

Alfred de Grazia

MAGIC, LAW AND SCIENCE IN THE CHOOSING OF LEADERS

Alfred de Grazia

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

ROUND TABLE, BOMBAY

January 4 -- 10, 1964.

MAGIC, LAW AND SCIENCE IN THE CHOOSING OF LEADERS

Alfred de Grazia

What are leaders? It is a fascinating question that has been argued since the dawn of mankind. And we are only a little closer to disposing of it today. I suggest that we are closer to understanding the question because of the kinds of progress; progress in logic and progress in objective study.

My first aim in this paper is to explicate the meanings of the term, leadership. My second purpose is to describe the conceptions of leadership held in historical times. My third purpose is to explain the new approaches to providing leadership for modern societies. And my fourth intention is to relate a few of these ideas to the present conditions of India.

I. Meaning of Leadership

Leadership can be intelligibly defined for the purposes of general social science, and by implication for political science, only if it is regarded as that element in a group situation that causes the group to act the way it does.

But ofcourse many other concepts of sociology and related sciences refer to the same events. And if, in a less general sense, leadership could be called that element that causes a group to change, we should have the same problem -- it includes such of all sociology -- but even more than that we should be wary of talking only of change when the most important feature of an actual leadership may be its resistance to change. (1)

What is the role of individuals in the group? Firstly the person acts and a full vectored map of all personal actions would describe per se the group action. Are they all leaders? "How can I be the leader, when nobody wants to follow?" asks the distraught leader, and apparently he is implying that the nobodies are leading the group. The transactional nature of leadership is apparent as is also that fact that we must study everybody in the group. (2)

But we pluck up our spirits and go on. We say that we are seeking the origin of traits that are more than average in the production of force-vectors in group situations. How to do this is often troublesome, but remarkable advances have been scored in sociometry and group-dynamics psychology. (3) We find also many psychological studies of traits mostly of a behavioral school approach, which typically proceed by comparing leaders and followers on

singular points or indices of social origins, physique, brain or culture.⁽⁴⁾

The background of leaders is a staple or political science diets, beginning with exhaustive biography⁽⁵⁾ and ending with statistical studies of the social origins of leaders.⁽⁶⁾ In the better works, the eye of the observer is upon certain developmental factors of theoretical importance -- such as the class interests of British colonial officials, or the compulsive rigidity of a President.⁽⁷⁾

Add to these students the reporters of the political scene who trade largely upon leaders,⁽⁸⁾ and the many scholars whose approach is the study of the movements and changes of elites and ruling groups, and we have a large proportion of the political scientists and other social scientists of the land counted among the interested scholars. Educators talk of the school superintendent and his role,⁽¹⁰⁾ psychiatrists of the transference phenomenon⁽¹¹⁾ and the many complexes of historical figures,⁽¹²⁾ administrative scientists of the executive habitat and habits,⁽¹³⁾ anthropologists of chiefs and shamans,⁽¹⁴⁾ and historians of kings, philosophers and intellectuals.⁽¹⁵⁾ Few fields are not so occupied; economists with their consumer and producer aggregates seem loathe to admit leadership but then there are Keynesian policy scientists,⁽¹⁶⁾ market

economists who talk of opinion leaders,⁽¹⁷⁾ and institutional economists;⁽¹⁸⁾ demographers prefer faceless aggregates too but are involved in the social differentials that influence mobility and birth rates;⁽¹⁹⁾ the rule of law recognizes no ranks but somehow a hierarchy of ranks, precedents, interpretations, and petitioners makes its mark;⁽²⁰⁾ nor is anyone any longer satisfied with truncated studies of public opinion that ignore how the public is organized and led.⁽²¹⁾ We must confess in the end that leadership is everything and, being so, is perhaps nothing in itself.

In every communicating aggregate -- which is to say in nearly all social settings and therefore all social science -- there is action, transaction, an outer world, a differentiation or individuation of members, and multiple goals. In order to have a situation of the "non-leader" and therefore dismiss any research concern for leadership, we should have to locate a setting where no individual differences exists, with only a single, constant goal, with no past, no transactions, and absurdly, no action. So all situations are led one way or another, and for good or bad. In all action we must look for a human element and ask what it is, where it originates and how it operates. And each question contains the sub-question: is it influential?

Sometimes when we see an ingredient that is a constant part of a human phenomenon, we may dismiss it as meaningless or state its presence as a universal law. The easiest universal law here is the one just developed: "Leadership is universal in group social behaviour." But as we move from that magnificent launching into the phenomenal rapids, we cannot gain much headway. "Leadership is the influence of each and all upon each and all," gives us an infinite problem, with countless ways of describing influence and our craft quickly disintegrates. For leadership then becomes a function of just about every imaginable variable, ranging from length of nursing at the mother's breast to being around when good fortune smiles upon one. (22)

Therefore when we are speaking of the scientific theory of choosing leaders, we are speaking of almost the whole corpus of the social sciences. Practically every proposition is relevant. Indeed we might suspect that the term "leader" would disappear from the vocabulary of the science of society were it not for its poetic significance. Its poetry elevates and preserves it intact, because leadership as an idea is at bottom a romantic, heartfelt, need-want -- a cry against all the free-floating anxieties that have sought assurance since the childhood of man, over the whole history and in the history of the person. (23)

II. The Three Eras of Leaders

Historical time is not like geological time that lays stratum upon stratum, each finishing before another begins. History is more like those geological faults that come from tremendous pressures of heat or ice, when all the striated sediments are exposed, side by side, to the same air of the present. Leaders of today are still eaten, usually symbolically, but sometimes even actually, to give new strength to the diners.⁽²⁴⁾ The executive today will feel from time to time all of the pride and terror of the lonely priest of Diana's grove, who had killed his predecessor to become priest and would, one day or night, at some moment of horrid surprise, be dealt a fatal blow himself.⁽²⁵⁾ Some have dreamt of Franklin Roosevelt intertwined with the images of their fathers,⁽²⁶⁾ and polls of college students showed Eisenhower to be several inches taller than he was.⁽²⁷⁾ At the same time, from the tribes of Central Africa,⁽²⁸⁾ as from the dialogues of Plato⁽²⁹⁾ or the laws of ancient China,⁽³⁰⁾ come intuitions and plans for the ordering of leadership that could be slipped unobtrusively into current collections of readings on the subject.

All the strata of history are exposed to the contemporary air and serve to determine what we can know and do about leadership or any other topic of science,

political, social or natural. Yet the ages of man bring change -- vast changes, possibly cyclical changes.⁽³¹⁾ I can perceive three major periods of leadership ideology and it is possible that we may not only live the past, but may also return to the past, the period of beginnings, so to repeat the main process.

The first period of leadership is the age of heroes, the second the age of law, and the third the age of operationalism. These terms no doubt convey echoes to some of you of the theories of Vico, Spencer, St. Simon, and Comte.⁽³²⁾ They are kindred, but there is no time here for genealogies. I aim, furthermore, to be more specific than the writers of the past in relating history and the theory of leadership.

Throughout history and therefore in each period, we have three sets of actors in respect of leadership and it is their transformations that need to be traced. We have, oversimplifying to be sure, the mass, the elite, and the scientists. Each set reacts and participates in its own way in the three historical eras, and in relation to the other sets.

The three sets of actors swing into action at different phases: the scientists first, the elite second, the mass last. The elite performs the critical social

function of applying the scientists' knowledge to ruling the society. The advanced intelligentsia prospers from an understanding elite and suffers persecution when the elite decides to turn for its slogans to the masses. Divisions among the elite are common, as when one faction turns almost instinctively to the intelligentsia, another to the mass, with both early personal conditioning and social background contributing to the choices of faction among individual influentials.

Leadership, we say in definition, remains the same. It is the extraordinary influence of a person on the behaviors of a group. We must strain to imagine our subject, because in its scope are incorporated emperors and small businessmen, the angelic and diabolic, the ancients along with our contemporaries, and the leader who is personally unknown to his group as well as the one who is an intimate.

III. The Age of Heroes

The age of heroes is primarily an age of small tribes and empires. The setting is not so important as the ideology of leadership that prevails and the kind of study of leadership that goes along with it. Leaders tend to be connected with gods, devils and magic.⁽³³⁾ Even the small tribe breathes these qualities into its leaders. The elite

"knows better"; we say: they deal directly with leaders, they are leaders, they coopt leaders. They make policies. They live by the ideas of sacredness, exaggerated prowess, distorted self-images doting upon omens, symbols, dreams, and unearthliness. And science in this period, if it exists, debunks. The mass, as it always has and does, believes, and worries and believes all the more. The elite expresses the beliefs, and decides policy according to a social rationale. Science, such as it is, is sceptical and cynical. It explodes myths and is uncomfortable.

What are some of the cases, the evidence? Ahknaton in Egypt, for example, the original Oedipus, who is mad scientist, priest-god, and king, who for all his naturalism in art, philosophy and manners thinks and works in the ideology of the heroic age.⁽³⁴⁾

Also the Bible, to be obvious, where the tests of human leadership are divine inspiration and superhuman heroism, and in the culmination of the line of prophets in the New Testament, where we know the Leader by the deeds, His word, and example.

Primitive peoples, again, extinct or living, whose small and close communities believe the very leadership emanating from their midst is concocted far away -- in magic, intervening ancestors, blood lines and cosmology.

Besides, Freud, Jung and the psychoanalysts bring us up to date by recounting our unconscious needs.⁽³⁶⁾ These are in historical terms (amounting almost, according to Jung, to a collective unconscious memory), and pull us constantly towards an interpretation of the world via the medium of heroes who are quite unlikely to be the type screened and referred to us through the local office of the state unemployment service.

And always, of course, Athenian Greece, where we enjoy the sensation, sometimes dizzying, that in a couple of generations all of man's history and thought are recapitulated and projected. There the Sophists through their alleged representative, Socrates, are held responsible for ruining the state by a frightened elite and populace that are swayed by Los Angeles-type cultists and quacks.⁽³⁷⁾ And then Rome and the Middle Ages of the West, the former through its Republican heroes and the God-Emperor who reigns above a vastly ramifying legal and bureaucratic substructure⁽³⁸⁾, the Middle Ages through a revival of the Homeric Age in the barbarian kings of Norse and sundry genealogy.⁽³⁹⁾ Aristotle is unknown, Plato mysticized, so that the charismatic and divine theories of leadership and decision are given free play until medieval formalism takes the stage.

To sum up the heroic vision of leadership, we say that it is inspiring, but erratic and uncontrollable.

IV. The Age of Law

The legalism and formalism that still lay heavy upon us today began with ancient empires in Egypt, China, Rome, the Talmudic rabbis, Hinduism, the feudal regimes, and the imperial Christian Church.⁽⁴⁰⁾ We discover that the mysterious hero is replaced more and more by the professional authority on rules. He is selected by rules to be a ruler, and he rules by rules. When men revolt against him they set up what they regard as better rules of selection. Federalism begins; representative government begins.⁽⁴¹⁾ Bureaucracy begins.⁽⁴²⁾ Stability, order, deductiveness, and formalism are both tests of recruitment and modes of leadership.⁽⁴³⁾ Society becomes official.

Science in this second period does more than debunk. It becomes constructive. It arranges. It classifies. It wears a black gown and looks like a judge (or the judge looks like a scholar). The great names of social science are Grotius, Locke, the law codifiers of the Continent, the Blackstones and Kents of the Anglo-American world. The literati of China qualify by their recital of poetry and their handwriting,⁽⁴⁴⁾ the Brahmin by ritual,⁽⁴⁵⁾ the diplomats by ritualizing the statecraft coming out of the

Italian Renaissance,⁽⁴⁶⁾ the politicians everywhere, including America, by tedious memorization of law.⁽⁴⁷⁾ And infinite prescriptions describe the modes proper for conducting public business and qualifying for office.

There are three escapists -- Machiavelli and Hobbes are operationalists before their time; Adam Smith and the liberals carve out a refuge in the economy, where by saying no to state intervention, decisions come to be made in a large area by business enterprisers and operators who are informal in style and "know" that what works is right and coopt others of the same ilk. At times, as in the American Constitutional Convention of 1787, the atmosphere of politics is 150 years in the future.

To sum up the legal vision of leadership, we say that it is controllable, but is rigid and unintelligent.

V. The Age of Operationalism

A third age of leadership is tentatively beginning now, and the science of leadership moves in ahead of it, as in the past. There is a new functional frame of mind and approach to problems both pure and applied, and not only in technology but in human relations.

The mass retains much of its ancient desire for a leadership that it can "believe in," not understand or

even control. And many an intellectual, when outside of his own little pond, feels the same want.

The elite in politics moves largely in the patterns of formalism and rules. Political scientists are still lawyers, or more precisely, judges. They are experts on rules and their modifications. In solving problems they think usually of more complications of the rules. Most of the formal devices they deal with are employed to produce leaders who will be responsive to one or another group of interests. Proof of partisanship, stance on issues, tenure of office, prior governmental experience -- such are the stock in trade of leadership theory.

Little attention is paid to producing leaders, or better, groups of leaders, of certain intellectual and moral qualities. Political scientists rarely study leadership systems as scientific problems, but study them as journalism. And they are far too conservative to structure new systems of recruitment and responsiveness.⁽⁴⁸⁾

But meanwhile, other areas of modern life have grown more imaginative and scientific. In business, which enjoyed a laissez-faire preserve, contempt of rules and an ideology of merit flourished.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Scholars, we know, hate the dollar, and we cannot expect them to have written yet in full appreciation of how much the scramble for profits

contributed to the growth of science and a pragmatic society. We are more aware, thanks to the religious puritans who have dominated much of American education, of the positive relation of a non-institutional individualistic theology to science and invention, both physical and social.

How the trends affected ideas of leadership can be explained. A lack of human authorities makes everyman a judge of everyone's merits and a clear-eyed critic of all leadership situations. The greatest innovators of devices of representative government were the English Levellers of the 17th century, the American radicals from 18th and 19th centuries, and the French revolutionary intellectuals.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Besides the absence of authorities, there has been in recent times a complex technology that presented men with ever more social organizations and cleavages to observe, dissent, and put together. The technocratic movement of St. Simon gave way ultimately to the more truly modern vision of American pragmatism.

John Dewey is the father of operationalism. Though they may cite only more recent apostles, the practitioners of the new science of leadership in all fields must harken back to him.⁽⁵¹⁾ I doubt that the genius of Lewin in group dynamics and of Moreno in sociometry would have found so

cordial a reception in America were it not for the great swaths of earth prepared for their plows in American education, business, and thought by American pragmatism. We see the human relations movement, of which the operational theory of leadership is a part, beginning in Dewey who would have it applied everywhere, in schools, churches, businesses and politics.⁽⁵²⁾ Mary Parker Follet one of the first to merge pragmatism with institutional practice was a political scientist who moved into community organization and management intellectual circles with the doctrines of operationalism and pluralism.

Then began the work of Mayo, Roethlisberger, and the distinguished line of researchers into productivity and human relations.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Now the operational era of leadership has become imbedded in certain corporations, insurance companies, military offices, government agencies, school systems, universities and religious seminaries.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The doctrines and their applications are many and not always consistent. I would state them here as they stand in a state of readiness for major advances throughout the social order:

1. Leadership is a definable, often measurable, facet of group behavior.
2. Leadership is a social function with almost innumerable determinants of a social and individual kind.

3. Leading is an applied science in itself and is also the subject of an applied science that can help select "better" leaders and instruct leaders how to lead "better."
4. The science of leadership -- perhaps we should call it duxology -- is like any other science in that, once given value-axioms, it can best proceed by setting forth a complete system of recruiting, training, and testing leaders' propositions for recruiting, regardless of the baggage and beliefs of history and institutions.
5. No area of human action is or should be exempted from the methods and practice of duxology, nor is any human relations problem irrelevant.

In the main, hundreds of studies of group transactionism from the viewpoint of leadership have exposed the essential weaknesses of the legal and formal approach to leadership which was in its turn the outgrowth of primitive magical theories of leadership. They have done so and at the same time provided the basis for a new theory and a new governance of man by delineating the factors that go into influence in groups.

We should not, as political scientists, be intimidated by the strange language and style of new studies. It is difficult to conceive, but once conceived most useful to theory and practice, that the histories of recruitment and

selection procedures in ancient empires, bureaucracies, guild systems, and representative governments are, when re-examined, the myriad and specific manifestations of the science of influence in group dynamics.⁽⁵⁶⁾ And all of the studies of modern-day social psychologists, when they are placed in this light, are either further statements of these myriad ways of organizing selective recruitment or a statement of the fundamentals of leadership that underline all phenotypical, i.e. historical, systems.

For example, when the political system speaks of the majority principle, the social psychologist talks of the impulse towards arriving at norms inside groups. Or, while political scientists talk of long tenure of office and its effects on men, the psychologist might investigate the increase in independent initiating activities occurring in a person the longer he is removed from his reference group setting. Both approaches lay the groundwork for answering the question: Are the majority principle and long tenure of office likely to produce the effects we want on leaders' behavior?

It is a typical irony of the study of movements of thought and institutions that the new duxologists are for the most part themselves caught up ideologically in mass beliefs and old elite practices. That is, typically, their

own revolutionary work is not logically extended to their own ideology. This is not so true when we speak of the giants in the theory of relations between leadership and society, such as Weber, Dewey, Michels, Lewin, Mayo and Lasswell, which is one reason why we should continually resort to the classics while moving ahead. Nor is it so true when we observe the ways in which the new theory of leadership is described and applied in some areas of business, education and the military in America.⁽⁵⁷⁾ It is sadly true of those politicians and political scientists who must continue to exhaust themselves in revivals of mass-democratic dreams of heroes, and in debating old formalistic political arrangements such as apportionments, proposals for laws on the conflict of interests and lobbying, the formal qualifications of the foreign service, etc.

Why do we persist in complicated election systems when their hundreds of devices that are difficult to administer secure merely a certain poorly-defined resulting representation? Why do we not select political leaders as we should select personnel in a rationalized model of a group of defined parameters and functions? Or even as personnel is selected in the most advanced of other institutions? The decline of politics as politics in recent years is notable. Is this a proof that the modes of selecting politicians are from previous epochs, the magical and the

legalistic? An elaborate system is used in various jurisdictions to elect representatives who are unknown to their constituents. Is this the best way of choosing leaders for the democracy of the future?

V. General Conclusions

If the history and analysis of leadership sketched out in these remarks had validity, what may be concluded therefrom?

In the first place, it would appear that a demand for social science in the study of leadership will continue to increase until and unless a reaction sets in in the direction of mass protest. Such a "revolt of the masses" would be compounded of a demand for expressive representation of massive social anxieties and a misunderstanding of the purposes of social science and its applications.

As a counter-force to the development of these massive reactions, social scientists must pay attention to the inculcation of mass attitudes favorable specifically to their work and more generally to religion in a broad sense. Religiousness in the sense of "divine wondering" and the "consolations of philosophy" is perhaps the only known method (and may be the "true" method) whereby collective projections of a human character may be achieved and maintained on a mass basis. Even those who are not religious believers can recognize that the knot that ties the

leader to the divine must be cut. To quote Mahatma Gandhi: "Those who say that religion has nothing to do with politics do not know what religion means."

Thirdly, the specific form which leadership theory can take so as to be both useful to the age and true to the procedures of science is to be found in the theory of leadership as an outgrowth of communications in and among groups. This means operationalism -- the solution of problems through their definition and working out in transactional situations. It means intellectuals must shed ideological commitments to the age of heroes and bureaucracy, and learn the methods of group dynamics, sociometry, systems analysis, and human factors engineering, with all that is represented in these forms from the general fields of psychological and sociological knowledge. And those already highly skilled in these fields can learn how to relate them to the larger historical and political currents. The problem is very large and open-ended. A new society has to be born in new forms of selecting and disciplining leaders.

So who would gainsay that genius of political science -- unknown as yet -- who would work out carefully the applied science of selecting the full range of political leadership for all the necessary functions of politics?