"Leadership in the sunlight"

Reflections on Dominic Scott and R. Edward Freeman's Models of Leadership in Plato and Beyond

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> The capacity for knowledge is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the Good. (Plato, *Republic* 518c)

> The measure of direction, or progress, is not assured by a beacon from afar, or what seems to be meant by what today is sometimes spoken of as a moral compass, but rather pointed to by what Emerson figures as a gleam of light over an inner landscape, and which, concretely is guided, and tested, by whether the next step of the self is one that takes its cue from the torment, the sickness, the strangeness, the exile, the disappointment, the boredom, the restlessness, that . . . portrays the modern subject. (Stanley Cavell, *City of Words* 329)

> Obsession, prejudice, envy, anxiety, ignorance, greed, neurosis, and so on and so on *veil* reality. The defeat of illusion requires moral effort. (Iris Murdoch, *The Fire and the Sun*)

Preamble

This essay is a response to my experience of leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic. I found it tough. So I picked up a book on leadership. That book talked about Plato. I wasn't convinced, so I went back to read Plato for myself. That started me thinking about leadership more generally. This essay is a reflection on that thinking. Where I get to is the deceptively simple claim that true leaders are those of us who are as in touch with reality as it's possible to be. Along the way I emphasise just how difficult that is and to be particularly vigilant against those who claim to be but aren't. Leadership on this account is more a matter of perception than action. That might seem counter-intuitive. It might also seem naive. I end by saying something brief about that.

Introduction - on the difference between fantasy and reality

The philosopher Stanley Cavell describes "philosophy worth caring about" as "an enactment of a responsiveness to events"[1]. Cavell goes on to say that any such enactment involves "counting again, for

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[1] from Stanley Cavell's "Introduction" to Robert Warshow's *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre, and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Enlarged Edition, Harvard 2002)

ourselves, what the world has counted for us, presuming to assign the significance of our experiences for us". The responsiveness Cavell has in mind is more reflective and discursive than instinctual. So while we might respond to an event with a cry, whimper or jerk (or a laugh, smile or even indifference), Cavell is referring to our ability *to find the right words* to express what those reactions *meant for us* then and subsequently. Truth is only one of various ways in which words can be right. Just as words can be wrong in ways other than being false. And while assigning the significance of our experiences "for us" can mean finding the right words for others, it can also mean for ourselves. I can often be the last to understand what I just went through and why I reacted as I did. Others may be better placed to find the words for me. There will be many times when neither me nor anyone else might ever find the right words or indeed any words. Some events are never remarked upon. And finally the finding may never end. I say all this to help explain what this essay is. It's my way of responding reflectively to events I've experienced. In particular, it is a response to the challenges of leadership I experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic. I am not going to say everything I might say about those challenges. They continue and the telling may never end. But the starting point are some of my experiences as a senior leader in a national government responding to the initial wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. The situation was tough and at times harrowing. The full telling would include a physiological and psychological story referencing the impact of physical and mental exhaustion, the familiar burdens of self-doubt and "imposter syndrome" and so on. These are not, though, the things I want to talk about. Rather I want to talk about the *philosophical* conditions of my experience of leadership. Talk of philosophical conditions of leadership might sound awkward. What I don't mean is that academic philosophy pops up in the day to day experience of leadership - as if one spends one's day talking about the problem of the existence of other minds or the completeness of first order logic - but rather I am referring to aspects of experience that lend themselves to particular forms of reflection that might reasonably be called "philosophical"[2].

So, where to begin? As the Covid-19 pandemic really took hold in Summer 2020, I found it increasingly tough. Sufficiently tough that my sense of myself as a leader began to be challenged profoundly[3]. Here already the words I use to describe my experience are telling. I don't simply say "my leadership was challenged" but rather the challenge was to something I call "my sense of myself as a leader". That helps to distinguish between different senses of leadership. In particular it distinguishes between leadership in a descriptive sense (as expressed through things like job titles, roles and position) and leadership in a more existential sense (as a mode of being). Descriptively, I was commanding and controlling, directing resources, and transacting business. I was building coalitions, networks, and communicating a vision. And so on and so on. In other words, I was doing all the things that might typically be thought to constitute leadership. Even from the outside, to others, descriptively, it's not clear whether anyone else would have noticed (the challenge to my sense of myself as a leader). However, from an existential perspective, the question "was I actually *being* a leader?" was becoming increasingly urgent. For one thing, that shift in perspective highlights how seemings or appearances can differ from reality. My issues really started when I realised I was engaged at the level of appearance rather than reality. That was not just a point about behaviour, as if it were my actions that were superficial; it was also a question of what my actions were acting *on* or responding *to*. I was leading at and on the surface of things, not at the level

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[2] An example of a leadership theory that understands the importance of the philosophical conditions of leadership is "theory U". See chapter 6 "Philosophical Groundings" Scharmer, Otto, *Theory U*

[3] the most obvious point to make here is "what about just challenging you as a person? How does that relate to you as a leader?". I want to stick that challenge to the wall for the time being.

of reality. As any dissociative event might, this sense of not reaching reality precipitated a crisis. There are a number of points that could be made about this. First, perhaps a personal crisis of this sort was anyway inevitable given the scale of the emergency the world was experiencing. To a certain extent that's right. Trauma is a response to or consequence of the traumatic. And trauma can be deeply dissociative. Second, there is a presumption here about reality itself. That will never be resolved, fully. It is why in the preamble I refer to my endpoint as "naive". One might well suppose that the trick here, in the end, is simply to give up on reality. What else has postmodernism taught us? But I simply refuse that. I find it a deeply unsatisfying form of liberation. Out goes the baby, the bathwater, and the whole shebang. I will return to this theme, and to the oscillation between naive realism and postmodern irony. I though want to start with my experience *as I found it*. It was an experience not of too much reality *but not enough*. How could that possibly be? If not reality then what? Just having your eyes open should mean reality's in view. How can there be something less than reality in view? What's blocking the way? These questions talk to "the *philosophical* conditions of leadership". If these sorts of questions leave us cold, then we are unlikely to think the philosophical conditions of leadership relevant to much (and I wouldn't recommend reading much further).

I will come on to say more about the nature and extent of this dissociation from reality. But it is worth highlighting the relevance of the conceptual repertoire beginning to be deployed here (e.g., "trauma", "dissociation"). It will not come as a surprise that it is a psychological or indeed psychoanalytical framing that might suggest a therapeutic or analytical response. That's going to be the case. For the moment, though, I want to start with a couple of the ways that dissociation began to show up for me. I start on the surface before going deeper. First was the almost instant move to purely virtual meeting technologies. Initially, unbelievably, this was audio-only before moving to video-enabled. There are perhaps opportunities in these technologies even those with audio-only capabilities (assuming we have accommodated those colleagues who cannot hear). Practices of deep listening might possibly be sustained. Or precisely not. I can only issue a promissory note for the deeper work that would be required to even begin to understand what these technologies really *mean* for not only for the theory and practice of leadership but for life more generally. Are such technologies inherently dissociative? Or are they mere (neutral) instruments that can be used in better and worse ways? My instinct is that, once the Zoom call became ubiquitous, *the screen screened*, that is to say, began to block or intervene between me and those I was interacting with ("leading"?). This screening let through just enough visual or aural presence to allow for relevant transactions but hindered exercises of leadership that involve deep attention and attachment. For reasons that will become apparent, that matters, deeply. The second source of dissociation came through the way we used data and numbers. Typically, our grasp of reality is seen to be enhanced not diminished by our grasp of data and numbers. *What is more real than numbers?* That can of course at least seem true. And when it came to the pandemic so much - life and death - was expressed numerically. However, that came to feel more like avoidance than understanding; more like consolation than control. Quality had become (mere) quantity[4]. The risk is mistaking representations of reality for reality itself[5]. Of course, if the question is "what's 2+2?" then the answer is "4" *punkt*. But that's not

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[4] In a way that will only really become apparent later this is in many ways a profoundly anti-Platonic thought - for Plato numbers are reality, and the messy "world of change" is mere appearance. I will challenge that in this essay but my example shows that far from always being "more real" numbers (and how they are manipulated) can be a way of avoiding reality.

[5] the issue here is what Jerry Z. Muller has called "the tyranny of metrics" (The Tyranny of Metrics, Princeton 2018)

what leadership questions look like. "What should I do right here right now?". The question "what does the data mean?" always remains. And even that's not strictly an arithmetical or statistical question; it's a human question. When it came to the impact on human life at such a scale perhaps there was no possibility (at least for normally constituted human beings) of looking directly at reality for any sustained period? Quite possibly. As I have said, it was tough, really tough. Just as data and numbers can console rather than illuminate the same can be true of behavioural or leadership principles. For example, the familiar building blocks of leadership literature: "build a coalition", "communicate a vision" and so on. As I will come on to say at some length, increasingly, I find myself radically unsure what such principles are, in particular their status and value. They look and sound plausible and their emptiness is perhaps a significant part of their utility; I don't deny that. If anything it's how we over- not under-estimate their power. Again, they console not illuminate. Sometimes consolation is needed. The general point, whether concerning numbers or principles, is that we risk coming to think of ourselves as in effect on railroad tracks[6]. That could be psychologically or neurologically. That the right course of action, once we back a principle or understand the calculation to be made, is *already laid out before us* - hence "railroad tracks" - and all we have to do is apply sufficient willpower to follow it through. But principles no more apply themselves than calculations calculate themselves. Humans apply principles and do the maths. We can talk about behavioural dispositions and neuroscience but that won't help[7]. This will be something I come back to. The trick is to understand that while there is no deep, justifying ground of leadership beyond the judgements and actions of leaders themselves that doesn't mean "anything goes". The point here is that when it comes to leadership the primary phenomena we are dealing with are simply human beings making judgements and acting as best they can amidst a reality that can be very difficult to grasp. So in that sense when it comes to leadership, perhaps not surprisingly, *we are our own ground*. The lack of anything beyond ourselves to act as ground, as justification can be a terrifying or liberating thought. And what I find interesting is the way that when we find it terrifying we create consoling fantasies to protect ourselves. When it comes to leadership, these fantasies typically involve illusions of control. In particular, we take *the making of choices and decisions* as the fundamental currency of leadership. These choices and decisions stamp sense on an otherwise chaotic world. I think this conception is not only wrongheaded but dangerous. We dramatically overplay the importance of those relatively rare moments of when our leadership comes down purely to choice and decision - something the philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch (alongside Cavell, another philosophical hero) calls "grandiose leapings"[8] - at the cost of understanding the extent to which true leadership is to be found (as least as much, if not more) in the quiet, sustained piecemeal work that happens in-between. This work is more about noticing, paying attention and the work of the (perceptual) imagination than it is rooted in resolute exercises of pure will. This will be a fundamental insight in setting out my alternative to more conventional conceptions of leadership. What we typically find is a double fantasy of the leader who, through choices and decisions,

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[6] this is an image from John McDowell. It's worth remarking that there are differences between the application of principles and numerical calculation. For one thing the former but not the latter takes a syllogistic form with the principle as a major premise, and some fact serving as minor premise.

[7] no philosopher has thought more deeply about these things than Wittgenstein. On a certain reading of his *Philosophical Investigations* made famous by Saul Kripke, Wittgenstein presents a profoundly sceptical argument by showing how any sequence expanded to this point - say the expansion of the rule "add 2" - is compatible with an infinite number of different rules. So applications of *addition* which produces the sequence "2, 4, 6, 8 . . ." are indistinguishable from applications of *quaddition* which produce the sequence "2, 4, 6, 12, 16 . . ." (after 6 add 2 then 4). The point being if one is at "6" in the sequence one can't tell whether one is adding or quadding.

[8] Add reference to Iris Murdoch

seeks to command and control a reality that in turn appears commandable and controllable. This is the same sort of fantasy involved when we say that to a hammer everything looks like a nail. Of course what's there to be struck may well be a nail - just as what's to be done is to command and control - but more often than not the nail is just the hammer's fantasy; what it wishes for and desires. And here's the challenge for leadership: whilst understandable, that can't be right. True leaders cannot be sundered from reality by fantasy (and we must be particularly vigilant against those who are but claim not to be). It took reality hitting me like a steam train - the reality of a global pandemic - for me to begin to see that I may be caught in just such a consoling fantasy. Once that became clear, I came to suspect that the fantasy may be prevalent. It certainly felt as if it had been a constant presence in *my* leadership journey. This is why I talk about a crisis in my sense of myself as a leader. It was not my job title which was threatened by fantasy, but my leadership in an existential sense. That realisation felt like coming out of the shadows into the sunlight. Whether it's just mine or anybody else's challenge is a matter for exploration. Whatever, it certainly feels generalisable. It feels potentially like uncovering a crisis in leadership itself.

How then do I recount the experience to myself? This essay is about how I sought the strength to turn myself round, emerge into the sunlight so that I could look straight at reality without any intervening fantasy. The idea that you need strength to even see reality suggests that there are forces at play stopping that from happening. What forces? I will talk about three. They are distinct but not entirely separate ways in which we are constantly pulled back into the shadows. I will talk later about how we resist them. That will return to the idea of therapy. I call these "shadowing factors". The list is not comprehensive; there may well be more[9]. The first is the ego with its neuroses (such as repression, denial, anxiety). This is what Iris Murdoch calls "the tissue of self-aggrandising and consoling wishes and dreams which prevents one from seeing what is there outside one"[10]. In a way that is often recognised but not fully understood, the shadow blocking the sunlight is all too often our own. Second, is the impact of social convention and generalised ways of seeing things. We might think here of how leadership interacts with familiar phenomena like "fitting in", "groupthink", "cultural assimilation". This is a point about language as well as how we see things. We cannot speak without convention - without applying general concepts - but we can still speak words authoritatively, make them our own (putting the author into authoritative, so to speak). So when Cavell talks about "finding the right words" he doesn't just mean using appropriate words but is referring to this ability to make words our own, to own them. None of that involves neologism; the words are just plain English (or French or Mandarin etc). This is crucial to leadership. I will call being stuck in generality "idealism"; I could have called it "generalism" or "conventionalism". Third, and finally, is ideology, which is in effect a more pernicious version of convention. It is when convention becomes so dominant and repressive that it creates false consciousness. One might think here about the way that leadership is gendered, or racialised, or tied to a particular conception of how bodies and minds (should) work. I will invite us to think about who or what we think about when we think about a leader. That simple experiment might tell us something about how both idealism and ideology keep us in the shadows. The struggle against these factors - against the ego, idealism and ideology - is an endless task. That's why leadership can only ever be a work in progress. To keep the shadows at bay it's not enough just to be aware of the effects of the shadowing factors but one must engage actively in critical (self-)reflection. What I will say later is that critical (self-)reflection is not something reliably done by an individual but requires (at least) another. Not just any other but someone who can in effect serve as

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[9] More might be made of the factors above - the impact of technology and the over-reliance on data and numbers.
[10] Murdoch 348

analyst to the analysand leader. On this account true leadership - leadership in the sunlight - not just is but essentially involves a therapeutic or analytical relationship which stands a chance of dispelling or at least counteracting the fantasy caused by ego, idealism and ideology. What you then go on to do is no mystery. You "direct resources", "build coalitions" etc etc. In a sense leadership actions are any actions done in a particular way. I talk here about the philosophical conditions of that way but there are other conditions including psychological, cultural, organisational. All of these will help determine whether an action is an instance of leadership. That's a way of reassuring those that may be worried that they read this essay and even after all the words they've not been presented with a definition or account of leadership with concrete examples, practical prescriptions etc. However, there is no action that is intrinsically an instance of leadership. Ordering a cup of coffee, saying nothing, a nod or a wink, and so on, could perfectly easily be instances of leadership. Just as commanding and controlling, shouting the odds, dominating conversation may be as far from leadership as anything could be. When it comes to leadership, context is all and it's the conditions that determine that context that I am outlining in this essay.

But I do think it's worth saying something more general about leadership. The shadowing factors just referenced not only stop us being the leaders we might be but have had a profound effect on how we understand leadership itself. The unchallenged assumptions and prejudices of ego, idealism and ideology have done their work. I have two particular prejudices in mind. First, that leadership is essentially a matter of *will* (will power, resolve); and, secondly, that leadership is essentially *singular* (solitary, monadic). In coming to see how these ideas had implicitly contributed to my own self-conception as a leader, and that they had in effect let me down (at a point when I most needed true leadership) I came to see the critique of these ideas as at the core of any reflective responsiveness to events. I say critique rather than refutation or refusal; they are not straightforwardly false - all actions are in a relatively harmless sense "willed by individuals". But I think we risk overstating the significance of this platitude and suppose it is grounded in certain deep truths (about selves and their psychology). Taken together the claims essentially say that human beings are (like) *monadic decision machines* and that when those decisions - the outputs of those machines - tend to change the world for the better, we talk about leadership. Each element contributes something to the story we tell ourselves, at least implicitly. "Monadic" means "self-contained", "not requiring others". "Deciding" and "choosing" are as i said above, the basic currency of leadership action. And "machine" to give a sense of mechanism and limit to choice. That notion of machine or mechanism relates to the idea of the psychological or neurological railroad track I referenced above. It doesn't much matter that the idea that leaders are monadic decision machines is not found explicitly in any particular leadership theory (that I am aware of). My claim is that it constitutes a picture[11] implicit in our leadership culture. That picture constitutes what is in effect a foundational leadership fantasy and the implicit dominant ideology. What does this mean? Put simply: being a better leader does *not* mean being a more *wilful, resolute individual*. That was one thing that became increasingly clear to me in leading through Covid-19. Responding to a leadership crisis does not require one simply to toughen up and act ever more forcibly on the world, to cast it in one's own image. Indeed I came increasingly to feel that that was precisely the opposite of the truth. That before I could

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[11] I use the word "picture" here in the way philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein does in sect. 115 of his *Philosophical Investigations* where he says "a certain picture held us captive". Interestingly, one reading of the very picture that Wittgenstein says is holding us captive and he is critiquing, through his famously fragmentary grammatical investigations, is that human beings are "monadic choice machines". He comes to that not through a consideration of leadership but rather by uncovering the ideological "picture theory of meaning" - "words are the names of things" - which he espoused in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and he traces back to Augustine.

come to see reality I would have to get my wilful self - the neurotic, controlling ego - out of the way. At my lowest point when I felt I could not bear reality, that was not because reality no longer conformed to my wishes and desires. It was more that my wishes and desires had come to no longer count because they were no longer based in or on what was most true about reality. I could no longer bear to look straight at reality because reality wasn't reality at all but a fantasy of what reality needed to be for me to cope with it. This deep consoling fantasy had obscured my view of the world. As a leader the world and others are not there simply to be controlled and shaped by me. This insight is fundamental in explaining the difference between being in the shadows and being in the sunlight.

So the question was how to turn these fragile, counter-intuitive thoughts into the basis of living and a leadership practice. As should be clear, when I need to consolidate insights and form a conception of how to live, I tend to turn to philosophy. Not philosophy as idle contemplation but, following Cavell, in a deeper sense of an *enactment*. I chose to open this essay with a quotation from Cavell because, as is often the case, it was to Cavell I turned for at least an initial insight. That was before I picked up the book on leadership I will come on to talk about in detail and even before I returned to Plato. There was something deep in Cavell that struck me. When he talked about a philosophy worth caring about I wondered whether he might also be talking about leadership worth caring about. So recasting the definition that I opened this essay with, a definition of leadership - of leadership in the sunlight - might be: "a shared enactment of a reflective responsiveness to reality (not fantasy)". That's intended to be a definition that stands in direct contrast to the dominant notion that leadership is *the resolute actings of a solitary will* (or monadic decision machine). That reflective responsiveness would have to involve both an ability to (bear to) look straight at reality and also to be willing and able to assign significance to it after the fact through finding the right words to communicate with oneself and others. As I said above, this essential dialogical relationship should take an asymmetric form which is essentially therapeutic or analytic. This means leadership not as wilful choice but as a *reflective or discursive discernment*[12]. These are ideas, not least the idea of leadership in the sunlight, that quite deliberately evoke Plato, in particular, the most famous image in all of western thought, *the allegory of the cave* from the *Republic*. The epigraph to this essay is drawn from that allegory:

> The capacity for knowledge is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the Good. Plato, *Republic* 518c

In effect that quotation contains pretty much all I have to say: what must we do, as leaders, to learn to turn away from the "world of change" - from the fantasy of controllable reality that governs our everyday experience - so that we can bear to look instead straight at reality as it really is. This is what I have started to call "leadership in the sunlight".

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[12] I hesitate to say "Leadership as a form of perception" in part because it is not straightforwardly seeing but also because, in a way that will come to matter, it is an ability that those who cannot see can easily share (if we let them).

On how not to read Plato

I have jumped ahead to offer an outline of my conclusions as an aid to making sense of what follows. I want to return now to reflect on what came after the immediate crisis of leadership I experienced. The full story would talk about friendship and support by colleagues, family and friends. That's something I want to register and return to nearer the end of the essay. I have already stated that leadership is not "monadic". I cannot be clear enough how much that felt true, in particular when the chips were down. But what I want to focus on now is how I turned not just to friends and colleagues but also to leadership literature in the hope of some practical insight and guidance. This will take me into the question of the extent to which leadership literature can help or whether it can have a shadowing effect.

When things got difficult during Covid-19 one of the things I did was pick up Dominic Scott and R. Edward Freeman's *Models of Leadership in Plato and Beyond*. That book came to my attention because of its explicit connection to philosophy and to Plato in particular. I already had a sense at this point that there may be something in Plato that could help (the nascent idea of "leadership in the sunlight" had started to form). But Plato is a difficult and sometimes obscure thinker so I hoped Scott and Freeman had found ways to express Plato's thoughts simply and practically. In the end though I struggled with it. It didn't engage with the philosophical conditions of leadership and didn't get Plato right. On that basis I thought it kept us in the shadows. In a sense it is helpful that it did as that will allow me to use it as a way into explaining two of the shadowing factors I set out above, viz. idealism and ideology.

Although I am going to be critical of it, Scott and Freeman's book is not entirely without merit. It does contain insight. That includes the claim that there is perhaps no one thing called leadership. That seems to me as good a basis as any to start thinking about leadership. I am not going to compare and contrast Scott and Freeman's book with other leadership literature I have found more helpful. But at the point I turned to it, I couldn't help but think about my contrasting experience with Maureen O'Hara and Graham Leicester's *Dancing at the Edge*. My encounter with that profound book highlighted a limitation of Scott and Freeman's approach: that there was no sense whatsoever that it was enacting a responsiveness to events. In particular there was no sense of us finding ourselves, as we do, in the shadows - at the convergence point of what O'Hara and Leicester describe as *real, conceptual and existential emergencies* ("the three emergencies"[13]). That goes beyond the global pandemic to any number of things that have created a burning leadership platform, not least the impending climate catastrophe and the rise of populist nationalism (where the disassociation from reality is in some cases apparently near absolute). Leadership can be and often is the cause of such emergencies. So that means we need to approach the concept of leadership critically. That's the difference between insightful leadership literature, and leadership literature that's something else all together[14]. However that insight is not where Scott and Freeman begin. Like my pre-Covid-19 self, they remain largely on the surface of the issues. They don't dance at the edge as O'Hara and Leicester do. Leadership (as a concept and therefore as a practice) is something they pretty much take for granted: there are leaders, they act in certain ways, these are ways we can and should emulate, and if enough of us do that then, other things being equal, we should all be fine. That's in itself a fantasy of leadership. These things are presented as facts not essential starting points for reflection and

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[13] https://medium.com/spacesforgrowth/sharpening-awareness-in-powerful-times-1cf75eaacc6e

[14] there are many books I might commend here but I want to single out O'Hara, M and Leicester, G, *Dancing at the Edge: Competence, Culture and Organization in the 21st Century* 2nd Edition (Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2019)

critique: *are there? do they? should we? will we? Really?* One way to capture that is to say that there is talk of leadership without reference to the philosophical conditions of that leadership. That's not just disappointing, but when we are crying out for insight into leadership that might help lead us out of these dark times, it's scandalous.

What aggravates the crime is that Scott and Freeman implicate Plato in their complacency. Indeed, given how they present things, any reader could be forgiven for thinking that Plato is the cause of that complacency. There are a number of tired prejudices (embedded in the dominant leadership ideology) that would see philosophers denounced as other-worldly irrelevances given the challenges that real world leaders face every day. Faced with the desperate immediacy of O'Hara and Leicester's three emergencies, what can thoughts from 2500 years ago offer us? And if Scott and Freeman's take - a "distinctive twist" on what they themselves admit already looked like "dead metaphors and cliches" 2500 years ago - is all that Plato offers then the answer appears to be "not much". Plato was and remains a radical thinker on leadership. The former - that he was - seems a matter of historical fact; the latter - that he still is - needs, of course, to be argued. Despite his reputation that must not be an argument from authority: (just) because Plato said it, it must be true. That would not honour Plato. "Who cares anyway? He lived 2500 years ago." This is again where Cavell's point about the philosophy worth caring about comes in. In reading and then writing about Plato in a way that is worth caring about, we should both be enacting a response to the very event of reading Plato and to the events that prompted that reading. Let us suppose that those events are, as I have said, a crisis at the very heart of leadership. What else might matter (here, now)? Surely not simply adding more pages to the millions on both leadership and (separately) Plato? Cavell's concept of enactment has a clear practical if not performative sense. One would imagine then, in the company of Plato, one should, in the end, be enacting one's leadership in reading and writing about Plato on leadership. I am going to try a bit of that myself. Indeed the whole point of this essay is to narrate my experience of using philosophical reflection to "turn myself around" to bear to look at reality without fantasy. To move from out of the shadows into the sunlight. I understand the threat of obscurity: *how can reading and writing on leadership be itself an enactment of leadership?* This is rooted in the idea that leadership, whatever else it involves, involves active critique, in particular of the very concept of leadership itself. If that even makes sense it sets a very high bar for writing on leadership[15]. Given the stakes though - "a plague-ridden world on fire" - that seems entirely reasonable. We need leaders more than ever. Leaders are critiquers of leadership. (One way to say that of course is that leaders are not followers, straightforwardly.) My deep disappointment in Scott and Freeman then comes from their failure to critique. That's doubly unforgiveable inasmuch as critique (in the sense I mean it) is essentially Plato's method. And to honour Plato one has of course to critique the Platonic orthodoxy. There are a few very brief moments when Scott and Freeman seem to realise that they should be engaging more critically with Plato and the concept of leadership. That includes an important short section in their book on Karl Popper's critique of Plato, which famously places Plato in the vicinity of totalitarianism, and some interesting, more philosophical material, relegated awkwardly to the appendices, that reference precisely the sections of the *Republic* that can most obviously be used to problematise Plato's account including the question of Plato's troubled relationship to democracy. Scott and Freeman also hint that there may be a socio-historical version of this radical interpretation that could be drawn from the historical and biographical material they set out. That Plato was writing at a tumultuous time, reminiscent in certain

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[15] it would be worth noting here that there is of course a long history of leaders writing books on leadership. Not all of these are enactments of leadership. Some are self-serving, narcissistic, propaganda etc etc.

ways to our own, is again presented as bland fact, rather than the basis of a deeper explanation of what Plato was trying to achieve in his writings on leadership. Plato's own interventions into political leadership, the complex relationship of him and his family to the disintegration of Athenian democracy and tyranny, are referenced without any sense of how they might make available a much deeper - existential - explanation of what precisely Plato was doing. (In what follows, I will not say as much as I might about this aspect of Plato.) As I said above, whether right or wrong - as Popper and others have argued at length - Plato was a radical thinker (on leadership and many other things). If we need anything from Plato today it is that sense of revolution not just but at least about leadership. That's because in the end understanding what it means to be a leader is a way of understanding what it means to be human. The necessity (for me) of this return to Plato and the Greeks is not simply to rescue them from interpretations like Scott and Freeman's - there are other more or less disappointing efforts to find relevance in Plato on leadership - but is more about the return to the primal scene where many of the basic concepts of leadership and humanity were instituted. But - and this is the critical moment - seeing this as much as a return to the scene of a crime as to the birthplace of anything unquestioningly glorious. What we find in Plato are all the existential dilemmas of leadership played out (reflexively) in the course of one of the most profound accounts of the concept of leadership. It is a hugely complex reflexive and reflective account that is presented as drama. So we have all the oversimplifications, tensions, doubts, fears, as well as all the insights that one could ever hope for in a series of enigmatic dialogues, with all the questions that the dialogical form offers up: *who is speaking? On what authority? Which voice, if any, is Plato's own? Who is Plato's hero Socrates?* Although asked here of Plato, these are exactly the sort of existential questions faced by all leaders. Indeed one could argue that *the* leadership question, askable at every moment, by every leader is: *who is speaking and for whom?* It is this performative (leadership) moment in Plato - the Cavellian enactment - that Scott and Freeman miss utterly and thereby fail, in turn, to enact in their own writing. There is no self-doubt, no tension, no contradiction, in anything Scott and Freeman say. It is clear in that sense that they do not see writing a book on Plato on leadership is itself enacting leadership. That seems odd to me in the context where surely their intent would be to *influence others*, which, however much we come to challenge it, will remain a crucial aspect of leadership. Their interpretation is presented as neutral, value-free fact. As it happens, I am far from clear that that is something that is available in seeking to explain *any* concept. As if our choices of what to value and what to devalue, who to amplify and who to suppress in writing about leadership are not themselves essential leadership choices. As I will come on to say, all leadership is ideological - one way to put that is to say that all leadership contains a fantasy of itself - and so all good writing on leadership - that is going to dispel the fantasy - has to be or at least involve a form of ideological critique.

That explains something of the context of my reading of Scott and Freeman's book but I want now to circle back to say more about its content. There is a familiar feel to it. Anyone who has browsed the leadership section passing through an airport or train station will recognise the form. It proceeds in two steps. First it identifies certain general qualities that are typical of leaders - Scott and Freeman call these "key principles" - which are commended to some extent in the abstract. Then, secondly, it provides a series of case studies of leaders throughout history who, they claim, demonstrate these key principles in action. This second step is intended to provide some real-world credibility to the otherwise all-too abstract principles. So far so familiar. Scott and Freeman's distinctive take on this form is their claim that what makes the key principles they identify more interesting and perhaps even more plausible is that they are distilled from a consideration of analogical "models" (or what they also call "homely images" p3)

found in the dialogues of Plato (primarily the *Republic*, the *Gorgias* and the *Laws*). "Analogical" because, according to Scott and Freeman, Plato explains various aspects of leadership not by providing a single (reductive) definition but by drawing analogies with a series of models. Scott and Freeman identify eight such models, drawn from professions or ways of life: the doctor, the captain, the navigator, the artist, the teacher, the shepherd, the weaver, and the sower. The key principles identified in each one of these professions - in total 27 are listed in grey boxes in the various sections - are not exclusive (e.g., both teachers and doctors focus on helping others not themselves) and sometimes the key principles within and across professions conflict or at least pull in different directions (e.g., the sower is more "hands off", while the shepherd is more "hands on"). Part of the distinctiveness of their approach is the claim - which I commended above - that given the complexity of circumstances in which leadership is demonstrated or needed, *leadership is not one thing:* different situations in life require different approaches and we should be cautious about reducing or simplifying that complexity. Situation matters in leadership and so drawing (interestingly) on Wittgenstein not Plato, Scott and Freeman call this a "family resemblance approach to leadership". The point being that "leadership" like certain other concepts - Wittgenstein's most famous example is "game" - is not one concept but a family of concepts (or conceptions?) which although sufficient to be talked about using a single word, actually don't always completely overlap, sometimes contrast etc. Is the point of all games to win? Do all games have rules? One player, more than one player? This more complex, situational approach to leadership, they point out, is not one one might expect to find in Plato, who they describe (horrifyingly) in their Introduction as more of a "one size fits all" type thinker.

> Each model may have its place in different contexts. Some situations require an educator; others a leader to navigate between various obstacles. No one leader imitates all the models all of the time; but each model may be apt for individual episodes in a leader's career. Different cultures and contexts require different qualities; it is impossible as well as fruitless to boil leadership down to a single formula. The variety exhibited by Plato's models helps bring out the sheer diversity of what may be involved (pp3-4)

There may be some form of insight here. I want, though, to pick out a couple of issues. First, in passing, I would want to at least register a concern about Scott and Freeman's appropriation of Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance. This is not something I will explore in detail but I want to reference what Wittgenstein actually says about family resemblance: "Don't say 'There must be something common, or they would not be called "games"' - but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all"[16]. The point I want to register is that Scott and Freeman do not "look and see". They take variation itself to be indicative of a multiplicity in the concept. But a concept is not the same as its instances, and the latter can be infinitely varied but still the concept be (near enough) unified. As I said above, I don't deny that it is a serious question whether there is one thing called leadership, anything in common across all its uses. But Scott and Freeman need to earn that insight. There is nothing in their book that resembles a serious look at how the word is used, about the commonalities and the differences. If you are going to claim any kind of Wittgensteinian heritage then surely you need to have considered at least that? Secondly, and more seriously, it is not uncommon to be told that good leaders should adapt differentially to circumstances, that they should be able to adopt different leadership styles to suit the situation they find themselves in. But I don't think it is straightforwardly an insight open to Scott and Freeman. The problem in large part is

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[16] Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations section 66

the word that Scott and Freeman use to describe how leaders relate to these models: *imitation*. One might anyway wonder whether that could ever be the right word. We might feel owed at least some sense of the psychological conditions of this imitation. The obvious point being that if *authenticity* - being who one is - is any part of leadership then leaders are not imitating anything; they are *being* the very things they claim to be, essentially so. If imitation is to feature anywhere then it would likely be as part of a developmental or genetic psychology in which the conditions of how leadership comes to be learned are explained. In other words, as leaders learn how to be leaders they may well imitate models or styles or indeed other leaders. But that must stop such that when they are themselves leaders they would not be *imitating* anything. Rather, if anything, they would become the imitated. This presents a significant difficulty for Scott and Freeman. They are at best playing fast and loose with their language - "maybe "imitate" is simply the wrong word? Well, do better, I am paying a lot of money for this Oxford hardback!"- or at worst - if they stick by "imitate" - they are simply wrong. That may seem a clear enough basis for further exploration and critique. But I fear that the situation is significantly worse for them than that. So far I have approached their use of the word "imitation" to describe the way leadership is a multiplicity without reference to its putative source: Plato. I will come back to this in much more detail later when I provide an alternative reading of Plato. But this claim - that leadership is a diversity in the sense that leaders imitate different models - allows me to demonstrate the extent of Scott and Freeman's sloppy misreading of Plato. They are not completely unaware of the trap they have set for themselves but they appear to blunder in regardless. Given that the idea of an inherent diversity in leadership rooted in Plato gives their book its title one might suppose that if it were exposed as a travesty (as well as possibly false on independent grounds) that would seriously undermine Scott and Freeman's credibility. That's exactly the case. To show it I have to refer directly to Plato's *Republic*.

In Book 3 of the *Republic* Plato's main character Socrates sets out how leaders (what are called "guardians") are to be educated in the ideal city that he is building "in words". In a powerfully iconoclastic moment Socrates argues that impressionable young leaders must not be exposed to the pernicious falsities of literature, even the very greatest literature of Homer and Hesiod, for fear of being corrupted. So great is the risk that eventually this leads not just to extensive censoring of literature and art but the expulsion of poets and artists from the ideal city. Scott and Freeman recount elements of this. What is clearly being expressed by Plato is a deep fear of *mimesis* ("imitation") understood ultimately as *speaking in another's voice*. While there is some acceptance that mimicking good behaviour, especially if it teaches the young to be good, may be useful, leaders, for Plato, speak without imitation. This is expressed grammatically as a requirement that leaders use direct rather than indirect speech. And Plato has a great deal to say about the idea - the fundamental idea of Scott and Freeman's book - that leaders adopt or imitate different roles. This is based on perhaps the most fundamental principle in the *Republic*, which turns out to be the basis of Plato's answer to his own defining question "what is justice?": *one man, one job*. This (odd) principle is effectively deployed by Plato in the context of an extended argument for the necessity of harmony and order in both the individual soul and the city. Whether plausible - and many have contested it, not least because of its tendency to support some deeply unsavoury ideas including racism and misogyny - it appears incontestably Plato's view, as the text shows.

In conversation with a character Adeimantus, who happens to be Plato's brother, Socrates, Plato's dramatic hero, asks,

"Do you think, then, Adeimantus, that we want our guardians [RF: our leaders] *to be capable of playing many parts or not? Does it not follow from the principles we adopted earlier, that one man does one job well, and that if he tries to take on a number of jobs, the division of effort will mean that he will fail to make his mark at any of them?*

Adeimantus replies, *"The conclusion follows."*

Later, Socrates continues, *"And so ours is the only state in which we shall find (for example) the shoemaker sticking to his shoemaking and not turning pilot as well, the farmer sticking to his farming and not taking on court work into the bargain, and the soldier sticking to his soldiering and not running a business as well, and so on."*

To which Adeimantus replies, *"Yes."*

So while we may entirely disagree with Plato on his rejection of *mimesis* and advocacy of the "one man, one job" principle, there is little doubt that it is Plato's view. And not just a dispensable part but foundational. And that is a problem for Scott and Freeman. In a way that directly contradicts Plato, their entire argument is based on the acceptance of *mimesis* and a "one man, many jobs" model. It's true that Plato presents a whole series of analogical models not just in the *Republic* but in other dialogues. Many of which, including some of the most important, viz., leaders as noble dogs, are not even mentioned by Scott and Freeman. But whatever the role of these models of leadership in Plato, they are not to be understood in the superficial way Scott and Freeman do, as effectively styles to be imitated, to be selected at one's leisure, when useful, to help one achieve one's ends. That's what I called above "the pick and mix approach to leadership". Of course, Scott and Freeman may want to argue that they disagree with Plato on this point no matter how foundational and focus instead on other of Plato's claims. I might suspect that's the line they would take. But it's not without cost and it has to be earned. Otherwise it is entirely fair to highlight it as a potential contradiction.

As well as the textual references Scott and Freeman justify their selection of Platonic models by identifying them at work in real-life case studies drawn from business, politics and science including: Roy Vagelos (Merck) and Jean Monnet ("the doctor"); Frederick Douglass and Arch McGill (AT&T) ("captains and navigators"); Elon Musk and Ataturk ("the artist") and so on. For Scott and Freeman the Platonic models and the real-life case studies are mutually supportive: so the fact that we see the various elements of Plato's models in these exemplary cases of leadership is evidence of just how wise Plato was; while equally, in conforming to these models, we can find reasons why in the first place we select just these historical individuals as leaders. Neither the key principles (theory) nor the practice of leadership are more explanatorily basic. This is a resolutely explicative (non-reductive) model of explanation which may feel more Wittgensteinian than Platonic, which to be fair is a point that Scott and Freeman make. More significantly though, already in the choices of exemplars we can begin to see the very real dangers in failing to subject those choices to critique. These are not neutral paradigms that choose themselves but are expressive of a certain (leadership) perspective. Scott and Freeman's criteria are not clarified. I will return to this point.

As referenced above, across the various sections of their book Scott and Freeman identify 27 key principles of leadership[17]. In their conclusion they boil them down to six: leadership, they tell us, might include such things as "confronting stakeholders who are prone to give excessive weight to seemingly attractive but short-term objectives"; "helping an organisation on its newly-chosen course, bringing an unexpected kind of expertise to the task, and maintaining unity or morale when the going gets tough"; "realizing a vision, against all the odds, and living your own life around it before trying to impose it on anyone else"; bringing people out of their comfort zones by appealing to their heads as much as their hearts"; "combining a group of diverse talents and temperaments, especially hawks and doves, and unifying them with a common set of values"; and "originating ideas big enough to create a legacy, but still empowering others to adapt them as circumstances demand." Our ability to pick and mix these, rather than rely on a single formula explains, we are told, "why quite different people, with very little in common, can still be equally great leaders" (184). But just in case that all seems too scatter-gun, Scott and Freeman quite dramatically hedge their bets. Apparently, Plato can effectively be dumped if not found useful - while an interesting source of insight to illustrate their point, the leadership facts apparently speak for themselves - and if the "family resemblance" (many not one) notion of leadership feels unsatisfying - I suggested above at least one way in which it may be - then we can console ourselves with the much simpler idea that leadership is effectively a form of *ethical expertise that gets results*. Maybe so. Indeed I might even accept that it places Scott and Freeman in the vicinity of the space I end up myself. But how one gets there and how one understands the concepts of "ethics" and "expertise" are all important. On those points I see very little connection between Scott and Freeman and myself. One might well ask, if even on their own terms, so much of the preceding 186 pages - before they flirt with the idea that leadership is ethical expertise - is effectively dispensable, why we should consider their book a source of any real insight? Haven't we heard such things a thousand times before? And as I have shown above, in the regard in which they are distinctive - their use of Plato - they are playing so fast and loose with Plato's ideas that they obscure rather than illuminate. That's not perhaps entirely fair. It's clear that Scott and Freeman are trying their best to present complex ideas - including those of Plato - simply and to offer as much sign-posting as they can to make their ideas useful practically. And as long as there's just enough insight to help someone maybe that's enough? So if a person is helped or a situation illuminated by taking a step back and thinking "if I acted like a doctor here, by helping others not myself, by finding a balance, by demonstrating technical expertise etc., then things might be better." Maybe. I have already mentioned the risk of ideology but there are other risks including over-simplification and over-generalisation (I will call these "idealism" in contrast to "ideology"). These, especially the latter, are risks when we start trading in principles. Leadership is not easy and indeed it presents not just risks but dangers. If you get it wrong it can really matter. In that context fortune cookie or other folksy wisdom captured in trite principles - "don't lie", "be nice to strangers", "respect difference" - doesn't straightforwardly help and could make things worse. Whenever presented with such a principle, including any of Scott and Freeman's 27, we are still left asking, *how should I apply it? What is it about* this *situation that means that* that *principle is the one that matters?* Similar to a point I made above, here the "what?" from Scott and Freeman lacks not the "why?" this time as much as the "how?". *How do we know when to apply leadership principles? And if there are 27 then which one should guide us in which circumstance?* I started to talk about the issue with principles at the outset of this essay when I talked about the temptation to see ourselves on railroad tracks. So that all we had to do is decide which principle

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[17] there are a handful of key principles associated with each model except the shepherd. As well as the fact that Scott and Freeman adopt different naming conventions this inconsistency is frustrating.

to abide by and the principle will look after the rest. That's not an idea that makes sense. However we approach it, these feel like fundamental questions that it's simply not good enough to ignore entirely. We are not helped (much) by pointing to an historical figure and saying "we can see from a brief account of their life how and why they applied just these principles". Were they in fact applying just *those* principles? If they were, why? How would we know they were not applying subtly different ones? Does which principle they think they were applying matter? Of course, we don't always need the sort of complexity, depth and meaning only available in sources such as Plato but there is I think a huge risk with skimming over the surface and refusing to problematise what we are saying about leadership and about aspects of it like the question of whether leadership is, can and should be expressed through principles. This gets to something fundamental in my concern not just about Scott and Freeman's book but many others that trade in principles and exemplars. Before turning to offer my positive account of Platonic leadership, I want to say more about these general concerns.

Idealism

As I said at the outset of this essay, I worry about the very concept of "leadership". That's not in-itself unusual. I am not the first to express that worry. Much has been written about it. I should say that I also worry about my worrying. Is my real worry with leadership itself or am I projecting based on worries about my own leadership? That was a very real question at the point in my life when my own leadership came into question. Was it just me? I want to start though by assuming that I am right to worry about the concept itself. I am worried about the concept because I don't find it particularly *helpful* or *safe*. These worries are related. I don't find the concept helpful in the sense that in talking about leadership, descriptively, there is a tendency to over-generalise and elide the complexity of individual and collective behaviour and motivation which obscures rather than illuminates. That's what I've called a shadowing factor. This is the one tied to conventional modes of description and so what I will call "descriptive idealism". As I have made clear it's a flaw of Scott and Freeman's account. And not just theirs. In what follows I will contrast it with something called "descriptive realism". Descriptive realism is a way to stave off the fantasy (of simplicity) that dominates leadership discourse. (One might well call that a "sunlight factor".) I want to pick out two particular aspects of descriptive idealism. First is "over-generalisation". That is most obvious in the identification of simple (leadership) principles that are meant to explain[18] (leadership) behaviour. This picks up on my concerns above not just about Scott and Freeman's 27 key principles of leadership but in all leadership books that trade in principles. At this point substitute any principle-led approach in any leadership book. Or indeed substitute for principles, such notions as "trait", "characteristic", "capacity" etc[19]. *Are there such things? If there are, what are they and how do they work?* These are not only obvious first principle questions about principles but historically

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[18] The concept of explanation requires explanation. I say that not just because it's true but also to make the point that without an appropriate level of critical engagement in which vagueness or ambiguity are resolved we are left at risk of basic misunderstanding. By "explain" we might mean a stronger, more reductive explanation - the non-circular explanation of one thing (explanandum) by other more basic things (explanans), where the explanans can in turn be explained without reference back to the explanandum. One thing is effectively reduced to another (e.g., thoughts by brain states, or physical objects by atoms). Or we might mean a weaker non-reductive form of explanation, which might include through analogy (e.g., how does that work? It works a bit like a steam engine.) or explication (e.g., providing more relevant detail).

[19] Much more would have to be said before this substitution - of traits, characteristics etc for principles - could be said to work. These are different sorts of things. But there is a general point here about the use of certain stable terms that can explain.

they are effectively Plato's defining questions: *how does one find unchanging reality in the context of ever-changing appearances?* In Plato's case, infamously, the fundamental principles are what he called "forms" or "ideas" which were presented as part of a grand metaphysical theory (set out at length in the *Republic* as well as in other dialogues). So "pure" were these principles, so untainted by anything as messy and unreliable as the world around us, that they are placed outwith our everyday experience. This is perhaps the most famous indeed infamous fantasy of simplicity and purity in philosophy. Fascinatingly, although it's not expanded upon, in appendix 2 (194) Scott and Freeman note that this is precisely where Plato's greatest pupil, Aristotle, offers perhaps his most fundamental critique of his teacher. Scott and Freeman call Aristotle's counterpoint to Plato's idealism - Plato's *platonism* - his "keeping our feet on the ground" argument[20]. It is something that we might think of as a form of *particularism*. Leadership as attention to particulars. I will come later to wonder - in the company of Iris Murdoch - whether we can read Plato himself in a way that rescues this insight. The critical point here though is to problematise the very idea - the fantasy - that there are (simple) principles which range over (describe, explain?) (leadership) behaviour. Take the first of Scott and Freeman's 27 key principles of leadership, D1: "the leader works for the benefit of their followers, not to pursue their own self-interest". Is it (even) true? In every case or typically? Is it a descriptive principle or a norm? That is to say, does it describe how leaders happen to behave or how they should, even if none do? Would it remain true if no-one acted in accordance with it? And so on for each of them. Some are mere platitudes, which would give no basis to understand their application; some are just straightforwardly false; some are norms, may never be true but should be. That's not even to get to even deeper ontological questions about such principles. If these things are to guide us, that all matters, surely?

As well as over-generalisation, there is the risk of over-simplification. This refers now more to (leadership) behaviour than to principles. My strong sense is that to draw lessons from behaviour, whether one's own or from historical figures, one needs just enough descriptive content to capture the relevant complexity of the situation and to justify, for instance, the claims "*that* is leadership" or "*that* is a leader". That will require both "internal content" covering intentions, motivations, desires and other psychological states, and "external content" such as whether other people were involved, where the situation was happening, when it was happening, etc. We typically call external content, context. Each situation will involve potentially an infinite amount of internal and external content. The question is, how do we know in any such circumstance what is salient to, for instance, our judgements that some behaviour counts as leadership or some person is worthy of the label "leader"? Is external content ever salient or, ultimately, is it only internal content that matters?[21] We might think of this as a generalised form of the frame problem:[22] given an infinite number of facts, internal and external content, how do we decide what's relevant in telling our leadership story, in justifying our leadership judgements? We see this most fully in the typical case study element of the leadership literature. So we say that Barack Obama is a leader. Why? He does things, thinks things, believes in things, that make him a leader. What things? Not immediately helpful to say "leadership things". So let's take an example. Barack Obama orders a drone

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[20] There is a similar argument in Wittgenstein when he critiques his own Platonism: "We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground!" Wittgenstein

[21] So, for instance, the fact that it was getting dark might explain a certain action (say, ending a search). However, the critical factor in any explanation may not be that fact directly but rather the belief that there would be no chance of finding the body in the dark. In that way external content would always have to be reducible to internal content.

[22] reference, frame problem

strike on a building in Afghanistan in which a suspected terrorist leader is hiding. There is no guarantee that that terror suspect is alone in the building; there may be innocent bystanders. Is that an exercise of leadership? What factors would or should be picked out as relevant here? First of all, is it true? But then? His decisiveness? His thoughtfulness? The outcome? The ethics? His tactical nous? That he's the leader of the Free World and by definition everything he does is leadership? Everything? Eating? Sleeping? Is there not an infinite amount to say about each of these and a near infinite number of possible headings under which his behaviour could be categorised? Suppose that life has gotten more complicated. Given O'Hara and Leicester's three sorts of emergencies, it's more complex again. So suppose we are experiencing not just one but many simultaneous conceptual emergencies, emergencies in our epistemic, cultural, ethical, etc., etc., frames. (I think such frame problems are what O'Hara and Leicester mean by a conceptual emergency.) How could we possibly make a justified judgement in such a context? We lack a clear ground. In particular I want to express the elements of that response that lend themselves to discursive exploration. That problem of course generalises and so it's not a problem (just) for leadership - it problematises all judgements - and since we don't want to disappear down that particular sceptical rabbit hole we might suppose that we are saved: if the sceptical consequences of experiencing multiple conceptual emergencies simultaneously are too much to bear generally - risk us becoming paralysed, unable to pick out what is salient in relation to anything not just leadership - then they are certainly too much to bear in relation to the much narrower concerns of leadership. So let's avoid them. We lurch here from too far to not far enough. Leadership idealism as I have described it marks out the "not enough" end of the spectrum - too sketchy and cartoon-like to draw any significant lessons; no complexity, tension, contradiction in the internal content of the description in particular. This is a common feature in the sketches of historical figures in leadership literature. In my (made up) example above, what did Barack Obama think he was doing? Might he have thought "at this very moment, I am precisely not being a leader. I have succumbed to intolerable pressure and influence and I am simply doing what I feel I have to, politically." Or "this is a potentially horrific but necessary thing to be doing, especially if there are children in the building too, but my leadership comes through my will, despite all that, to do what must be done, for the best, in the longer run. Even if it costs me my soul." And an infinite number of alternatives in between. We will no doubt at this point be inclined to look for the most solid ground we can on the basis of which we might make our leadership judgements ("*that* is leadership", "*that* is a leader"). Maybe his own first person avowal of what he was seeking to do is as solid as we will find? Would we generally accept such testimony? Do we imagine that what a person avows they are doing is what in fact they are doing? Not if we have read any Freud we don't (always). So if the first-person "inside" perspective is too vulnerable to confounding factors such as sub-conscious desires etc., we might be tempted to look to a third-person "external" perspective that is not so confounded. We need to be careful here. The more external we go, looking for solid ground, the greater the risk that we find ourselves effectively changing the subject, meaning nothing even approximating leadership can hove into view. At the outset of this essay I challenged the idea that there is a (consoling) ground of leadership. So, for instance, I am presuming that talking about Barack Obama's neurological state at that very moment, presuming he was not suffering from a neurological condition, will not be relevant, even on a pretty strong naturalist reading[23]. There is certainly a *causal* explanation here of how through the firing of certain neurons a certain brain caused a certain nervous system to react which led to movement in certain vocal chords that produced sounds which when received and processed by another brain led, through another complex process, to a button being pressed which caused a bomb to be dropped. Even for the

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[23] reference to *Neuroscience for Leadership* etc

sensible naturalist[24], one could describe all that at any length one wished and not in all eternity find *leadership* anywhere. So we are effectively going to be looking for a weaker, more explicative form of explanation at the level of the psychological states of a person (i.e., what they believe or want or hope or fear etc)[25]. In searching for solid ground then, that is likely to take us away from the scientist and more toward the novelist or perhaps the journalist or other story teller. Perhaps problematically, there is no clear line and for that matter the line, if there is one, can keep shifting across time(s), and across people, but leadership realism is what we might call providing *just enough* detail and richness to justify calling someone a leader or an action or actions leadership. It would be a mistake to think this is reducible to quantity, as if the problem with Scott and Freeman's account or any of the other many case studies and sketches in leadership literature is simply that they are too short. Too much (superfluous) detail is as unhelpful as not enough. It's applying whatever standard or standards one applies when one reads a novel or an article in a newspaper and thinks or says (at least) "I understand". That can of course also be a book on leadership. The plausibility of that claim comes from one's being able to explain why one thinks or says "I understand". If one can't (convincingly) then perhaps one doesn't; if one can, and especially if one can do to an ever-wider audience, then perhaps one does. Perhaps the point here is that one can be justified in saying "I understand" only after the fact, not just after one has explained convincingly what one is supposed now to understand but after one has acted based on that understanding that in turn demonstrates insight and wisdom. (Might this be the test of leadership?) Generally that speaks more to one's ability to tell a (leadership) story than provide (in a strong sense) a (leadership) explanation. One might then baulk at the distinction between (leadership) idealism and realism. If (leadership) realism is not tied ultimately to scientific explanation but rather to one's ability to tell a decent story then it would appear one has disappeared down a particular version of the sceptical rabbit hole - a post-modern rabbit hole with a sign at its entrance that states "there is nothing outside the text". Surely there are leaders, not just stories about leaders? Maybe. I say narrative not fiction deliberately. That's what justifies it being realism and while I do think it applies to fiction - there are superb examples of leadership displayed by fictional characters - if that makes ones uneasy then think about how the notion of realism might be applied to good journalism where that is not reducible to a rather clunky series of neutral "facts" simply listed one after the other but is rather a well told story. Something that might entirely legitimately be called truth and realism can emerge from the rich and imaginative telling of a person's story using the fullest possible range of not just psychological terms but myths, jokes, analogies, transcripts and so on. And that can include whatever is needed to allow the reader to say "now *that's* leadership". Essayist Joan Didion talks about *fixing a narrative line:*

> We tell ourselves stories in order to live. The princess caged in the consulate. The man with the candy will lead the children into the sea. The naked woman on the ledge outside the window on

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[24] I don't doubt there are papers entitled "the leadership gene" or "the leadership neuron". That's fine. I absolutely think that you need a genetic structure and a central nervous system to be a leader. Otherwise you are just meat. But leadership cannot be explained by these things. That becomes very difficult and very contested when we reach the boundaries of the hard sciences. Might leadership be explained epigenetically or behaviourally? Sophisticated behavioural dispositions in furtherance of clear biological functions such as sexual dominance? My critique to be comprehensive would have to go there. For the purposes of this essay, my point is just to acknowledge precisely that complexity and to note that the failure to acknowledge it leads to something I have called leadership idealism.

[25] the distinction between personal and sub-personal level explanations helps here. In the end there are no sub-personal explanations of leadership, but sub-personal explanations can explain the enabling conditions of leadership (including brain states).

the sixteenth floor is a victim of accidie, or the naked woman is an exhibitionist, and it would be "interesting" to know which. We tell ourselves that it makes some difference whether the naked woman is about to commit a mortal sin or is about to register a political protest or is about to be, the Aristophanic view, snatched back to the human condition by the fireman in the priest's clothing just visible in the window behind her, the one smiling at the telefoto lens. We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the "ideas" with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience.

Identifications or attributions of leadership are fixings of a (particular sort of) narrative line, a freezing of the shifting phantasmagoria. We can see a clear connection between the over-generalisation and the over-simplification elements of descriptive idealism: we may suppose that the salience of a situation is established (not by neurological science etc., but) by certain principles that serve to pick out from the infinite number of possible facts the relevant ones. In understanding a situation as an exercise of leadership, it would be leadership principles that mattered. It is important to note that the argument mentioned above, attributed to Aristotle, remains in play. Despite what I am saying here - that to identify salient features of a situation one needs sorting principles - that may simply not be true, in part because such principles may not be available or because we generate an infinite regress (to pick out sorting principles from amongst a potentially infinite number, we need higher order sorting principles). The point remains that if one is to draw, for instance, credible lessons from any description of a circumstance or situation then one needs to have described that circumstance or situation with enough richness - enough internal and external content - to justify one's claims (for instance, that there is a credible lesson here to be learnt). Here again there is a clear risk of if not infinite regress then circularity: if we include within the description of a circumstance of situation - within the internal or external content - the very thing that we then draw out as, say, a leadership lesson (perhaps the basis on which we postulate a key principle) then that's circular, or, put otherwise, if we are querying whether that is the sort of thing that might answer a question about leadership then we simply beg the question. We see this play out in Scott and Freeman in their, not entirely unreasonable claim that neither leadership principles or practice (the behaviour of leaders) is explanatorily basic: if we need the leadership principles to pick out the behaviour we think demonstrates leadership then we can hardly use the identification of that very behaviour to individuate the principles. You might break into that circle if you are willing to grant self-justifying status to one or more of the principles but all you then do is push the issue back to justifying the basis on which you've granted that very status. Either it's an inherent property of the principle, which is metaphysically opaque, or it's granted based on choice or preference, and we are back with the infinite regress (what justifies the choice or preference?). My point here is that what I called "particularism" above is effectively what I have called leadership realism. The attribution of leadership not through the application of principles, which on the whole simply leave one asking "on the basis of *what* should I apply *this* principle *here, now*", but through a sort of discernment or discrimination that can best be expressed in the telling of a (leadership) narrative or story. What counts as "just enough" can't be determined in advance. It can only be after the description is offered, the story is told. This form of *discernment* or *discrimination* will be fundamental to what follows. It is something that is fundamental to Plato. It is the beginning of an alternative to the idea that leadership consists in willed action. We saw it emerge out of the shadows above. This has brought it further into the light. But not yet clearly.

Ideology

So far I have expressed my worries about the concept of leadership through the concerns I have about descriptions of leadership. About a lack of enough psychological, cultural or social reality in any description of a putative leadership situation for that description - more specifically the associated judgements - to be justified. The most obvious such descriptions are the all-too familiar leadership case-studies and sketches that trot out a remarkably consistent list of leaders. Maybe the best explanation of that consistency is just the fact that those referenced are in fact leaders. But are such choices neutral in that way? Is it just a fact? This is where the concept of leadership moves from being helpful/unhelpful to being safe/unsafe. This shift happens when we realise that the concept of leadership and its many applications are inherently *ideological*. Given what we said above, we might ask, is there ever a non-ideological story? If the answer is no then maybe there's little we can do with the worry about ideology. But it will matter if some ideologies are better than others. To help clarify, I want to say something about the concept of ideology at play here. Nothing of this is to be found in Scott and Freeman.

Some of the issues with descriptive idealism and realism were entirely generalised. There was nothing in the points being made that singled out the concept of leadership in particular. Most of our moral, psychological or behavioural concepts are subject to the same issues and critique. That's true of the ideological use of our moral, psychological and behavioural concepts too. Given the importance of being able to distinguish reliably between leadership and its deformations, not least demagoguery and tyranny - something which is fundamental to Plato - we might have thought that we would be particularly alert to the effects of ideology on our leadership narratives. So while we can perhaps tolerate a degree of idealism - sketchiness, unclarity etc - in applications of our concept of leadership we should be much more concerned about the way that (the concept of) leadership is used to promote certain historically entrenched ideals and associated power structures, silencing and suppressing those who don't conform to them[26]. That risks being and often is deeply pernicious. In the context of a (deeply problematic) description of what he thought of as "authentic leadership", the philosopher Martin Heidegger, said that *we must choose our heroes*[27]. And that is precisely the peculiar and particular danger of all leadership narratives: *who's in? who's out? what they represent, what they don't; what we value, what we don't.* Whether explicitly or implicitly exemplars of human leadership are selected, who are not only, typically, idealised but ideological. Not just Scott and Freeman's book, but so much of leadership literature comes with an all-too familiar panoply of political, military, religious and business leaders who are presented as ideal models for our own lives. The issue is not just that they are rarely as exemplary as presented[28] - something which those selected may wish themselves to emphasise or indeed that those selecting them may acknowledge - but the way that their apparently consensual presentation seeks to or more passively and commonly by omission silences, marginalises, and either promotes a particular cause or simply sustains the status quo. The point about ideology is more fundamental than the point about idealism in

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[26] This is what Raymond Geuss calls "ideology in the pejorative sense". Geuss, R., *The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas and the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981)

[27] reference to *Being and Time*

[28] I don't suppose that there are not heroes. I am just deeply sceptical that they are always as presented or that their selection is itself free from certain prejudices. A salutary lesson comes from those who fall from grace or whose complexity become apparent under scrutiny, see Hitchens, C., *The Missionary Position: Mother Teresa in Theory and Practice* (ref)

the following sense: descriptive idealism and realism are forms of descriptive ideology. There is no escaping ideology in the descriptive sense if by that one simply means that each and every society or culture contains or is constituted by sets of beliefs, ideas, concepts, rituals, practices etc etc. If one calls such sets "ideology" or indeed "ideologies" then ideology is an inescapable fact about human existence (whether individual or collective). That reinforces the point above about there perhaps not being any non-ideological stories. One might see ideology in this sense as being a fundamental part of the "external" and "internal" content of descriptions referenced above. One might make useful distinctions here between "discursive" and "non-discursive", "explicit" and "implicit" elements of such descriptive ideologies[29]. That would help us develop the sort of conceptual complexity we need to capture the depth of our implication in ideology. The sense in which I think that the concept of leadership is unsafe because ideological is not though in this descriptive sense. Because ideology is not merely descriptive and so is not and cannot remain neutral. The "unsafe" notion of ideology - which perhaps the sense that the word "ideology" should be reserved for - is "ideology in the pejorative sense". This is ideology as implicated in or promoting "(ideological) delusion" or "(ideological) false consciousness". Some forms of delusion or false consciousness are not practically pernicious (beyond the fact that epistemically one should seek to avoid false beliefs). What we need to be concerned about are those forms of delusion and false consciousness that are practically pernicious (or perhaps simply insidious). Take patriarchy or institutional racism as examples. This is the context in which we talk of domination or hegemony: "it is in virtue of the fact that it supports or justifies reprehensible social institutions, unjust social practices, relations of exploitation, hegemony, or domination that a form of consciousness is an ideology" (15). So one can understand that beyond the descriptions of systems of beliefs and practices that might institute an ideology or ideologies of leadership (one can suppose that there are such things in any social hierarchy, political/military/religious/business organisation) that there will also be structures of exploitation, injustice and domination that serve to promote forms of false consciousness. These structures will not only be discursive - in the form of beliefs etc - and non-discursive - in the form of behavioural responses, gestures etc - but also explicit - in the form of leadership codes, hierarchies etc - and implicit - in the form of attitudes, reactions, expectations etc. Part of what defines the times we live in as "dark times" - leadership in the shadows - is precisely that one finds our world replete with leadership ideology of this pejorative form. (Was it not always thus? Indeed might it not, in this sense, have been a lot darker previously? There is a Stephen Pinker-esque argument in this vicinity.) We might be tempted to think that the most significant threat is the implicit forms of ideology, whether discursive or non-discursive, which is almost impossible to notice, hidden in the subtle choices, assumptions, the smoothings of the rough edges that go toward descriptions of leadership. But these days we can all too easily see pejorative leadership ideology - whether patriarchal or racist or ableist etc - very much out in the open. It is precisely here that we find, as did Plato, perhaps the most fundamental leadership judgement: distinguishing between leaders, tyrants and demagogues. And it is perhaps precisely this issue that demands that we take a genuinely critical approach to the very concept, given its tendency to be co-opted into structures and systems of domination and repression. Who, after all, are the causes of the emergencies we currently face? Not a cosmic accident, but exercises in supposed leadership. That is to make clear that in the end some leadership writing containing leadership judgements may be "safe" but that will only be after we have viewed it through the lens of ideology (and subjected it to *Ideologiekritik*).

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[29] [reference to Geuss]

But there are other worries than just whether a leader is in fact a tyrant or demagogue. One might ask, once one has made clear one's anti-tyrannical credentials, what have Dr Roy Vagelos or Jean Monnet or Marie Curie or Elon Musk (and any of the other of Scott and Freeman's examples or the many other littered through leadership literature) done to deserve being tarred with this ideological brush? But there are different forms of domination and repression than political; different forms of tyranny than just militaristic totalitarian or indeed deep sexism, racism or ableism. The effects are perhaps not as devastating as we are seeing say in Ukraine at present but they are pernicious nonetheless. But why does it matter (to me) so much? Ideology infects all concepts. Why get so worked up about leadership in particular? That was why I wanted to draw the distinction between the ubiquitous "ideology in a descriptive sense" and the more limited, but still widespread "ideology in a pejorative sense". The point is that our judgements of leadership make clear who we take to best represent humanity and so they equally make clear (thereby) who doesn't. The very notion of leadership carries with it a sense of singling out for praise, for valuing the qualities that those so singled out supposedly embody. To be fair, the issue is not simply falling for what one might call the "hero fallacy" or "myth of perfection", given there are many leadership theories that at least appear explicitly to recognise how fundamentally fallible human beings are, including our heroes. However, even in those more self-aware leadership theories that are built on an acceptance of human fallibility there is an inherent risk that all we are doing is replacing one set of ideal capabilities or "virtues" with another - Athens for Sparta, New Testament for Old - with that new perhaps less obviously "heroic" set of virtues - say fallibility, humility, vulnerability, consensus - simply sustaining the even deeper myth that there are such virtues to be had, that there are stable capacities available to human beings that can reliably lead to better outcomes. So we try to avoid ideology by falling back into a naive idealism. And so it goes on.

As I will come on to say, where Plato looks on the surface at least to go most wrong in the forms of leadership promoted in, say, the *Republic* is the ideological lengths he is apparently prepared to go to root out from his ideal city all forms of pejorative ideology. I say on the surface because it will come to matter whether we think Plato actually commends the (barely) benign but still totalitarian regime that he outlines in the *Republic* or whether, as some commentators have suggested, he is simply demonstrating the utter futility of any attempt to rid ourselves of ideology - and the threat of tyranny - by outlining how far we would have to go in re-engineering our society to save it. In Plato's case that includes the expulsion of artists and poets, the near complete destruction of the family structure, the subjugation of the non-leadership class etc etc. If that is what de-ideologicalising society comes to then it's for the birds. The question will become whether there is a credible middle ground between the Scylla and Charybdis of contemporary ideological leadership and Plato's equally terrifying alternative. This is an issue I will return to. It goes (nearly) without saying that it is not something we find in Scott and Freeman. They seem to inhabit an ideology-free world. But again, might we miss something of value in their more naive account? After all, if one takes critical reflection on leadership too far one may be left in effect without any leaders or at least in a position where one refuses to recognise any leaders given the risk, say, of further promoting ideological false consciousness. That feels potentially deeply indulgent in these dark times. Can we afford to question leadership *to that extent at least* in the face of the perfect storm of real, conceptual and existential emergencies?[30] Scott and Freeman might say, all that too-clever-by-half critique does is leave us without the resources - the leadership - we need at this time. But hiding in the shadows is not in the end a safe place to be, even if leading in the sunlight feels challenging. There is though no

[30] reference to Maureen O'Hara and Graham Leicester, *Dancing on the Edge.*

leadership without critique and ideological critique (*Ideologiekritik*) is not just possible but essential. So leadership remains open to us but the right form of leadership; one as far as possible without idealism and in particular if not without then in the full acknowledgement of our susceptibility to and influence by ideology. What we need is leadership that has set its stall out explicitly against domination, repression and forms of false consciousness. This is leadership in the sunlight. As I said above, whether there remains any credible ground between the false consciousness of contemporary ideological leadership and the sorts of extreme alternatives that have been presented including Plato's ideal city, remains to be seen. However, it's clear that sustained critical reflection on the meaning and uses of the concept of leadership is a basic requirement if we are to avoid the risks of over-simplification, domination and silencing (I use these as shorthand for the full impact of idealism and ideology). Whatever else it needs to involve - and what follows will unpack that - that critique should certainly include more overtly socio-political reflection grounded in such notions as "feminist theories of leadership"[31] or "white privilege in theories of leadership"[32] and "overcoming ableism in leadership"[33]. These approaches should not simply be the sources of a new and different set of principles - although if one were thralled to principles then better they come from feminism etc - but in line with the approach outlines above, they will be displayed in particular forms of discernment and discrimination. The failure of Scott and Freeman to recognise even the risk of ideological contamination is part of the scandal of their approach. There is literally no recognition that the selection of Plato (and so the tradition of Western logo-centric, male-dominated, largely white philosophy) or the analogical professions (doctor, captain etc) or the case studies (captains of industry, political leaders, scientists) might be problematic. Maybe all of these choices, ultimately, are legitimate but certainly not uncritically so and from the outset. I described that above as scandalous. In terms of the perspectives open to one in pursuing critique, there is no set list; imagination and curiosity are essential. The starting point is perhaps just to think what or who comes to mind when one thinks of a leader. Just think what that person specifically or generally looks like, or sounds like, or does. Maybe they're not a man, or white, or able-bodied, or heterosexual? Maybe so; maybe so far so good; but then think what nonetheless the ideal image is culturally. My overriding sense is that if that is where we start we will find ourselves very far indeed from a place where our practices of leadership are helpful and safe. I think that opens a very wide critical perspective. In a sense, subject to certain constraints including what I called above "descriptive realism", "anything goes!"[34]. I have offered a few plausible starting points: whatever and wherever you are tempted to start, whether it's a theory of leadership or a case study of leadership practice, one can not go far wrong searching for the feminist, or critical race or anti-ableist etc., take on that theory or that case study. Listen for the voices of difference, for the (typically) hidden or silent voices[35]. Sheer breadth here is a helpful and necessary tool in circumventing the limiting effects of ideology, which often pushes us down certain paths, closes or silences certain perspectives. The point here is to retain one's critical faculties. So I should not be understood to be saying that feminist or critical race or anti-ableist thinking is always true and insightful (and that more traditional forms of mainstream

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[31] https://actionaid.org/feminist-leadership
[32] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3885528/
[33] https://www.acevo.org.uk/reports/hidden-leaders/hidden-leaders-disability-leadership-in-civil-society/16/
[34] This is a playful but serious allusion to Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* 3rd edition (London: Verso, 1993). In the preface to *Against Method* Feyerabend warns against taking "anything goes!" as a methodological principle, preferring instead to describe it as the "terrified exclamation of a rationalist who takes a closer look at history". His master-point is that having regard to the history of science, it's clear that is has no common structure. That is not though to open the door to bullshit.
[35] reference to Mary Beard, *Power and Women* on the silencing of women's voices in public spaces.

leadership theory are always false and obscuring). These more marginal forms of critique are just as susceptible to being bullshit as any other form of critique and are certainly susceptible to idealism and ideology. We need to triangulate constantly. Does what I am reading open for me a useful perspective? Does it make visible the limits of the mainstream? What are its own limits or "blind-spots"? Keeping on one's toes is more important than landing somewhere. This is the constant fixing of a narrative line (without any such line being, in the end, fixed).

All of that seems to move the risk from over-simplification to over-complicating. Would it be such a loss given all these concerns if in the end we just stopped using the concept of leadership? We just stopped talking in those terms? On the surface at least the kind of leadership scepticism I espouse seems quite different from the more profound forms of scepticism we have seen through the history of philosophy. That includes scepticism about the external world as such, and scepticism about the enduring self[36]. Compared with the loss of the world and the self, the cost of the loss of (the concept of) leadership would surely not be that great? I am not so sure. Above I emphasised the ideological primacy of leadership - these are the people we value, these are (at least by implication or omission) who we don't - but actually it has a quite fundamental explanatory role too. In this regard the threat of missing that role or at least over-simplifying it, is what I have called leadership idealism (the over-simplistic attribution of qualities or motivation to fundamentally complex human beings or systems). The point is that too many leadership theories have such a poor "theory" of human action and motivation, of the sort of science and philosophy of mind, language and action that might come close to explaining the outer and perhaps especially the inner life of human beings. Again, we might think of Freud as the great herald of the true complexity of human action and motivation, and so the great critic of leadership idealism[37]. In abandoning the concept of leadership we would lose more than we might expect. That is in part because of the ways that leadership is embedded more generally in the cluster or web of concepts we use to evaluate and explain human behaviour. Maybe a brain in a vat could do without a concept of leadership and all it entails. And maybe the rest of us could do without some of the high-end technical notions of leadership we find in many leadership books. But as soon as one thinks about how children learn, about notions of authority, of education, of knowledge by hearsay, of persuasive argument, of trustworthiness and so on, and so on, through to full social adulthood, one can see just how difficult it would be to do without any concept of leadership or its cognates. Of doing things that command respect and influence, that others seek to emulate and all the other more or less common sense things we think leadership consists in. It is though precisely this significance that explains why the threat of idealism and ideology looms so large. In a sense these threats apply to each and every concept. The requirements of critique are not justified or needed in every case. Only in cases that seem to matter. I am claiming that it matters deeply when it comes to leadership. I don't stand in the way of anyone saying something similar about any concept or indeed denying that in the case of leadership this all isn't all just stuff and nonsense. The work - what follows - is my justification that leadership, framed critically, is worth keeping, just as it would be for anyone for any concept.

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[36] See David Hume.
[37] The complexity of the situation - and the justification for maintaining critical vigilance - is here demonstrated by the fact that although Freud identified that there is always already more going on when one thinks about the causes and motivations of human action. He was in fact deeply scientistic inasmuch as he felt that although complex such patterns were susceptible to essentially mechanical and complete explanations.

Transition I

So far I have focused primarily on the traps to avoid. What I called shadowing factors. I have spoken at length about two of the three I mentioned above. I have yet to say much about the neurotic ego. It would be fair to ask when I will turn to say something positive about leadership. To do that I want to begin circling back to Plato, now not through the lens of Scott and Freeman but through my own experience of the *Republic*, perhaps the greatest work in western philosophy and the book to which all subsequent philosophy has been cast as a (mere) footnote. I cannot give a full account of this extraordinary text. I want to focus on perhaps the most famous section within the *Republic* - the allegory of the cave - to offer an account of what it can tell us about leadership. As I said above, the idea that I will find, in at least nascent form, in that allegory is the one expressed in the epigraph quoting the *Republic*, which i quote again here:

> The capacity for knowledge is innate in each man's mind, and that the organ by which he learns is like an eye which cannot be turned from darkness to light unless the whole body is turned; in the same way the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the Good. Plato, *Republic* 518c

The image of the whole body being turned, of turning to a point when the eye can bear to look straight at reality is fundamental. The allegory of the cave puts that into a wider context. At the heart of the allegory is the idea of an endless and rigorous educative process, inherently social, that moves us from the shadows to the light (ascent) and then encourages us back into the shadows (descent) to lead and educate others. We might think of this ascent and descent, which is the turning back and forth as *enlightenment*. This is what, for these very reasons, I have called "leadership in the sunlight". The rigorous process is critique. Above I called it therapy. I shall argue that the move from shadow to light (and back) in the allegory of the cave represents our learning perhaps for the first time and with the help of at least another to discern true particulars (without obfuscation, ideology, prejudice). That discernment can motivate just action. This is exactly contrary to the idea that leadership is will and that it is solitary. The lesson of the allegory is that it is a shared responsiveness in the light of the sun, where the sun is the concept of the Good. This will begin to show that when I talk about leadership in the sunlight what I am talking about is leadership in light of the Good. When I commended Scott and Freeman's talk of ethical leadership, this was why. They didn't explain it. What I have offered so far suggests that leadership is a deeply ethical and so shared responsiveness to events, to reality as opposed to fantasy. Threads here are beginning to pull together. The form that responsiveness takes is both a discernment of particulars and a reflective expression of what is discerned. Following Cavell, I called that reflective expression "finding the right words" and placed it in a relationship that has the structure of therapy. We are still not quite in a position to understand these claims.

"A city in words"

My question: *why did I return to the Republic at the point I did?* Why at my lowest ebb, was it the book I turned to? Part of the answer is no doubt deeply contingent and not in an interesting way: it was simply

there on my bookshelf and I caught sight of it. But there are lots of books there. Why that one? There's an obvious historical answer, beyond its foundational status as a philosophy text, which is that it is a book about leadership, about the conditions of ethical or just leadership, and the ever-present threat of that leadership being corrupted (into tyranny). Perhaps then I turned to the *Republic*, when I had lost all confidence that I knew anymore what leadership was, in the hope of finding a convincing theory of leadership? That is Scott and Freeman's prospectus: "models of leadership in Plato and beyond". As if I could try such models on for size? Pick the one that best suited me. Nothing about that "pick and mix" approach moved me at all. My instincts were that there was deeper treasure in the *Republic*. My instinct was that that treasure could be uncovered approaching the *Republic* not as a mere sequence of arguments and theories in ethics, metaphysics and political theory, but, in Cavell's terms, as the enactment of something I am calling "leadership in the sunlight". This risks outrage as it appears to assign significance to the *Republic* as a (leadership) drama rather than a philosophy or theory of leadership proper. And given the strictures of the *Republic* itself which casts drama as morally and metaphysically corrupting, in seeing it as an enactment I seem almost to be choosing to amplify a contradiction. On Plato's own terms the *Republic* would not be permitted in the republic. Surely better to suppress the dramatic and extract the philosophical essence? Either neat arguments or even Scott and Freeman's analogical models. The arguments though are not convincing and the models are deeply superficial. No, the *Republic* is first and foremost a drama and that is how it should be approached. And it is not just a drama in the sense that it is presented entirely in dialogical form with settings and characters. The very writing of the *Republic* seems itself to be a drama. This is what above I called an enactment of leadership. I don't want to nor need I recount all of what is said in the *Republic* but I do want and need to give a sense of what it says, at least in outline. A basic point here is that leadership itself can be understood to consist in or at least involve *building cities in words*.

Written around 375BC and set around fifty years earlier, at the height of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, it is a conversation (an argument?) primarily between an older man - Socrates - and a group of young men (friends?) about justice, education and leadership. Included in that group of young men are Plato's two older brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus (who we met above) and Polemarchus[38]. It is set not in Athens itself but in the vibrant nearby port of Piraeus, which Socrates and Glaucon are visiting to attend a festival. The drama starts in hesitancy and with (playful?) threats of violence as Socrates, despite his professed ignorance, is encouraged by Polemarchus to stay in the Piraeus to talk. First, talking to an older man, Polemarchus' father Cephalus, and in whose house the conversation is happening, about the advantages and disadvantages of old age, in particular wealth. This exposes conventional ideas that justice and thereby leadership consists in moneymaking. That's a shadowing thought. That provokes the younger interlocutors to join the conversation. What really is justice? And can we prove that the just man is happier than the unjust one? The development of the conventional view, attributed to the poet Simonides, has it that justice is giving each man his due. The violent undertones continue when Thrasymachus, who had been desperate to join in, was "no longer able to be quiet but gathered himself together and sprang on us like a beast, as if he wanted to tear us to pieces" (336b). Justice, says

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[38] As mentioned above, I will not explore the historical underpinnings of the text, which explain much. At least two of the characters of the drama will come to executed, and some will be implicated in the imposition of an oligarchy - "the thirty tyrants" - after Athen was humiliated by Sparta in the Peloponnesian War in 404BC. One of those executed is Polemarchus, son of Cephalus and the other is, of course, Socrates, who was tried and executed for corrupting the youth of Athens, shortly after democracy was restored in 403BC.

Thrasymachus, is self-interest and the advantage of the stronger over the weaker. (We can see here echoes of the view that felt attractive before my leadership crisis - leadership as the most resolute will.) Socrates rather feebly rebuts Thrasymachus' claims, concluding that "the just man is happy and the unjust man miserable" (354a). Despite the feeble nature of the arguments Thrasymachus effectively withdraws from the conversation in shame at this point and the rest of the dialogue is almost exclusively between Socrates, and Plato's brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus. What then follows, famously, is a better proof that the just man is happier than the unjust, through a grand thought experiment: the construction of "a city in words" - *Kallipolis*, good city - so that justice might be more easily found in that larger setting than in the soul of an individual man. In essence - dramatically distilled - what follows is a story about the imposition of order on the disorder of both the collective city and the individual soul through rigorous education such that the just man (or woman) ascends from the darkness of the shadows to the light of the sun ("the Good") and then back into the shadows to lead reluctantly, as now a philosopher-king.

I can't offer an account of all of the *Republic* so I want to pick out four ideas from that book that seem to me to matter greatly when it comes to understanding leadership. I state them here in part to restate them. They have featured previously but now I trace them back to Plato. The first Platonic idea is that leadership is the ability to bear to look straight at reality. That includes, perhaps especially, the reality that is other human beings. That sounds like a very odd thought. *Who, who has their eyes open, cannot see?* This is a question I asked at the outset of this essay. Leadership cannot consist in seeing reality otherwise everyone (who can see) would be a leader. But imagine that reality is not easily seen, nor even much seen at all, especially by those with their eyes wide open? Then seeing - or discerning - reality would be quite some achievement and thereby justify the assignation of leadership. For those in the know, this is of course about the most Platonic of thoughts imaginable: reality is not apparent to us, but rather only mere appearances are - "the world of change" - and that to get in touch with reality requires a most significant effort. I have already explained two of three ways in which even when our eyes are wide open we are left in the shadows and I have begun to describe the kind of effort required to bring reality into view. In the telling of the allegory of the cave Plato calls that effort, depending on which translation you read, "enlightenment" or "education". I have also called it "therapy" and again "critique". The second Platonic idea is revealed if we note how the quotation from Plato in the epigraph to this essay, which I have re-quoted twice, ends: "the mind as a whole must be turned away from the world of change until its eye can bear to look straight at reality, *and at the brightest of all realities which is what we call the good.*" So it is clear that the reflective discernment in which leadership consists is not so much a biological capacity as a moral one, one that is capable of seeing "the brightest of all realities, which is what we call the good". As I said above, leaders see reality in light of the good. This will mean for one thing that there is an uncrossable line between leadership and tyranny. It will also require us to think about what "the Good" is. The third Platonic idea relates to one of the most contentious and enigmatic claims ever made about leadership, viz. Plato's claim in his *Republic* that the ideal state should be ruled by philosophers. If we suppose that this form of reflective moral discernment in which reality is seen straight is that in which both philosophy and leadership consists - call that "wisdom", *sophia* - then one would understand why all true leaders are philosophers (with the "are" signifying a relationship of identity). Leadership as the love of wisdom, *philo-sophia*, which is being in touch with reality and not (just) the world of change. (As it happens, although I won't pursue this thought here, this could well do as much to rescue the notion of philosophy as it does rescue leadership.) The fourth Platonic idea relates to *how* Plato says what he wants to say rather than *what* he says. For Plato philosophy, and so leadership, famously, is dialogue. In

describing Plato's method, Cavell calls it a "mode of conversation between friends". These are not just idle conversations but educative. Indeed it might be reasonable to suppose that the process of having one's eyes opened to reality - enlightenment - is just this mode of conversation between friends. You can't have a conversation on your own. There are no solitary leaders. That's why Socrates is the leadership hero of the Platonic drama.

My task then became to assure myself that this notion of leadership was not, in the end, just another consoling fantasy. Fantasy replacing fantasy. Given the Platonic ideas set out above that assurance, if it's available anywhere, becomes available only in conversation with at least one other. Given how I have just described it - overcoming fantasy - one would be forgiven for thinking that this was essentially the conversation not so much between mere friends but between mentor and mentee or indeed therapist and client. I said earlier in this essay just how important friends were to me at my darkest point. It is something deeply fascinating to me that although by that I clearly meant actual living human beings, at the darkest point, if anyone counted as the friend in conversation, and who thereby helped my turn (back) fully toward reality, it was Plato. And he is of course long dead. Inspired, again, by Cavell, I have written elsewhere about the ways that books - in this case Plato's *Republic* - can function as a friend precisely in the way Cavell finds in Plato. This would consist as much in the reader being read - questioned, interpreted - by a text as reading it. Through its questioning or interpreting, one would come to find new ways of seeing oneself in that text, which in turn would open up the possibility of finding a better self. The text here is the analyst and the reader the analysand. In so doing one would come to understand what Cavell means when he describes such reading as "redemptive"[39]. Redemption here is securing freedom from shadows and emerging into the sunlight. It is working through (analytically) the burden of ego, convention and ideology, to bear to look straight at reality without the intervening shadows.   More usually the role of analyst is not fulfilled by a text but by a person. Of course that person could be an actual analyst. But it need not be. This is the sense in which leadership is shared and not monadic. One cannot (reliably) work through the burdens of ego, convention and ideology - the shadows - without being in a dialogical relationship which takes the form of analyst/analysand. The point is to have in place the checks and balances needed to ensure I can tell when my relationship to the world descends into (mere) projection. In a sense that's what much of this essay has been about. When I talked about the fantasy of command and control, and the hammer and the nail, I was talking essentially about projecting my needs onto my (external) self and the world. I talked about command and control, there are of course other fantasies of leadership. It would seem in particular important given the potential impact of leadership on the world that there be these checks and balances. That's where we should talk about *transference* rather than projection. When it's me simply projecting my wishes hammer-like onto the world that's one thing but when the hammer can bear up under the weight of that projection, call it out, name it, question, even challenge it, we move into an active relationship where there is transference rather than projection. It is only in this more reciprocal or dialogical space that (projected) issues can be contained, analysed and the relationship can be therapeutic. And of course just as the analysand brings baggage so does the analyst, and so as well as transference there is counter-transference. In talking about the drama of the *Republic* I have sought to bring to the fore the material for the counter-transference in my relationship with that text. If it's another human rather than a text then they bring their own drama with them too.

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[39] [Add reference - Stephen Mulhall, *Recounting the Ordinary*]

I can well imagine that the potential contingent benefits of this sort of analytical relationship is accepted. What is less clear is the extent this would be accepted as essential either to the concept of leadership itself or indeed to the very concept of the self. How deep does it go? I am at least suggesting there is no leadership without this sort of relationship. How much of one's time needs to be spent in such conversations, with whom? etc., are more contingent facts that will be determined in each case.

Transition II

I've talked around the basic question of what leadership in the sunlight is. Much of that has been taken up trying to uncover what I have called the philosophical conditions of leadership. That has primarily focused on the things that turn us away from or interfere with leadership. I called these shadowing factors. I picked out three in particular - ego, idealism and ideology. I have argued that leadership literature that does not start from the perspective of understanding the impact of these factors won't offer much insight into what leadership is. I briefly referred to a book that does start by understanding just these factors - O'Hara and Leicester's *Dancing At The Edge* - before talking about a book - Scott and Freeman's book - that doesn't. Scott and Freeman set out a series of leadership generalities and superficial caricatures of supposed leaders from history - descriptively idealistic and ideologically naive - and hope that by simply laying these things before us we will intuit what to do and how to do it. It seems to me that either you know enough already and Scott and Freeman add nothing, or you don't know enough to understand what Scott and Freeman's 27 principles of leadership actually *mean* in the sense of what one should do and how one should do it. At least being aware of the conditions of these principles and the forces they are susceptible to would be a start. Within that form of self-awareness the philosophical conditions of leadership can remain implicit or they can, like this essay, become more explicit. That is a way of distinguishing between reflective practice as knowing-how and as knowing-that, and means that it is not an actual condition of leadership to be able to quote Plato's *Republic*. The foundation of leadership is critical self-awareness, either implicit or explicit, of the impact of ego, idealism and ideology on our leadership consciousness[40]. There is no such critical self-awareness in Scott and Freeman. I then offered an alternative (brief) reading of Plato, the allegory of the cave in particular, that suggested where the leadership treasure may lie, which was essentially different from where Scott and Freeman suggested it was. In honour of the allegory of the cave, I called that treasure "leadership in the sunlight". It builds on a very tentative definition of leadership as "a shared enactment of a reflective responsiveness to reality (not fantasy)", which I shortened to "reflective or discursive discernment". That definition came from a firm rejection of two prejudices that haunt our ideologically dominant picture of leadership, viz., that leadership is the actings or decisions of an essentially solitary will. What Plato helps us understand is that leaders are not "monadic decision machines". Leadership is "shared" inasmuch as, to stave off the shadows, leaders should be involved in what are in essence *therapeutic conversations amongst friends*. That is the legacy of Socrates bequeathed to us by Plato. Leadership is "discernment" inasmuch as it requires leaders to *see through* the fantasies generated by ego, idealism and ideology - what Plato called the "world of change" - to reality itself, which is not readily available, however good our eyesight. There is much more I could say about what Plato teaches us about leadership. As I said at the outset and have tried to ensure I emphasise all the way through that essay not all of which is unchallengeable or even credible. What I focus on is the drama of Plato's dialogue and identify in that a structure that speaks to the conditions of leadership. There is too much said in that drama to account for it all. And I would

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[40] O'Hara and Leicester call this "psychological literacy"

anyway reject much of the heavy-duty metaphysics that comes with it. I have tried to account for just enough to show there's something worth saying about it in the context of contemporary leadership.

There is one last thing to talk about. I haven't said much about the impact of the neurotic ego on leadership. Without underplaying the impact of the other two shadowing factors I have referred to - convention and ideology - the neurotic ego creates a particularly powerful force that stops us realising our leadership potential. That is in part because of the way that in striving for reassurance and consolation the neurotic ego is particularly susceptible to the effects of convention and ideology. Although there is defining insight in Plato himself through his culturally momentous division of the soul into three parts in the *Republic* - reason, spirit and passion - it is only really in contemporary post-Freudian culture that we come to understand the particular role and impact of the ego. I promised at the outset to say something more practical about what leadership in the sunlight actually amounts to. I have offered tentative definitions and said something about the conditions that make it possible. But it could still be unclear what it is. To acknowledge the cultural point about a thoroughly post-Freudian take on Plato and also to emphasise the importance of what I said about storytelling and "fixing the narrative line", I want to end with Iris Murdoch and her, I think convincing, account of leadership.

"A vocabulary of attention"

In their book *Dancing At The Edge* O'Hara and Leicester talk about the fact that we are in the midst of a conceptual emergency. Their point being, in part at least, that given the sheer complexity and pace of things, we find it almost impossible to make sense of the world. This was a phenomenon that Iris Murdoch wrote about convincingly 50 years earlier[41]. Murdoch was to some extent a critic of the enlightenment. The cost of scientific explanation is the disenchantment of the world and the subject. In terms of the subject or self, we are left with "far too shallow and flimsy an idea of human personality". That subject

> . . . [i]s the hero of every contemporary novel. . . . [T]his man is with us still, free, independent, lonely, powerful, rational, responsible, brave, the hero of so many novels and books of moral philosophy. The raison d'être of this attractive but misleading creature is not far to seek. He is the offspring of the age of science, confidently rational and yet increasingly aware of his alienation from the material universe which his discoveries reveal . . .

Our descriptive and explanatory powers beyond the relatively narrow field of science (and even there) have drained away. This has led to a conceptual emergency:

> What have we lost here? And what have we perhaps never had? We have suffered a general loss of concepts, the loss of a moral and political vocabulary. We no longer use a spread-out substantial picture of the manifold virtues of man and society. We no longer see man against a background of values, of realities, which transcend him. We picture man as a brave naked will

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[41] This is an expanded version of a blog I wrote "Rise like Lambs" Rough Ground – We have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk so we need friction. Back to the rough ground! (Wittgenstein)

surrounded by an easily comprehended empirical world. For the hard idea of truth we have substituted a facile idea of sincerity.

What's true for humanity generally is true in particular for leadership. Back to the point made at the outset of this essay about a dominant leadership ideology. We have come to picture the leader as a "brave naked will surrounded by an easily comprehended [or controlled] world". The idea I introduced above of "descriptive idealism" was the idea that we come to descriptions of leader and human being more generally with a poverty of concepts. That was Scott and Freeman's flaw. The response to the conceptual emergency - understood as a "general loss of concepts" - is not fewer more precise concepts but more concepts, drawn from as many sources as possible. What I called "descriptive realism" was the ability to deploy as many concepts as possible, from as many sources as possible, to give an account of human behaviour that would allow us to talk in terms of reality, and not idealistic sketches (hence "descriptive idealism"). Within that complexity (rather than poverty) of concepts we will need to fix the narrative line in rather the way that a novelist (just like Murdoch) might. That's not about length but about depth. A one line description can capture everything there is to say (of value, at that time) about a person; while 1000 pages might say nothing (of value, at that time). So, as Murdoch says,

> We need more concepts than our philosophies have furnished us with. We need to be enabled to think in terms of degrees of freedom, and to picture, in a non-metaphysical, non-totalitarian and non-religious sense, the transcendence of reality. A simple-minded faith in science, together with the assumption that we are all rational and totally free, engenders a dangerous lack of curiosity about the real world, a failure to appreciate the difficulties of knowing it. We need to return from the self-centred concept of sincerity to the other-centred concept of truth. We are not isolated free choosers, monarchs of all we survey, but benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy. Our current picture of freedom encourages a dream-like facility; whereas what we require is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons. We need more concepts in terms of which to picture the substance of our being; it is through an enriching and deepening of concepts that moral progress takes place. Simone Weil said that morality was a matter of attention, not of will. We need a new vocabulary of attention.

This absolutely speaks to me - in eminently Platonic terms - about the practice of leadership. We need to return from the idea that authenticity is the best we can hope for - "I can never know that I have done the right thing, I can only aver that I was at least sincere in doing what I did" - and recover the "other-centred concept of truth". The word "other-centred" is doing as much work as "truth" here. It is not "my truth" I seek but a truth resolutely outside of me. For Murdoch, in a way that feels true also for leadership, the realest (and most complex) reality is other people. When Murdoch says, we are "benighted creatures sunk in a reality whose nature we are constantly and overwhelmingly tempted to deform by fantasy", this is leadership ground zero. It's Plato's cave. It's where we find ourselves and where we start. The task of leadership, using all the concepts we can muster, is to work patiently through the complexity and opacity of life to get to reality. That is a matter of attention, not will. What is most critical here is that this attention is not seen as contrary or even prior (logically or psychologically) to action. Once one discerns reality, action follows, without the need for will or desires (understood a distinct mental states):

The place of choice is certainly a different one if we think in terms of a world which is *compulsively* present to the will, and the discernment and exploration of which is a slow business. Moral change and more achievement are slow; we are not free in the sense of being able suddenly to alter ourselves since we cannot suddenly alter what we can see and ergo what we desire and are compelled by. In a way, explicit choice seems now less important: less decisive (since much of the "decision' lies elsewhere) and less obviously something to be cultivated. If I attend properly I will have no choices and this is the ultimate condition to be aimed at . . . The ideal situation . . . is rather to be represented as a kind of 'necessity. This is something of which saints speak and which any artist will readily understand. The idea of a patient, loving regard, directed upon a person, a thing, a situation, presents the will not as unimpeded movement but as something very much more like 'obedience'." "The Idea of Perfection", Iris Murdoch 331

So we need as leaders to be like painters or saints in being obedient to reality. If that sounds too precious then Murdoch talks less about saintliness and more about humility:

> Humility is a rare virtue and an unfashionable one and one which is often hard to discern. Only rarely does one meet somebody in whom it positively shines, in whom one apprehends with amazement the absence of the anxious avaricious tentacles of the self . . . The humble man, because he sees himself as nothing, can see other things as they are. Murdoch 385

It is humility that cuts through or counteracts the shadowing factors. There is a strong interpretation of these claims in which leadership in the sunlight involved such humility as to effectively involve an "unselfing"[42]. "Because he sees himself as nothing, [he] can see other things as they are." One can imagine having the critical resources to clarify for oneself the shadowing impact of convention, ideology and ego and so get oneself into a position to discern reality as it is. Whether one can in fact ever get there is a very real question. I find that level of virtue - leadership - difficult to imagine and so prefer a weaker interpretation of Murdoch's claims. The humble woman struggles to free herself entirely from the effects of convention, ideology and ego but knows this and always brings enough critique to her discernment to avoid overconfidence, hubris etc. This humility also involves an essential relatedness to others. It is inherently social. In what does this humility consist? If we no longer see ourselves as monadic decision machines don't we make it difficult if not impossible for ourselves to imagine we are still talking about leadership? If this humility is too humble then one is perhaps consigned to a passivity that stands in contradiction to leadership[43]. Murdoch is clear that humility is not a "peculiar habit of self effacement . . . like having an inaudible voice" but is "selfless respect for reality" (378).

> I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to thinking of the other matter it seems less important. And of course this is something which we may also do deliberately: give attention to nature in order to clear our minds of selfish care. Murdoch 369

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[42] One could see a "buddhist" or "zen" theory of leadership adopting this strong stance.
[43] Many years after Murdoch talked about humility, Edgar and Peter Schein wrote about "humble leadership" Schein, E and Schein, P *Humble Leadership*

Iris Murdoch inverts the model that has leaders as monadic decision machines. Leadership is not now exemplified in those flashes of occasional decisiveness when a "proud naked will" seeks essentially to choose what to do, but is in the continuous slow business of a patient, loving attention to reality including and perhaps especially other people, seen in a moral light. The question of what to do is not a matter of empty choice - "given this, then that" - so much as what follows from that constant "small piecemeal business" in which true leadership consists. Leadership ideology makes even acknowledging this conception as a viable alternative near impossible at times. It is culturally ubiquitous.

In the preamble I mentioned that where I end up may seem both counter-intuitive and naive. The counter-intuitiveness comes in no small part in the apparent move from resolution or will to obedience. That is not of course a move from activity to passivity, or a move away from action. But it does seem to push against the countervailing ideas of strong willed leadership. My conclusions seem naive because they seem to rest on the very idea that we can be in touch with reality. Of course that only seems naive to those who have gone through the post-modern or similar theoretical mill. For the vast majority of people the idea that we are not in touch with reality - with our eyes wide open in the middle of the day - is just bizarre. I want to claim if not a middle ground - where I end up may not be stable enough to be called that - then perhaps a place in an oscillation between a hopeless naivete and a cynical wisdom. We have got access to reality but not easily. We have to work damn hard and it may very well be that we never quite get there. Is this then an "as if" realism? A realism in which we act "as if" we are in touch with reality? That's maybe a question that never quite gets an answer. In contemporary theory this oscillating position has been called "metamodernism"[44]. I will need to return to answer the question whether I am presenting a metamodern theory of leadership.

Conclusion

All of this helps me understand my own position in leading through Covid-19. In terms of my leadership crisis, I had got caught up in the sheer scale of the issue that confronted us and had invested everything in the "big decisions". They became just too big. I had lost contact with the slower business of leading. It was not that there were no "big decisions" - I still have nothing but respect for those political leaders making the big calls - but by failing to notice the value in the rest of what I was doing I had lost touch with reality. Too much was invested in too little. Of course I can now explain why. I was subject to the influence of shadowing factors. The influence of each of the three shadowing factors I have talked about in this essay would itself require another essay. Suffice it to say that my ego - my self-conception of myself as "a leader" - began to oppress me: "what would a real leader be doing now?"; "everyone is looking at me expecting clarity and decisiveness, when I have none to offer". These ego-centric worries clouded my judgement. That blends into the impact of idealism. When I lost confidence to act I turned to how leaders are expected to act. That took me into the kind of territory that Scott and Freeman lay out with their 27 principles (and any number of leadership handbooks offer alternatives). That simply created further alienation. The impact of ideology is more difficult to articulate. There is a story to tell about ideology at play in pandemic response as well as the ideology at play in expectations of leadership. There is also how ideologies play out in organisations including the one I was part of. I have tried to offer a

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[44] http://www.metamodernism.org/

vocabulary in this essay that allows us to understand that thought for what it is. Ideology is ubiquitous. Recognising these things, working them through in a way that makes sense to me, and indeed writing them down has helped refocus my leadership. I remain at the early stages of developing a more stable leadership practice that makes real the insights in this essay.