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Essay One: Respond

Nora Elbilawi

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Leadership Seminar

Dr. Rebecca Fox

“Leadership is not manifested by coercion, even against the resented. Greatness is not manifested by unlimited pragmatism, which places such a high premium on the end justifying any means and any measures.” Margrate Chase Smith

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Introduction

What are the essential qualities of an effective leader? Great leadership seems easy to recognize, and you usually can tell when someone is lacking in leadership qualities; but, how do you define it? This is a critical question especially when developing your own leadership capabilities. I agree with Bernard Bass (1989) when he describes leaders as "people who leave their footprints in their areas of passion." You possess, acquire, and develop leadership qualities until you earn the respect and reputation of a successful leader.

In our class, we were engaged, for the past four sessions, in discussing the work of two remarkable leaders each in his own field--Niccolo' Machiavelli and Thich Nhat Hanh-- in order to reach an academic and a well researched answer for the above posed question of leaders' qualities. In their books, *The Prince* and *The Art of Power*, each is defining leadership requisites, qualities of a leader, and the essence of power. Both thinkers provide deep analysis and worthwhile arguments; however, they completely differ on their approaches and on the ground theory of the matter.

In an attempt to illustrate the differences between both philosophies; first, I will take each book and briefly synthesize the fundamentality of its definitions; second, I will reflect on both philosophies with my personal opinion in order to concisely describe the qualities of a good leader.

The Prince

An Overview

Among the most widely-read of the Renaissance thinkers was Niccolo' Machiavelli, a Florentine politician who retired from public service to write at length on the skill required form

a prince to successfully running the state. In his book *The Prince*, he offers practical advice on how to rule a city like sixteenth-century Florence. Its over-all theme is that the successful prince must exhibit virtù [variously translated as "strength," "skill," or "prowess"] in both favorable and adverse circumstances Mansfield (1996). His crucial qualities of leadership are not the same as the virtuous characters described by ethical philosophers. Machiavelli believes that corrupted means achieve social benefits of stability and security; hence, they are not immoral but means towards attaining power Mattingly (1958). His main concern is not what makes a good human being, but what makes a good prince. Today, the term "Machiavellian" denotes ruthless opportunism and the use of manipulative tactics to maintain power. The source of this negative connotation is his famous treatise on government on his short political work, *The Prince*, that attempts to lay out immoral techniques to secure and maintain leadership positions.

General Theme

In *The Prince*, Machiavelli states that humans are self-interested or self-regarding beings. According to Machiavelli, man's self-interested and egotistical nature is what makes power politics possible, that is, the ability to control others by compelling their obedience through violent and manipulative means Mattingly (1958). Machiavelli claims in *Prince*' (chapter XVI, XVII, XVIII) that a prince should be miser than liberal, should prefer being feared rather than being loved, and should not be faithful. In one of his most controversial statements, "A man who wishes to make a vocation of being good all the times will come to ruin among so many who are not good" (Machiavelli 45).

Machiavelli's philosophy vs. a Spiritual One

Machiavelli goes against the traditional mindset, at that time, that a prince derived his power from God; Machiavelli believed that the rulers were given no divine right. He said that a ruler achieved his power through his own efforts and skills. The traditional thinkers believed that the ruler had to abide by Christian morals like the "virtues;" whereas, Machiavelli believed that the good ruler ignored questions of good and evil because those questions distracted the ruler from dealing with the necessities like state problems concerning the welfare of the people Mansfield (1996). It is not that Machiavelli does not believe in being merciful, it is just that he believes there are special occasions or situations where it should be used.

Machiavellian Power

As for the acquisition of power, Machiavelli advocates the swift ruthlessness of brutal tyrants: "He should calculate the sum of all the injuries he will have to do, and do them all at once" (27). Niccolo Machiavelli here is concerned only with the maintenance of power, rather than with any ethical consideration. Whatever rationalization is made in defending Machiavelli's ideas, the fact remains that those ideas are rooted in the worship of power. In any case, as Machiavelli notes, if the leaders "depend on their own energies and can make use of force, then they hardly ever come to grief" (17). His ideas can be used as intellectual justification not only for the brutality of tyrannies, but for much of the corruption and deception which are today so blatantly a part of the democratic process as well.

According to Steven Lukes (1974), a ruler comes to power not by dynastic inheritance or on the back of popular support, but purely as a result of his own initiative, skill, talent, and/or strength (all words that may be translated for *virtù*). Thus, the Machiavellian prince can count on

no preexisting structures of legitimation, as discussed above. In order to “maintain his state,” then, he can only rely upon his own fount of personal characteristics to direct the use of power and establish his claim on rulership.

The Art of Power

An Overview

Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the best known and most respected Zen masters, poets, and peace and human rights activists; he has led an extraordinary life. Hanh was born in central Vietnam in 1926 and joined the monkhood at the age of sixteen Kraft (1992). Thich Nhat Hanh's key teaching is that, through mindfulness, we can learn to live in the present moment instead of in the past and in the future. According to Nhat Hanh, “dwelling in the present moment is the only way to truly develop peace, both in one's self and in the world...Misuse of power is the primary cause of suffering for many of us... Spiritual power seeks the power of faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and insight.” These powers are unlimited, and they never do any harm to anyone, including oneself, assures Hanh.

General Theme

According to Kraft (1992), Nhat Hanh's *The Art of Power* is not a rejection of the corporate world or capitalism, but is an inclusive nurturing philosophy of our own power which helps us see through our cravings. Hanh points out that money can save a life, buy food, provide shelter, but we lose our way when we stop looking for our deepest motivations; quoting Hanh, “Greed is based on ignorance ... Ignorance is the ground of all desire ... Understanding is the foundation of love.”

Hanh explains that it is not enough just to cultivate these powers alone. We are part of something larger; we live in an interdependent web of rituals and expectations of a civilized society Fenggan Yang (retrieved, 2009). To Hanh that means a place where people have the time and capacity “to live deeply, to love and take care of their family and community.” It is when we, as individuals, “awaken our collective consciousness” that we “harness the full strength of our collective power.”

This book is not a solution to the problems of our world continually battered by the misuse of power – but we might be if we awaken to the collective consciousness of our full humanity.

Hanh's Spiritual Philosophy vs. Machiavelli's

True power, Hanh declares, is spiritual. Hanh admits that our “society is founded on a very limited definition of power, namely wealth, professional success, fame, physical strength, military might and political control.” While the idea of spiritual power is profoundly simple, we live in an age where power is still understood as conspiracy, violence, and dominating; while, spirituality is often conflated with religion and dogma Fenggan Yang (2009). We observe how, paradoxically, impermanence, non-self, inter-being, and mindfulness form the foundation of the peace, happiness, freedom, and prosperity we all seek on individual and collective levels.

Hanh's Power

His book proposes that we hold the key to a truer power by learning how to live; quoting Hanh, “free from addiction, fear, despair, discrimination, anger, and ignorance.” This power is our birthright regardless of whether we are “rich or poor, strong or weak.”

According to Fenggan Yang (2009), the element of power that eludes brute force is what Hanh calls spiritual power, which he separates into five disciplines. The power of faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, and insight. We become strong through faith in our ability to return to our highest selves through diligence. With diligence we maintain our best practices and we stay mindful of what happens in each moment. Mindfulness develops concentration which then leads to insight “a sword that painlessly cuts through all kinds of suffering, including fear, despair, anger and discrimination.”

Discussion

In conclusion, I believe that both discussed leadership qualities and philosophies have their power and input to the realm of leadership. I am also convinced that Machiavelli's and Nhat Hanh's leadership qualities could be more appropriate in certain situations and leadership positions than others; for example, a political leader will need more of the Machiavellian “virtue” than of Hanh's spiritual powers, while a spiritual leader or a regular person will appreciate Hanh's innate power.

Choosing which qualities to lead with depends on the status of the person and where and what he's leading; however, I believe that people have to mix between both philosophies in order to be able to survive in the modern society and the capitalism doctrine. Machiavellian ideas are at work in democracies as well as in tyrannies, for Machiavelli does not simply advocate brute force as the only or primary tool of the leader, but instead argues for persuasion---including the use of any necessary lies---if persuasion works. the dilemma is if a person is completely spiritual: acting and interacting following the five rules, how can he assure that people are practicing the same manners; hence, people might take advantage of him or think he does not belong or fit to

their standards, i.e. gets rejected. Paradoxically, if a person is completely corrupted and is Machiavellian in reaching his means then he will not earn people's trust and his leadership footprints will be featured by immorality and selfishness.

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