are active players who work with the leader to construct his or her charismatic identity’ (p. 34). This aspect of ‘working with’ the leader, I argue, is the process of negotiation identified by Braddock and Walter (2001), and can be seen in the exchanges between Henry and his subjects, and is designed to draw attention to the parallel relationship between the audience-as-populace and their monarch.

The elements of performative negotiation that appear most prominently in Henry V occur in three specific contexts: the first, and most problematic, occurs when Henry threatens and engages in seemingly unjustified violence; in the second, Henry disguises himself as a commoner and confesses that ‘the King but a man’ (IV.i.102); and the last appears in Henry’s legendary St Crispin’s Day speech, given just prior to the battle of Agincourt. Together, these instances of performative negotiation help establish Henry’s position as a martial, monarchical, and charismatic leader, but also reinforce the role of early modern drama in general, and Shakespeare in particular, in interrogating contemporary conceptions of sovereignty. While Edmondson (2000) remarks, ‘Shakespeare then, invites us to view his portrait of the ideal leader as he sequentially reveals each dimension of his character’ (p. 61), the image with which the audience is left at the play’s conclusion is multivalent and paradoxical, unsettling rather than appeasing the ideology of providential monarchy.

6. Appropriate attire was crucial to the early modern understanding of social position both on and off stage, and continues to be a cultural index in an audience’s recognition of an individual’s leadership role (Goffman 1959, pp. 24–25). Accuracy of costume is important to the reception of theatrical performance, and the costumes of nobility that appeared on the early modern stage were often taken from the households of those who held similar public positions (MacIntyre 1992, p. 78). Concern with appropriate attire also included the often allegorical depictions of appropriate monarchical appearance. Elizabeth’s formal gowns were costly and elaborate, and the dress in which she appeared in both pageants and portraits was specifically designed to evoke mythological and dynastic overtones (Strong 1987, pp. 37–38; Anglo 1992, p. 99). These concerns with apparel indicate that physical appearance was an index of an individual’s status, but also of the intention and attitude the monarch intended to convey.
The most vexing element of Henry’s leadership appears in his demand for the surrender of the city of Harfleur, in which he threatens ‘rapacious violence’ (Deats 2004, p. 91), disrupting claims of ideal leadership:

HENRY V Therefore, you men of Harfleur,
Take pity of your town and of your people
While yet my soldiers are in my command,
While yet the cool and temperate wind of grace
O’erblows the filthy and contagious clouds
Of heady murder, spoil and villainy.
If not, why, in a moment look to see
The blind and bloody soldier with foul hand
Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters,
Your fathers taken by the silver beards,
And their most reverend heads dashed to the walls,
Your naked infants spitted upon pikes. (III.iii.27–38)

These threats are often ignored completely in leadership studies: for example, McCombs’s (1992) description of Henry includes the assertion that ‘One of Henry’s personal credos is that: …when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner’ (p. 219). This sentiment is entirely absent from Henry’s ultimatum, which is among the most vicious in Shakespeare’s works. While Henry does not actually follow through with his threats – Harfleur immediately surrenders – the speech provides us with a moment of evidence for Henry’s willingness either to commit atrocity or to use cruel falsehood to secure victory.

Deats (2004) suggests that this enumeration of atrocities indicates Henry’s role as a ‘virtuoso rhetorician whose words prove more puissant than swords as he topples a great city through the power of his oratory, thus preventing many deaths on both sides,’ but that this rhetorical virtuosity is ‘undermined by … these very ringing words’ (p. 91). In short, Henry’s performative strategy reflects a despotic persona at odds with his later appearance as a fraternal figure concerned by the potential loss of his men’s lives. Henry’s willingness to commit questionable moral acts reappears when he commands the execution of the French prisoners: ‘Then every soldier kill his prisoners! / Give the word through’ (IV.vi.37–38). Deats (2004) suggests that his decision could have come ‘for tactical reasons or for revenge’ (p. 92) against the French for murdering the boys (servants and runners) left behind in the camp. However, while Henry reissues the order following his discovery of the French attack on the boys, his initial order comes before Flewellen announces the discovery of the slaughter. Henry excuses his unethical orders by placing blame post factum upon the French, just as he excuses his threats against Harfleur by forcing the Governor of the city to make the choice between surrender and violation.

Henry’s actions are often justified as necessary to his success, yet if Shakespeare wanted to fully legitimize all of Henry’s decisions, he would not complicate those decisions by having Henry attempt to reassign fault onto others. While some critics charge Henry with avoidance (Pittock 2009), Rothschild (1986) suggests that ‘only a human being, would engage in such patent rationalization’ (pp. 66–67), arguing that Henry’s displacement of personal responsibility is an indicator of his laudable humanity. Shakespeare’s construction of the king ‘allows Henry himself to be troubled by those costs and responsive to the moral questions they raise. Thus it reveals him to be a finer model for a king than he had hitherto been allowed to be in the national consciousness’ (ibid., p. 67).
While Henry’s ‘humanity’ may make him a more sympathetic figure – if Rothschild is to be believed – does it make him a better king?

On the most simplistic level of success, Henry’s threats against Harfleur and his execution of French prisoners are practical decisions that contribute to his ultimate victory. On another level, such acts (or the threats thereof) undermine the pious and virtuous persona Henry seems to have cultivated in the play’s early scenes. And yet it was important for an early modern monarch to be seen as capable of such extreme acts when compelled by necessity; when threatened by the Jesuit conspiracy to place Mary Queen of Scots on the English throne, Elizabeth ordered the torture of the conspirators and the execution of her royal cousin (Montrose 2006). Interestingly, the audience does not witness any internal trepidation from Henry with regard to these incidents, a lack that often diminishes the very sympathy Rothschild claims these acts produce. Nor does Henry seem to show regret or guilt over either his threats or the execution of the prisoners, perhaps because, as Pittock (2009) argues, he accepts ‘no responsibility for his own actions’ (p. 188). The only moments in which we see him ‘humanized’ appear when he is most concerned that blame will be laid at his feet for the death of the English, not the French.

This fear of personal accountability for his own followers prompts Henry to disguise himself as a commoner and speak with his soldiers on the eve of battle. He borrows Sir Thomas Erpingham’s cloak and changes his language to match that of his men (prose, rather than the more traditional blank verse used by nobility). They perceive him not as a king, but as one of them – the difference in rank elided by Henry’s ‘common’ performance. During this encounter, Henry admits trepidation about the upcoming battle, as he tells his men that kings are not significantly different from them in terms of needs and emotions: ‘I think the King is but a man, as I am. … Therefore when he sees reason of fears as we do, his fears, out of doubt, be of the same relish as ours are. Yet, in reason, no man should possess him with any appearance of fear, lest, he, by showing it, should dishearten the army’ (IV.i.102–112). For Henry, the differentiation between himself as King and as Harry lies in performance; the king is required to eliminate ‘any appearance of fear’ for the sake of his followers, regardless of what he feels. Taunton (2001) suggests that the purpose behind Henry’s foray into the camp is ‘to appease his insecurity and vanity, to justify to himself a costly and difficult campaign, to assure himself of his rightful claim and above all to test out claims that God is on his side’ (p. 177). However, her assertion that his motives are entirely selfish discounts his need to connect with his followers in order to better motivate both them and himself (McCombs 1992; Edmondson 2000; Rosendale 2004). In Henry’s disguise, then, we likely find both self-serving and altruistic motives – a realistic rather than ideological picture of sovereignty. Yet in this realism Shakespeare does not condemn Henry, specifically; rather, through the embodiment of an imperfect yet successful monarch we find a criticism of providential absolutism. Henry’s faults – especially, as we will see, as highlighted by his encounter with Williams – do not make him a bad king, but they do defy claims of monarchical infallibility and complete divine authorization in favor of the subject-located legitimation found in participatory limited monarchy.

Confronting the disguised king (whom he does not recognize), Williams insists that ‘Now if these men do not die well it will be a black matter for the King, that led them

7. It is unclear whether an early modern audience would be as appalled by Henry’s actions as a modern one; period accounts seem to indicate similar sympathetic responses to other events, such as sadness at the death of Talbot in 1 Henry VI (Walsh 2007, p. 58).
to it, who to disobey were against all proportion of subjection’ (IV.i.143–146). Rather than assuaging his fears, Henry learns that his men hold him fully accountable for their deaths – and their souls:

HENRY V Upon the King! ‘Let us our lives, our souls, Our debts, our careful wives, Our children and our sins lay on the King!’ We must bear all. O hard condition, Twin-born with greatness, subject to the breath Of every fool whose sense no more can feel But his own wringing! What infinite heart’s ease Must kings neglect that private men enjoy! And what have kings that privates have not too, Save ceremony, save general ceremony? (IV.i.227–236)

Williams’s accusations call both Henry’s and the audience’s attention to the duality of leadership: Henry may be akin to common men, but he is also more than they by virtue of his performative leadership role. Henry’s reminder to the playhouse audience of his own inadequacies are placed in opposition to his willingness to accept his responsibilities as king, to performatively negotiate with his subjects for sovereign authority, and to fulfill his obligations as a martial, sovereign, and charismatic leader.

Shakespeare returns to this scene following the battle when Williams challenges Fluellen. During Henry’s initial conversation with Williams, he and the soldier exchange gloves as tokens of their quarrel. Henry later gives Williams’s glove to Fluellen, and when Williams sees it, he issues a challenge to the confused Welshman. Henry intercedes, and reveals himself: ‘’Twas I indeed thou promised’st to strike, / And thou hast given me most bitter terms’ (IV.viii.42–43). Williams, however, refuses to continue on the grounds that a disguised Henry was not, in fact, the king:

WILLIAMS Your majesty came not like your self: you appeared to me but as a common man – witness the night, your garments, your lowliness; and what your highness suffered under that shape, I beseech you take it for your own fault and not mine, for had you been as I took you for, I made no offence; therefore I beseech your highness pardon me. (IV.viii.51–57)

By rewarding Williams with ‘an honour’ and ‘crowns’ (IV.viii.60 and 58) rather than punishing him, Shakespeare confirms the soldier’s understanding of monarchy as performance: when Henry is not actively playing the role of king, he ceases to be the king (Bezio 2010, pp. 15–16). It is important for Henry’s negotiation of power that he specifically conform to the expectations of followers such as Williams, as Black (1975) explains: ‘What they would have the King be is linked to their dreams, and their dreams are of history, of chivalry, and of epic. Henry knows what he is doing, so does Shakespeare’ (p. 13). Such an ideology explicitly contradicts claims of providential absolutism, again reinforcing an interpretation of Henry V in which Henry’s success relies on performative negotiation rather than providence or primogeniture.

Such a reading is, finally, positively enforced through the depiction of Henry’s famous rallying of his troops. Henry’s St Crispin’s Day speech, given the morning following his first encounter with Williams, is perhaps the most famous speech in Henry V, and one of the most notable – and oft-quoted – in Shakespeare. The speech is worth reproducing at length:

HENRY V This story shall the good man teach his son, And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by From this day to the ending of the world
But we in it shall be remembered,
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers.
For he today that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne’er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition.
And gentlemen in England now abed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin’s day. (IV.iii.56–67)

Here, Henry’s rhetorical facility is displayed at its utmost. The structure and syntax of Henry’s speech are designed for public oratory:

its movement from the King’s honor to his people’s; its crescendo variations on St. Crispin’s day, reaching their climax in the last line; its rhythmic patterns expanding repeatedly from broken lines to flowing periods in each section and concluding climactically in the cadence that begins ‘We happy few’; its language constantly addressed to the pleasures, worries, and aspirations of an audience of citizens. … We recognize it as a performance; we share the strain of the King’s greatness, the necessary effort of his image-projecting. (Rabkin 1977, p. 286)

Discorfano (2003) remarks that in a 1994 theatrical production the speech was delivered to only a few nobles, a decision which undermined its intended rhetorical power: ‘The point was to emphasize Henry’s humanness, and our own – and history’s – penchant for construing things in a way that is favorable to our own needs. Sitting in the theater, I found myself longing for that rallying speech, wanting that moment of leadership’ (p. 11). Without proclamatory rhetoric, Henry’s speech fails to persuade his audience of his efficacy as a martial or political leader, just as he failed to persuade Williams during their night-encounter. The circumstances by the literal light of day are no different for Henry than they were when he confessed his fears to the playhouse audience, however Henry is now performing to an onstage audience as well, and must present an appropriate persona.

In aligning himself with all levels of the populace, Henry returns to the point he made earlier in a private context: the king and the common man are one and the same. He ‘attempts to win consent’ (Tebbets 1990, p. 11) for the impending battle from both nobles and commons. However, here Henry is successful in convincing both his and Shakespeare’s auditors because instead of lowering himself, as in his conversation with Williams, he raises up his followers to be ‘my brother’ by virtue of the shared combat that ‘shall gentle his condition.’ Elevation is more discursively successful than diminution, and permits rhetorical egalitarianism that does not give up the importance of honor and nobility while equating Henry with his followers. Performed both metaphorically and literally to a socially multifaceted audience – on stage, it is addressed to nobles and commons, and its performances similarly target nobility, royalty, and commons at Court and public performances – the speech enables the player (as the vehicle for Shakespeare’s language) to claim equality not only with nobles and commons, but even with the Queen herself when given at Court. The content of Henry’s speech, too, identifies him with Elizabeth, as it echoes her address to the English forces at Tilbury, facing the Spanish Armada (Bezio 2013, p. 40). 8 Henry’s

8. Elizabeth’s speech is quoted by Dr Lionel Sharp as follows: ‘I am come among you at this time but for my recreation and pleasure, being resolved in the midst and heat of battle to live and die amongst you all’ (Marcus et al. 2000, p. 325).
discourse makes an explicit claim for the importance of performance – and rhetoric – to the construction of leadership roles and relationships in early modern England; by specifically linking Henry and Elizabeth, Shakespeare is able to praise Elizabeth’s self-conscious theatricality, but is also able to express anxiety about her impending unnamed heir.

Because of Henry, the English are successful at Agincourt, losing only 29 to over 10,000 French. As the play moves toward its conclusion, we see Henry put aside martial responsibilities and successfully play both the savvy politician and the lover, securing French surrender and the hand of Princess Katherine. A consummate leader, Henry is capable of assuming the roles demanded of him, adapting his attitude, language, and personation to each situation as required (Tennenhouse 1986). Yet Henry V does not end on a triumphant chord.

Although, as the play itself acknowledges, Henry’s life and death have already passed, the epilogue’s reminder of the failure of English monarchy reveals the intense anxiety present at the close of Elizabeth’s reign:

CHORUS Fortune made his sword
By which the world’s best garden he achieved,
And of it left his son imperial lord.

Henry the Sixth, in infant bands crowned King
Of France and England, did this king succeed,
Whose state so many had the managing
That they lost France and made his England bleed. (Epilogue.6–12)

The epilogue refers here to the events of Shakespeare’s First Tetralogy, during which Henry VI loses control of France, causes the War of the Roses, and is deposed and executed, followed by the tyrannical reign of Richard III. At the conclusion of Richard III, however, is the arrival of Henry VII, founder of the Tudor dynasty (Tillyard 1946). The promise of security that seems implicit in Henry VII’s appearance is fractured by the political circumstances of 1599 – Henry VII’s granddaughter, Elizabeth, is an aging monarch with no heir, and England faces yet another potential civil war. And while Elizabeth – like the image of Henry created by Shakespeare – is a consummate performer (Marcus et al. 2000), the charismatic leadership produced by performative negotiation only endures so long as the performer is alive to enact it (Parolin 2009; Bezio 2013).

What we find in the historical sequences of the First Tetralogy and the Henriad, concluding with Henry V, is an argument against the absolutist ideology that can lead to the loss of rights, fragmentation, tyranny, and ultimately civil war. In Henry, Shakespeare presents a kind of realistic ideal: a flawed king who nevertheless is able to achieve success because he does not rely on a presumption of absolute authority. Henry seeks justification for every action he takes throughout the play: from the bishops to begin the war, from his enemies for their defeat, from the French king for his alliance with Katherine, from his soldiers for their sacrifice, and even from God for his eventual victory. These acts of performative negotiation – both private and public – ensure his success and provide an exemplum to England’s future monarch. The epilogue follows this illustration with a warning of what could ensue – rebellion, civil war, and regicide – if this example is not followed.

Shakespeare does not give us or his audience a satisfactory answer to the question of the succession. As a playwright in the service of an Elizabethan courtier, he was undoubtedly aware of the debates concerning the future of the English throne, despite
the illegality of such conversations (Montrose 2006). It is not Shakespeare’s purpose in Henry V, however, to argue for a specific candidate.9 Rather, Henry V acts as a eulogy for the Tudor dynasty and an expression of hope and fear about England’s future. For while the play’s focus on performativity ultimately praises Elizabeth’s successful negotiation with her subjects, the epilogue (and the earlier plays to which it alludes) reminds its audience that not all monarchs are successful – or as willing to accept limitations placed on their authority.

9. Some critics read an endorsement of the Earl of Essex into the Choric interlude between the fourth and fifth acts. The problem of Essex – to whom Shakespeare compares Henry returning to London as being like ‘the General of our gracious Empress’ (V.0.30) returning victorious from Ireland (which he, in fact, did not, although Shakespeare would not have known that when writing the play) – is that the link between Elizabeth’s General and Henry is imperfect and even more problematic than the character of Henry himself. Albright (1928) notes that ‘Essex was at this time definitely out of favor with Elizabeth and a group of powerful courtiers, and was being spied upon in his Irish enterprise’ (p. 728). She continues, suggesting that ‘Shakespeare was definitely taking sides’ (ibid., p. 728), but does not actually state which side she believes the author falls on, although she does explain that Shakespeare’s patron, Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, was an ally of Essex’s. While this is compelling, all it really indicates is that Shakespeare wished to please his patron – or, at least, not to displease him.

Additional evidence Albright (1928) supplies for the parallel between Henry and Essex lies in his lineage; while it is true that both Essex and Henry were able to claim descent from Edward III, so was Elizabeth herself, as could a wide variety of noble lines in court in 1599, including James VI of Scotland, whose claim was also through the female line (pp. 738–739). Furthermore, Albright (1928) offers the suggestion that the alliance between Henry and Katherine at the play’s conclusion is an allusion to Essex’s desire to ally with France (pp. 748–749); yet within the play itself, the mockery made of the French in general hardly seems to indicate sympathy with such a sentiment. Ultimately, though, even Albright (1928) comes to the conclusion that ‘Whether “England for the English” meant, to Shakespeare, as it did to some of his countrymen, a preference for Essex as a prospective ruler, rather than the feared domination by Spain, Scotland, or even France, it is difficult to say,’ although she does note that ‘it is clear that he has definitely likened Essex to the very best and most patriotic king’ (p. 753) of the history plays.

Certainly, as Patterson (1989) notes, it is important to acknowledge that Shakespeare was rooting history within his contemporary context through the mention of Essex, but that does not inherently mean that Essex himself should be unequivocally mapped onto Henry as idealized king (p. 71). Parolin (2009) observes, importantly for our purposes, that Henry is also likened to Caesar, the legendary builder of the Tower of London, but also the tyrant whose death was staged by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, along with Henry V, in 1599 (p. 44). It seems unlikely that Caesar, himself a military hero, would be used as a support for Essex’s monarchical ambitions were Shakespeare wholeheartedly intending to support him. Rather, it seems that a combination of these motives is the most likely conclusion: Shakespeare, whose patron supported Essex, would be disinclined to openly criticize Essex, but, given the context of the Elizabethan succession crisis, neither would he be likely to fully endorse the Earl. Instead, the depiction we get of an already paradoxical and problematic king in Henry is further complicated by his alignment to general (Essex), tyrant (Caesar), and Queen. This indicates to me that Henry embodies both the hopes and the fears about the future unknown monarch of England, who – while unknown – has the potential to fulfill any of the characteristics contained in Henry, to either the great benefit or the great detriment of England.
REFERENCES

Cohn, R. (1967), ‘“Theatrum Mundi” and Contemporary Theater,’ Comparative Drama, 1 (1), 28–35.


McCombs, G.M. (1992), ‘“Once more unto the breach, dear friends”: Shakespeare’s Henry V as a Primer for Leaders,’ The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 18 (3), 218–220.


Book review


Peter Case
Professor of Management and Organization Studies, School of Business, Faculty of Law, Business and the Creative Arts, James Cook University, Townsville, Australia

Keith Grint is arguably one of the most innovative and imaginative scholars currently working in the field of leadership studies. A sociologist by training, his scholarship ranges across several other disciplines within the humanities, including *inter alia*: history (particularly military history); social studies of science and technology; philosophy; and literary theory. The scope of Grint’s approach to the study of leaders and leadership makes him an obvious candidate for attention in this inaugural issue of *Leadership and the Humanities*, and it is for this reason that I have chosen to review two of his publications here. While Grint has held chairs in several UK business schools, his work is by no means representative of the managerialist orthodoxy that has come to influence, and perhaps even dominate, debates relating to human organization and governance. His is a dissenting voice that eschews the often simple-minded thinking and crude methodological instrumentality which characterizes much business school treatment of the leadership phenomenon. Before offering a critical appraisal of the two Grint volumes, it may be helpful briefly to locate his work in relation to the evolution of leadership as a distinct field of study. His heterodox contribution can only properly be understood, I suggest, as a counterpoint to mainstream approaches.

Leadership studies, *per se*, is a relatively new invention. While it is certainly the case that historians have, since the beginning of recorded history, been attracted to the study of individual leaders and organizational governance wherever manifest in human communities and civilizations, ‘leadership studies’ as a distinct discipline has existed for barely 60 years. It is associated intimately with the growth of the science of organizational behaviour – being something of an offshoot – which developed primarily in the United States from the middle of the twentieth century onwards. As a subject discipline, it sought to provide answers to questions concerning how best to lead and govern in the context of mid-twentieth-century US institutional and business organizational life. The fashion of the time was to look for science for direction and, accordingly, leadership studies positioned itself as a putative science of individual conduct informed predominantly by psychological theory. Early studies were concerned with the exploration of individual ontology whereby the various personality
traits and characteristics of effective leaders could be established and, most importantly, measured (for example, see Stogdill 1948; 1974). The dominant epistemology of the discipline was positivism, an inheritance that still holds great sway to this day.

Trait theory has largely given way to studies which seek to correlate attributes of the individual leader (qualities, styles or skills) with attributes of a social or organizational context (Tannenbaum and Schmidt 1958; Likert 1961; Fiedler 1967; Hersey and Blanchard 1988). The positivist emphasis, however, still persists and there is much concern within mainstream leadership studies – particularly in the USA – to produce models that hold out the possibility of control and predictability or that represent generalizable principles and can be studied using replicable methods.

Grint’s work, by contrast to the mainstream development, is far more rooted in a European intellectual tradition and offers, as it were, something of a non-positivist antidote. The dominant disciplines of psychology, social psychology and economics which typify US approaches are supplanted by social theory, history and philosophy in his far subtler theorization and empirical enquiry into the processes of ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ constitution. This non-positivist sensibility results, I suggest, in a more sophisticated account of the complex processes which are productive of leadership enactments. Indeed, according to Grint (2005), leadership must ultimately be approached as an ‘essentially contested concept’ (pace Gallie 1955/56). In other words, leaders and leadership should be approached as socio-material assemblages – a notion that Grint draws from Latourian actor network theory – that lack intrinsic essence. In both the books reviewed here, Grint is careful to eschew the idea that there can ever be an uncontested, once-and-for-all-time definition of ‘leader’ or ‘leadership’, or that such concepts can be unproblematically operationalized within a rational science of the subject. Rather, conceptions of leaders and leadership should always be approached as an outcome of historical and present social circumstances. As such, they are always subject to contestation and perpetual revision within any given social milieu. Grint’s constitutive approach

… is very much a pro-active affair for leaders. It is they who actively shape our interpretation of the environment, the challenges, the goals, the competition, the strategy, and the tactics; they also try and persuade us that their interpretations are both correct – and therefore the truth – and, ironically, not an interpretation but the truth. (Grint 2001, p. 4)

Taking a Foucauldian turn, moreover, Grint observes that ‘what counts as true and false is not determined by the essence of the phenomena themselves, because such phenomena are brought into existence only through representation … the “truth” is determined by the power of the discourse’ (ibid., p. 25). And discourses must always be socially and historically situated.

Rather than generate a rational science of leadership, therefore, Grint contends that it would be far more fecund and valuable to apply a series of ‘arts’ to the exploration and social scientific rendering of the phenomenon. He proposes, for example, that: the philosophical arts be applied to the study of leadership ‘identity’; the performing arts facilitate insight through the ‘theatre of persuasive communication’; fine arts offer a ‘studio of strategic vision’; and martial arts a ‘dojo of organizational tactics’. This, doubtless, was the impetus underlying his choice of title, The Arts of Leadership – a titular repudiation of mainstream scientism and celebration of the possibilities offered by alternative positions within the humanities.

Grint introduces a theoretical schema in The Arts which he goes on to develop and elaborate further in Leadership. Although leadership is an essentially contestable concept, it can be helpful, he contends, to map processes using a series of questions
relating to the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the phenomenon. The later version of the schema found in Leadership sees ‘why’ supplanted by ‘where’. Elements of the new nomenclature correspond respectively to leadership as Person (who), Result (what), Position (where) and Process (how). In other words, in historical and contemporary studies of leadership a certain structural grammar (my term) seems to inform lay and professional accounts. These, in turn, reflect particular explanatory dispositions, preferences and assumptions. According to some narratives, who leaders are makes them leaders, in others it is what leaders achieve, where they are located, or how they get things done that qualifies them as leaders. Forms of explanation can be located within this conceptual alembic; some focusing exclusively on one dimension and others proposing an admixture of the who, what, where and how motives.

My conjecture is that the structure of this schema betrays some classical philosophical influences on Grint’s thinking. It strikes me that the who, what, where and how reflect the quis, quibus auxiliis, ubi and quomodo elements of classical grammar. These are typical of the motivational elements developed, for instance, in Cicero’s De Inventione (Kennedy 1972) or Boethius’ circumstances of action in De Topicis Differentis (Leff 1978) for the purposes of textual exegesis; although the latter grammars each include more than four analytical categories. There is also a family resemblance between Grint’s theoretical schema and the grammatical pentad deployed by Kenneth Burke in his social theoretical and literary critiques (Burke 1969a; 1969b). This prompts me to query the slight anomaly that appears in Grint’s framework as it evolves from the initial form in the The Arts to that found in Leadership. Leadership narratives (particularly in the business and political world) often point to the ‘visionary’ nature of the leaders and their charismatic and persuasive communication skills. Leaders are commonly spoken of as supplying the why or ‘purpose’, to borrow from Burke’s pentad, of organized collective action. So my suggestion would be that, rather than drop ‘why’ (cur) in favour of ‘where’ (ubi), the schema could usefully be expanded to include all five structural elements.

While I have focused thus far on aspects of Grint’s theoretical schema and interrogation of structures of explanation, it is important to note that in both books the majority of his text is given over to the elaboration of examples which illustrate the constitutive approach he is at pains to advance. The historical analyses often centre around iconic figures or, as Grint frames them, ‘extreme leaders’, but these accounts are far more than hackneyed heroic portraits of the sort that characterize much writing on ‘great leaders’. On the contrary, Grint invariably has an eye toward reflexivity and complexity, taking care to situate his analyses within the sociopolitical and socioeconomic supporting conditions that give rise to the leader or leadership case in question. In this respect, he seems to have taken to heart Tolstoy’s injunctions regarding the study of history, ‘To study the laws of history we must completely change the subject of our observation, must leave aside kings, ministers, and generals, and study the common, infinitesimally small elements by which the masses are moved’ (Tolstoy 1952, p. 470). So while the names of famous and infamous leaders, such as Florence Nightingale, Henry Ford, Horatio Nelson, Adolf Hitler, Martin Luther King and Richard Branson, feature in separate chapters of The Arts, their agency with respect to historical events is invariably problematized in Grint’s treatment, and socio-material dimensions of analysis are introduced to challenge the otherwise iconic status of these ‘individuals’. Likewise, in Leadership the illustrative cases often work ironically to toy with or upset commonsense interpretations. The reader is educated variously as to the hybrid nature of leadership during the D-Day landings, the parallels between Spartacus’s leadership in the Third Servile War and the organization of Nazi death camps, and the hydra-like
networked leadership that characterized both the Civil Rights movement in the USA and the organization of al-Qaeda. There are no sacred cows in Grint’s leadership cosmos and just about any established view (Transformational Leadership, Distributed Leadership, etc.) or cherished idea of nobility (Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi) are fair game for his deconstructive analytical gaze.

In the space available, I have only been able to offer a cursory and selective overview of Grint’s thinking as represented in the two volumes chosen for review. This fails to capture the laconic wit and serious playfulness with which he engages in his theorization and analysis of leaders and leadership phenomena. I would certainly encourage readers who are unfamiliar with his oeuvre to explore the writings of this heterodox thinker; and either of the books considered here would be worthwhile places to start. Not only are they intrinsically rewarding reads, they are also useful resources for teaching purposes. Grint’s work can act as a valuable intellectual irritant to challenge received leadership wisdom and disabuse students of previously held assumptions and prejudices. This is no bad thing in a business school milieu that is increasingly susceptible to facile recipes and easy answers. I often make much in my classes of Grint’s opening Socratic remarks in *The Arts*:

> In 1986, before I first began to study leadership in a serious manner, my knowledge of it was complete. I knew basically all there was to know … I should have stopped then, because ever since that time my understanding has decreased in direct proportion to my increased knowledge: in effect, the more I read, the less I understood. (Grint 2001, p. 1)

Such scholastic humility, to my mind at least, is an extremely important value to impart to students of leadership or, for that matter, any other subject.

REFERENCES


