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Leading Minds

# 2

## *Human Development and Leadership*

> A leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don't want to do and like it.
>
> —*Harry Truman*

Human beings are cultural creatures, growing up in societies formed over the centuries by other human beings, and participating more or less energetically in institutions that have evolved over equally long periods. For most of this book, I write within the cultural perspective, simply assuming that humans have been adequately socialized so that they can join these institutions, typically as followers but occasionally as leaders.

As noted in chapter 1, I apply a perspective that is cognitive as well as cultural. I view leadership as a process that occurs within the minds of individuals who live in a culture—a process that entails the capacities to create stories, to understand and evaluate these stories, and to appreciate the struggle among stories. Ultimately, certain kinds of stories will typically become predominant—in particular, stories that provide an adequate and timely sense of identity for individuals who live within a community or institution. This focus on stories presupposes that some individuals are in a position to convey these stories to others, that other individuals can identify with these stories, and that various individuals feel included or excluded once these stories have spread.

Just what kind of a creature can participate in such a community, enter into a world of narrative, and ultimately assume a position as follower, leader, or perhaps both? What sort of mind is needed to gain nurturance from at least certain kinds of stories told by certain kinds of people? I see at work four principal factors, outlined respectively in the next four sections. Two can be summarized briefly; two call for more extended discussion.





### *Humans' Primate Status*

The first factor is our *primate heritage*. In contrast with most other species, the order of primates is organized into hierarchies with *clear dominance relationships among its members*. Primates recognize individual members of their species from an early age, compete with one another for positions within the hierarchy, and ultimately assume specific relationships of dominance or submission to conspecifics.

These processes are most pronounced among males who live on savannah—at first during the rough play of childhood and later, during the serious competition for control of the colony, protection of offspring, and possession of the most desirable females. But dominance hierarchies are also found among female members of various primate species. In comparison with nondominant males, dominant males exhibit characteristic patterns of neurotransmitters (substances that transmit nerve impulses across synapses), such as a greater production of serotonin, and lower overall levels of stress. Intriguingly, when a male's position shifts in the hierarchy, so do these physiological markers. Primates often organize themselves into in-groups and out-groups; there may be an evolutionary advantage in remaining near those to whom one bears the greatest genetic similarity.

The second important component of our primate heritage is the *proclivity to imitate*. The decision about which model to imitate and when to imitate becomes crucial. Imitation is almost always unidirectional: that is, lower-status primates imitate the actions of higher-status conspecifics. However, the choices of behaviors to be imitated are made from a relatively narrow set of options; it would make little sense, for example, to speak of nonhuman primates as putting forth "stories" about their group that can lead other members of their species to develop a new sense of identity or a reconceptualization of the purpose of life.

While seemingly remote from the central topic of this book, our primate heritage is actually fundamental to an appreciation of leadership. For instance, the "dominance processes" observable in nonhuman primates are evident even among preschoolers. Dominant youngsters control toys, initiate and organize games, and help to keep the group together; less-dominant children orient themselves with reference to the more dominant ones and spend much of their time imitating and attempting to curry favor with the more dominant ones. Size, strength, skill, intelligence, attractiveness, and gender all contribute to the determination of which organisms will occupy superior positions in the emerging social hierarchy.

More generally, as primates, we expect a leadership/followership social structure. We also expect struggles for positions of dominance, and we frequently compute our positions within various hierarchies. This is *not* to say

that we are slaves of our species membership. Nondominant cooperative groupings are possible. But those who expect such uncontoured structures to arise easily or to remain unchallenged are innocent of human history as well as human biology.

## *Early Socialization: Self-definition and Group Identification*

The second of the four factors provides further clues about the origins of a sense of group identity. Researchers studying *early socialization of human children* have documented the importance of the establishment in early life of a strong and secure bond of attachment between infant and caretaker. Such an incipient sense of trust—or (less happily) of mistrust—colors the way that individuals react to authority. One's feeling of comfort in the presence of others or, correlatively, one's estrangement from others contributes powerfully to how one aligns oneself in later life with members of one's own group or with more remote groups.

Two other facets of early socialization are also crucial for understanding the processes and phenomena of leadership. One feature is the gradual emergence in the young child of a *sense of self.* As early as the age of eighteen months, young children have already become aware that they exist as separate entities. This awareness is revealed not only in a youngster's accurate use of names and other labels that refer to individuals, including herself, but also in her marvelous sense of affirmation when she peers into a mirror and notices that a mark placed surreptitiously on her face has marred her own appearance.

The other feature of critical importance in early socialization is the *appreciation of how one is similar to certain other individuals.* While youngsters naturally imitate a great deal of what they observe in the behavior of conspecifics who happen to be in their vicinity, this apprehension of similarity soon transcends sheer imitation. Indeed, since Sigmund Freud's time, researchers have spoken about a more complex process called *identification:* a youngster goes well beyond merely recognizing certain properties in common with another and comes to feel akin *in general* to an older model or set of role models. The young child may well *imitate* a person on the street or a puppet on television; but the child *identifies* with an older sibling or with the parent of the same sex, to the extent that he or she internalizes crucial features of that "role model." (Less frequently, youngsters come to identify strongly with age-mates.)

Once such identification begins to consolidate, the child need not directly monitor every action of the model. Instead, he or she can begin to imagine what the model *would do* in a given situation; the identifier can gain pleasure, or suffer shame or guilt, to the extent that he or she succeeds in living up to



the expectations—the ideals—of the role model. Ultimately, effective followers no longer require the regular presence of the leader; they can anticipate his or her stories and themselves inspire other potential audience members.

In general, youngsters identify with those in their immediate circle. It is therefore of great interest when a child comes to identify with someone more remote—for example, the leader of a political or religious group. A fascinating "marker" of many future leaders is their capacity to identify with a more distant authority figure. This identification manifests itself both in efforts to emulate the leader and in a willingness to challenge that leader under certain circumstances.

Two parallel social processes are at work during the early years. The child develops an increasingly complex and differentiated sense of self as an individual; and the child comes to feel an affinity to older individuals in particular, and to one or more social groups in general. These processes continue to unfold throughout childhood and, indeed, for much of the rest of life. In youth, they are often referred to as the formation of identity; in middle age, as components of citizenship; in old age, as a sense of responsibility to succeeding generations.

The end product of these processes of self-definition and identification is an individual as part of a group; as a holder of certain beliefs, attitudes, and values; and as a practitioner of certain behaviors. It is the particular burden of the leader to help other individuals determine their personal, social, and moral identities; more often than not, leaders inspire in part because of how they have resolved their own identity issues.

But role models obviously can exert a range of influences. The growing child may evolve thoughts and actions that are either praiseworthy or undesirable or, as so often happens, simultaneously admirable and loathsome. Moreover, consequences ensue if role models worthy of emulation are not present, or if role models themselves exhibit inconstant or destructive behaviors. In these latter cases, the growing child will probably lack a coherent or integrated sense of self or a developed sense of group membership, and amoral or antisocial actions are likely to emerge. All too often, such an individual is likely to be attracted by demagogues rather than by saints.

## *The Mind of the Five-Year-Old*

Courtesy of our primate heritage and the relatively predictable events of the first few years of life, one can anticipate the formation of the prototypical five-year-old child—someone who, amazingly enough, already possesses the basic ingredients necessary for entering into a leader–follower (or a peer–peer) relationship. That is to say, the five-year-old child already has a sense of himself and of other individuals, as persons and as members of the

group. Children of this age can appreciate simple stories and, indeed, even create simple patterned narratives of their own. In addition, they already have assumed positions (still relatively flexible ones) within various dominance hierarchies and are becoming proficient at recognizing signals of leading, following, and relating as equals in peer–peer interactions.

Thanks to Sigmund Freud and his followers in the psychoanalytic movement, many observers have at least one relatively articulated view of the personality of the young child: an individual who is driven by strong urges, knows what she wants and will strive to get it, has a limited capacity to empathize with others, and exhibits rivalry with siblings as well as strong and often-contradictory "Oedipal" feelings toward her mother and her father. Thanks to the Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget and his fellow cognitive researchers, many observers also have a sense of the thought of the young child as an individual who sees the world largely from her own perspective and who knows the world chiefly through the operation of her sense organs and her motor systems.

Freud and Piaget introduced us to the third of the crucial basic ingredients of leadership—*the mind of the five-year-old child.* But these renowned authorities disagreed on a central point. While both theorists believed that children pass through "stages" in early childhood, they viewed the nature of those stages differently. Freud's affective, or emotional, stages are cumulative. That is, even when a growing individual apparently advances beyond his Oedipal strivings, he continues to experience a similar ensemble of feelings in analogous situations. For example, as an adult, he may well relive his affects of early years when he encounters a demanding boss or a sympathetic therapist.

In contrast, Piaget held that once a child achieves a more advanced cognitive stage, she no longer retains access to the cognitions of an earlier stage. As an example, consider what happens once a child is able to achieve conservation—that state of mind where she appreciates that liquid does not change in amount just because it happens to be poured into a new and differently shaped vessel. According to Piaget, the "more-developed" child no longer retains access to the prior mental state wherein the amount of liquid was judged by its apparent height or width inside a clear container ("it's more because it looks taller"). In fact, the child becomes incredulous when confronted with evidence that she at one time denied the principle of conservation.

As it turns out, neither Freud nor Piaget, the two greatest scholars of human development of our century, had it completely right—or, to phrase it more generously, each was right about his principal concerns. As Freud thought, individuals never lose access to the emotional states and strivings of their childhood. Thus, even renowned and powerful world leaders can reactivate their own feelings of infantile omnipotence (or helplessness), even as they can play on or rekindle the euphoria or rage their followers experienced in early childhood.





By the same token, Piaget correctly described stage transformations in certain "universal" cognitive spheres. Achievements such as gaining an appreciation of the conservation of liquid are essentially permanent; barring dysfunction of the nervous system, individuals retain these more sophisticated belief structures indefinitely. Older persons experience great difficulty in acknowledging that they ever entertained different views about the objects or states of the world—and they cannot, as a rule, think of the world as a young child does.

But these two explorers of the child's mind failed to account adequately for another crucial set of phenomena. From early childhood, children exhibit a keen interest in understanding the world about them—the physical objects (entities ranging from atoms to cars to suns); the biological objects (entities that are alive and entities that move on the basis of their own metabolic energy); and the mind (the existence of mental objects, like thoughts and dreams, as well as the mental receptacles that are metaphorically assumed to house them, like one's memory or one's imagination).

Even without formal instruction, youngsters develop quite powerful notions—often termed "theories"—about these several realms of existence. So, for example, children come to think that heavier objects fall more rapidly than lighter objects; that entities that move are alive, while those that do not, or cannot, move are dead; and that all individuals have minds, but that individuals share similar minds to the extent that they look alike, have the same name, or come from the same neighborhood.

It was to Piaget's great credit that he sensitized child-watchers to these incipient theories held by untutored children. Where Piaget fell short was in his assumption that such misconceptions would necessarily dissolve. By and large, it has now been established that youngsters' initial notions about the physical, biological, and psychological worlds are remarkably robust. Indeed, even students who have taken courses in the formal disciplines typically continue to believe—contrary to fact and contrary to teaching—that an object's mass determines its acceleration; that evolution leads to an optimal species; and that certain valued beliefs are a necessary correlate of membership in a particular family or community group. In fact, the only individuals who seem genuinely and comprehensively to change their views on such topics are the persons that we label as "experts." Only the physicists, biologists, and social analysts in our midst are apparently able to relinquish completely the astonishingly strong and enduring theories of early childhood.

Just as they develop "theories of the world," children also develop coherent notions about everyday activities. Children as young as two or three

already have keen and reliable memories of series of events. By the age of four or five, most children have constructed a large number of "scripts" or "stereotypes" or "scenarios." These cognitive frames capture the regular features, as well as the optional ones, that come to mark such recurrences as birthday parties, trips to the supermarket, or dinner at a fast-food restaurant. In the face of much contradictory evidence, the "facts" of such scripts do change. One can come to accept—and even to expect—birthday parties that feature a dessert of fruit rather than cake or ice cream, or restaurant sequences where one pays upon ordering rather than after eating the meal. But by and large, early scripts, stereotypes, and scenarios prove surprisingly impervious to change.

In many ways, the mind of the five-year-old is wondrous, and it can be strikingly imaginative. It exhibits an adventurousness, a willingness to entertain new possibilities, and an openness to unfamiliar practices that is most attractive and that older individuals are well advised to try to maintain—in the way that the Picassos and Einsteins among us seem able to do. At least at times, the young child probes to the essence of the matter in a way that eludes more jaundiced adults (in the phrase of an old radio program, "Kids say the darndest things"). Yet, in an uncomfortably large number of cases, one may say that the five-year-old has already made up his or her mind. The theories and scripts of the young child are already consolidated and, in the absence of compelling circumstances that are repeated frequently, the growing individual shows little inclination to change.

This state of affairs proves crucial for an investigation of leadership. When an individual provides leadership for a group of experts in his chosen domain, he typically does so by virtue of the work that he executes—thereby exemplifying *indirect* leadership. But even when the leadership takes place through the *direct* and explicit communication of a message, it is possible for that leader to address fellow members of the domain in a sophisticated way. A physicist talking to physicists can assume that his audience members understand the principles of gravity, acceleration, and relativity; a diplomat or a social analyst speaking to peers in her craft can assume that her audience members can transcend stereotypes associated with different national or cultural groups.

The case is completely different, however, for individuals who presume to provide leadership across domains. Those who address a more broad-based institution like the church or a large and heterogeneous group like the inhabitants of a nation must at least begin by assuming that most of their audience members have a well-stocked five-year-old mind. So long as one traffics chiefly with theories and views already possessed by the five-year-old, one should be able to bring about modest change. Thus, when a political leader stresses the importance of supporting one's own group, while another leader



emphasizes the importance of helping others, both can expect to engage the five-year-old mind. But when a leader seeks to promulgate a story that is more sophisticated—that calls, for example, for a broader definition of one's social group—she can succeed only if she educates the unschooled minds of the audience. In what follows, my frequent references to the "unschooled mind" serve as an encapsulation of ideas that children develop in the opening years of life.

## *The Attainment of Expertise in Domains*

The five-year-old has advanced as far as she can on the basis of information that is readily accessible to her senses and her motor systems, as well as the set of concepts and theories that are most readily (and un-self-consciously) acquired by members of our symbol-using species. However, self-education can go only so far. It is not surprising that most societies initiate some kind of formal education in the years following the first half-decade of life. The results of this process of education—*the attainment of expertise in various domains*—constitutes the fourth ingredient crucial to the explication of leadership.

In preliterate or traditional societies, an apprenticeship is the preferred method of education. Youngsters are placed near "masters"; and through example, practice, and occasional explicit testing, they eventually attain the traits and practices associated with one or more varieties of expertise. In literate societies, those who are expected ultimately to attain influential positions almost invariably attend school. There they acquire the basic literacies, a certain mode of comportment, and, insofar as possible, the skills that allow them to pursue a vocation valued in the broader society. When youngsters work comfortably and productively with masters and teachers, they are likely to identify with them, to feel akin to them, and to anticipate that they may one day be able to fill their shoes.

Domains vary widely. Piaget specialized in the study of domains that are considered to be within the purview of every ordinary human being—such as an appreciation of how to classify objects or how to make inferences from a scene or story. Accomplishment in certain domains is considered virtually mandatory within a culture—for example, in a modern industrial society, it is expected that everyone will attend school and at least master the basic literacies.

But most cultures also feature a host of domains that are neither universally nor culturally mandated. Modern industrial cultures, for example, offer people the option of mastering domains that will lead to articulated career paths, such as those of a biologist, a lawyer, or an educator; and they also feature domains that call on idiosyncratic skills, such as chess or the cultivation of roses.

Just which domains or disciplines ought to be mastered by a particular individual turns out to be a complex issue. Some domains are mandated by an individual's culture or subculture. For example, most youngsters schooled in China are able to make ink-and-brush paintings of flora and fauna, and most Russian Jewish boys were traditionally expected to play the violin and to be at least passable chess players. However, other domains are distinctly optional, depending on the given interests and tempos of the family, the moment at which one happens to be born, or the particular aptitudes, interests, and skills displayed by an individual.

Becoming a viable member of the adult culture involves the identification of domains in which one will achieve expertise. In most cultures throughout history, the decision has been made as a matter of course, either by the accident of birth or on the basis of a mandate issued by a parent or a chief. In modern circumstances, the selection of domains is more likely to be made by the individuals themselves, though often in consultation with (and perhaps in identification with) knowledgeable adults. As an individual becomes an expert, he becomes able to appreciate the accomplishments of the masters of his chosen domain, including feats sufficiently novel to change the topography of that domain. He has truly transcended the limits of the five-year-old mind.

However, in areas where he is not expert, or in areas where he is considered as part of a heterogeneous and largely unschooled group (and may be content to be so considered), he is likely to encounter (and to apprehend) messages that are much simpler. Most individuals today deal daily with two contrasting presentations: sophisticated indirect leadership in their domains of accomplishment; and relatively "unschooled" messages from direct leaders of large-scale institutions.

## *Expertise in the Realm of Persons*

Until recently, observers have searched for early signs of gifts primarily in two sorts of domains. One group of youngsters is singled out as potentially accomplished in school activities; these are the culturally gifted children who are picked out by the schoolteacher or, more recently, identified by use of an intelligence test or some cognate measure of scholastic aptitude. Another group of youngsters comes to be identified because of a burgeoning talent in a specific domain, such as music, chess, sports, or mathematics. Because of acute pattern-detection capacities or mnemonic skills or physical dexterity in these domains, and often aided by parents or masters who are skilled in instruction and ambitious for their charges, these youngsters are deemed "at promise" for outstanding achievement in these domains.

Certain societies may display comparable concern with individuals who





have special gifts in the personal realm (which I have elsewhere termed the "personal intelligences"). I have in mind here individuals who are exquisitely sensitive to the needs and interests of others, and/or individuals who are correlatively sensitive to their own personal configuration of talents, needs, aspirations, and fears. One might assume, for example, that those societies which search among scores of youngsters for future religious or military or political leaders (a pertinent case being the selection in early childhood of the future Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet) have become superbly attentive to telltale "markers" for these talents.

Many organizations in our contemporary society have the potential to pick out individuals who may ultimately provide leadership, either the indirect variety that operates chiefly within a domain (like a particular science, art, or craft) or the direct form that has the potential to cut across different skill and knowledge bases (such as leadership of a political entity). Athletic teams, scouting troops, religious groups, various kinds of extracurricular clubs, and even the regular classroom are breeding grounds for future leaders. Sometimes the search for future leaders is explicit; more frequently, leaders are allowed to emerge and are informally identified as such. And certainly, specific institutions—such as the elite independent schools in Great Britain—have long thought of themselves as trainers of future leaders: legend has it that the epochal Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton.

While most individuals clearly do not attain expertise across diverse disciplines and domains, perhaps they do become expert in the ability to understand other persons. After all, we all interact with others from an early age, and perhaps we all gain significant skills in the human realm. I think it is reasonable to conclude that, as we mature, nearly all of us become familiar with certain more complex scripts (such as those involving ambivalence or jealousy or altruism), and nearly all of us develop some capability in appreciating the minds and motivations of other people. Yet, a myriad of social-psychological studies have revealed that most of us are not very skilled at detecting deception or the underlying motivations for actions; perhaps even more troublingly, most of us are not nearly as good at such detection as we *think* we are. Apparently, not even social expertise can be attained in the absence of dedicated study.

But social expertise does appear to be achieved by certain individuals. During the Florentine Renaissance, Lorenzo de Medici carried out a complex diplomatic negotiation at the age of fourteen. A readily recognizable example from recent American history is President Lyndon Johnson. Often called a legislative genius, he had an uncanny ability to put together unlikely coalitions that would support controversial bills. He once explained how he succeeded in securing passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act: "The challenge was to learn what it was that mattered to each of these men, understand

which issues were critical to whom and why. Without that understanding nothing is possible. Knowing the leaders and understanding their organizational need let me shape my legislative program to fit both their needs and mine." Unfortunately, this skill did not help him in the prosecution of foreign policy.

## *The Antecedents of Leading*

Earlier in this chapter I reviewed four factors that make possible the phenomena of leading and following in our species. To my knowledge, however, few systematic efforts have been undertaken to pinpoint the early markers of leadership. Some of the leaders-to-be I studied were clearly popular among, and sought after by, their peers from an early age; but many others had childhoods that were marked by loneliness, isolation, or frankly antisocial (if not criminal) behavior. Churchill spent much of his time alone, and Mussolini was twice expelled from school for stabbing fellow students. Some future leaders within domains, like Freud, reported an early fascination with issues of power and strategy, while others, like Einstein, were essentially uninterested in the world of other human beings.

Still, a few promising generalizations have been proposed. Future leaders have often lost fathers at an early age. According to one study, over 60 percent of major British political leaders lost a parent in childhood, more often the father. It may be that children with surviving parents take their social cues from the behaviors and attitudes of their mothers and fathers, while those who have early been deprived of a parent are stimulated (or feel pressured) to formulate their own precepts and practices in the social and moral domains. Their precocious dependence on themselves may place them in a favorable position for directing the behaviors of others. The French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre claimed that in the absence of a father, an individual is forced to make his own choices. However, the pain associated with the early loss seems to endure, and many of the once-bereaved leaders have reported never having lost a pervasive feeling of loneliness.

Another recurrent pattern among future leaders is a contrasting set of relations with their parents. According to the historian James McGregor Burns, Gandhi, Lenin, and Hitler each enjoyed a positive relationship with one parent and a negative relationship with the other. Stalin's mother doted on him, while his drunken father beat him savagely. Feelings of ambivalence accordingly predominate, and, it is conjectured, the impulse to wield power represents an attempt to resolve this anxiety-producing conflict. From all indications, President Bill Clinton's childhood was rife with parental tensions: he never knew his biological father, he did not get along at all with his violent stepfather, and he was called on increasingly to mediate among the adults in



his household. He reportedly first began to consider a career in politics when he discovered, as a schoolchild, that he was able to resolve conflicts among his peers.

Some individuals have traits that make them stand out even at an early age. At least some charismatic leaders, such as Charles de Gaulle and John F. Kennedy, are blessed with a striking appearance that draws others to them. Others, like Gandhi or Hitler, are ordinary or even peculiar in appearance. Their charisma may stem from their unusual personalities or mien or from a remarkable life course. The psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has pointed out that some leaders have distinguished themselves precisely because they have long spurned the socially accepted manner of achieving one's goals and yet—despite such defiance—have achieved success. These iconoclasts therefore strike observers as having privileged knowledge about the future, even though their stories may ultimately lead audience members down destructive pathways.

Scholars have discerned among leaders an inclination from early childhood for risk taking and a willingness to go to great lengths—often in defiance of others, including those in positions of authority—in order to achieve their ends. A motive to gain power—either for its own sake or in pursuit of a specific aim—is invariably present. The capacity to take risks speaks to a confidence that one will at least sometimes attain success; implacability in the face of opposition likewise reflects a willingness to rely on oneself and not to succumb to others' strictures and reservations.

Such toughness may be achieved by leaders at some considerable cost to themselves. Leaders often exhibit the wounds from their early losses and have a tenacity, even a ruthlessness, that may prove difficult for others to comprehend. In his biography of John Churchill, Winston Churchill commented:

> Famous men are usually the product of an unhappy childhood. The stern compression of circumstances, the twinge of adversity, the spur of slights and taunts in early years are needed to evoke that ruthless fixity of purpose and tenacious mother-wit without which great actions are seldom accomplished.

Both the indirect and the direct leaders I studied seem from an early age to have stood apart from their contemporaries. They have felt that they were special and, at least in some cases, capable of feats beyond those achieved by normal individuals. In cases where this sense of specialness was not an early attribute, one can identify moments when the perception of being "chosen" was confirmed. For Martin Luther, it occurred when he became overwhelmed by especially flagrant abuses of the church; for Martin Luther King, Jr., it occurred when he discovered that he was capable of leading the

Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. For creative individuals—indirect leaders who work in circumscribed domains of expertise—this feeling of "difference" need not pose any particular problem. Direct leaders, however, must feel simultaneously apart from yet constantly in touch with their contemporaries.

My theory of multiple intelligences points to a hitherto missing and possibly important piece of the puzzle. Most leaders obviously have gifts in the realm of personal intelligence—they know a lot about how to reach and affect other human beings. Such knowledge, however, stands in danger of being locked inside, in the absence of a way of expressing it. As I illustrate in subsequent chapters, nearly all leaders are eloquent in voice, and many are eloquent in writing as well. They do not merely have a promising story; they can tell it persuasively. A mark of the future leader is a generous degree of linguistic intelligence—the capacity and the inclination to use words well. When such linguistic intelligence is yoked to considerable personal intelligence, one has the makings of an effective communicator and, perhaps, a promising leader.

## *The Antecedents of Following*

Just as the origins of outstanding leadership have been little studied, the features of those who become followers remain shrouded in mystery. One might, of course, extend the term *follower* to all individuals who are not formally designated as leaders, in which case the "problem" of followership per se evaporates. Accordingly, it is useful to distinguish between two groups: those who are especially prone to enlist as followers in a cause, and those who exhibit the proclivity to follow that exists, at least latently, in every human being.

All notable leaders have had their followers, of course; and in some cases, one can identify individuals who have devoted their lives—who have even given their lives—in support of the story propounded by "their" leaders. Napoléon attributed half of his genius as a general to the fact that he could inspire individuals to give up their lives to aid his cause; the other half, he is reputed to have said, lay in his ability to figure out with great accuracy just how long it would take to transport a herd of elephants from Paris to Cairo.

Two possibilities about the "gift" of followership merit consideration. On the one hand, it seems likely that followers are cut from a different cloth than leaders—that, for example, they are perennially searching for the very authority figure that the leader has spurned. Many "believers" migrate from one group to another, always in search of the perfect community, perhaps ever destined to be disappointed. However, chronic followers may share





some important properties with leaders. Napoléon quipped that he had become a great leader because he had been an outstanding follower. A leader of the French Revolution echoed: "You know, I must follow the people; am I not their leader?" And many future leaders, like the young George Marshall and Angelo Roncalli (when he was a fledgling priest, long before his selection as the pope), gained inspiration from the model leaders whom they themselves "followed" or identified with during their formative years. What may bind "born" leaders and "born" followers together is their common need for a structure, a hierarchy, and a mission—needs stemming from a primate heritage that may be less binding in those who can "take or leave" membership in a group.

Followers may differ from one another in their attitudes toward power. Some, like the youthful Stalin or Mao Zedong, are attracted to movements that feature strong leaders because they themselves are ultimately (if still unconsciously) interested in achieving and deploying power. Others may prefer the role of a follower precisely because they wish to see (and to feel) the reins of power being held by someone else. The physicist-turned-anthropologist Richard Morris has indicated that most people do not attempt to attain leadership of a social group: "most individuals will placidly accept whatever status they have attained . . . after they reach a certain age, most of them lose their drive to struggle upward." Both groups of followers probably differ from those who turn out to be "rescuers," such as the otherwise-unexceptional individuals who, during the Nazi era, risked severe penalties as they helped those whom they considered to be unfairly singled out for persecution.

While chronic followers may find themselves attracted to a parade of disparate leaders, most potential followers prove more discriminating. As for features that make certain leaders appealing, young children are attracted to the overt features of individuals: size, strength, physical attractiveness, and control of desired resources. By adolescence, additional features become important: the power of the individual's ideas (or stories), their coherence, and their appropriateness to a particular historical moment. And, equally, an ensemble of personal characteristics may enhance the leader's status: those leaders who exhibit charisma, spirituality, and an enigmatic blend of ordinariness and extraordinariness often appeal to others.

Two final points about followership: First, some followers are attracted to certain features (for example, perceived strength or power), while others are attracted to quite different features (for example, originality of ideas or spiritual luminosity). Physical charisma differs from intellectual or spiritual charisma. Second, effective leaders are often distinguished by the fact that they exhibit an ensemble of these traits (Robert Maynard Hutchins was both physically attractive and intellectually scintillating) or that they can appeal simultaneously to different kinds of people (Margaret Mead's lifestyle mag-

netized certain followers, while her ideas about cross-cultural investigations impressed others).

## The Developed Leader

In considering the features that attract followers to leaders, I have touched on the "end state" of development—the question of what it means to be a full-blown leader. In one sense, this question may seem premature; after all, I am examining a range of leaders precisely so that I can extract the most important features. Also, no leader is ever fully realized; at most, one can observe individuals who are in the course of attaining greater skills and heightened effectiveness. Still, if one keeps in mind these reservations, one can identify four factors that appear crucial to the practice of effective leadership.

1. *A Tie to the Community (or Audience).* It is a truism that a leader cannot exist without followers. What needs emphasis is that the relationship between the leader and the followers is typically ongoing, active, and dynamic. Each takes cues from the other; each is affected by the other. In the various case studies, we can observe the kinds of concerns, needs, and stories that animate members of the community; and we can note the way in which the leader may alter his stories to take these changing features into account. Such ongoing intercourse with members of one or more groups characterizes leaders as diverse as Robert Hutchins and Jean Monnet from an early age. Ultimately, if the tie is to endure, leaders and followers must work together to construct some kind of an institution or organization that embodies their common values.

2. *A Certain Rhythm of Life.* A leader must be in regular and constant contact with her community. At the same time, however, the leader must know her own mind, including her own changing thoughts, values, and strategies. For that reason, it is important that the leader find the time and the means for reflecting, for assuming distance from the battle or the mission. I term this tendency "going to the mountaintop," with the understanding that such a retreat (or advance) can occur literally—as in the case of Moses—or metaphorically, as in the case of de Gaulle and his daily walks. Periods of isolation—some daily, some extending for months or even years—are as crucial in the lives of leaders as are immersions in a crowd.

The relationship between isolation and immersion differs appreciably between two kinds of leaders. For the individual who leads indirectly through his work in a domain, most time is spent working alone or in small groups; only occasionally is it necessary, or advisable, for the individual to expose himself directly to the reactions of a larger and more diverse audience. In contrast, the individual who would directly lead a diverse and changing ensemble needs to spend considerable time in the company of her followers; but this individual also requires time and space in which to reflect as well. When an individual like Clinton seemingly avoids opportunities for solitary reflection, there arises the possibility that he may not wish to know his own mind.



3. *An Evident Relation between Stories and Embodiments.* Throughout this book, I argue that leaders exercise their influence in two principal, though contrasting, ways: through the stories or messages that they communicate, and through the traits that they embody. Sometimes, the single leader alternates in emphases. For example, as prime minister, Churchill first developed a story about the need to maintain the glory of Great Britain, and he then embodied a courageous stand through his activities during the Battle of Britain. Some leaders, like J. Robert Oppenheimer or Ronald Reagan, place a greater emphasis on the stories that they tell; others, like George C. Marshall or Pope John XXIII, are valued more for the traits that they embody than for the already established, though recently neglected, stories that they relate. Some features, such as an explanation of the factors leading to a current imbroglio or window of opportunity, lend themselves to the relating of stories, while others, such as the importance of courage or of innovation, are better conveyed through embodiment.

A tension may develop between stories and embodiments. Indeed, many political leaders have gotten into trouble when the facts of their own lives seemed to contradict the stories that they were conveying. For example, it became difficult for Richard Nixon to champion the theme of "law and order" when his own administration was under attack for lawless acts. But in the happier event, stories and embodiments reinforce one another. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s story about the willingness to withstand pain and criticism was exemplified in his actions. Moreover, it is a stroke of leadership genius when stories and embodiments appear to fuse, or to coalesce, as in a dream—when, as the poet William Butler Yeats would have it, one cannot tell the dancer from the dance.

As for the possible interactions of stories and embodiments in the earlier lives of leaders, I must again speculate. Alas, this kind of information has not been highlighted in most biographical accounts. My expectation is that individuals' stories often grow out of life experiences and therefore come to be naturally embodied in the presentation of self. Moreover, at times when an individual's stories clearly clash with his or her embodied behaviors, a hostile response on the part of audience members is likely to discourage such blatant disjunctions.

4. *The Centrality of Choice.* Within a primate horde, an individual organism may prevail through brute force. An analogous instance exists among human beings when an individual finds himself in a leadership position because he has complete control over the instruments of power and/or maintains his position through violence, terror, and total ruthlessness.

In this study my focus falls on those individuals who have attained positions of leadership in a situation where they and their followers exerted some kind of choice, and where a measure of stability exists, without the temptation or need to invoke instruments of terror. Only in such instances of "leadership-through-choice" does it make sense to think of stories being told, virtues being embodied, or opinions being changed through example and persuasion. Nonetheless, it is worth keeping in mind the Stalins and Saddams of the world, for they did pursue paths to their positions of authority that in some respects resembled those taken by less brutal leaders. They, too, had to persuade, to adjust, and to highlight or mute nuances, depending on the predilections and anxieties of those whom they aspired to lead. In their cases, however, attainment of absolute power ultimately corrupted them absolutely. And it is also worth noting that some individuals who remain in temporary or elective offices may come to think of themselves as omnipotent and then act accordingly. President Franklin D. Roosevelt pulled back (as in the case of the scheme to pack the Supreme Court) when he had gone too far; Margaret Thatcher (as in the case of an unpopular, regressive tax) did not.

## *Symbols and Communication*

During the first few years of life, an individual's knowledge is secured primarily through the operation of sensory and motor capacities—the only cognizing capacities available to other organisms, including nonhuman primates. What distinguishes us from all other creatures, of course, is our ability to deploy, understand, and even create whole ensembles of symbols and symbol systems.

By the age of five or so, most normal children have already become experts in "symbolizing." They have attained a distinct grasp of a whole gamut of symbol systems, including natural language; gestural language; and the symbolic systems involved in picturing, numeracy, music, and other means of communication favored in their society. Equally remarkably, they attain this "first-order" symbolic mastery with almost no formal tutelage. Indeed, as has often been pointed out, if we had to understand the nature and operation of natural language in order to teach youngsters to speak, the species would long since have become extinct or at least mute.

It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that, after the first few years of life, cognitive development becomes equivalent to symbolic development.





Moreover, this process of ever-heightened symbol use continues unabated when the child enters school or other educational milieus. In any modern society, a primary burden of schools is to teach second-order symbol systems—those written notations that themselves refer to the first-order symbol systems like spoken language and number systems. More esoteric symbol systems, ranging from those employed in the physical sciences to those used in music or dance or football notations, may also be acquired. And whether she is enrolled in formal schooling or in some kind of apprenticeship, the student comes to learn the various moves entailed in the symbolic systems that she must master.

Symbol systems are means of thinking and categorizing; equally, they are means of communicating. Nonhuman primates lack these means and thus must achieve their influence largely through the exercise of brute power. Human beings, in contrast, have options for asserting leadership. As discussed later, the mastery of the linguistic symbol system is crucial for most direct leaders, since leadership is maintained largely through the creative use of stories. Many leaders—ones I term "linguistically intelligent"—are distinguished early on by the mastery of storytelling; and many others make the mastery of storytelling—whether through persuasive oratory or through well-crafted written documents—a primary goal. It was said of de Gaulle that his political destiny

> depended most constantly on words. The soldier—brought out of obscurity by writing a book; the rebel—made into the leader of a nation by a speech; the man in opposition—who survives politically because of a few interviews with the press; the President, ruling by radio and television; and finally, the lone wolf—in touch by words alone with the fickle mob.

In contrast, individuals working in traditional domains and disciplines need not be masters of natural language or prodigies of storytelling. It did not matter how well Einstein spoke German or English or how well Picasso wrote French or Spanish. What mattered for these indirect leaders was their mastery of the symbol systems of twentieth-century physics and painting, respectively. Such individuals might have eventually become known through their person; but they were already known, by proxy, because their thought processes and experiences were conveyed in the strings of symbols—more informally, the works—that they produced. They were fortunate to live in cultures that have evolved several powerful modes of communication.

Leaders traffic as well in another kind of communication—communication through embodiment. Sometimes leaders communicate by the most elegant and simple of symbols—Gandhi nakedly facing his enemies, Churchill issuing a defiant sign for victory, Martin Luther King, Jr., standing resolutely

behind bars. One may ask whether such symbolic communication, such embodiment of virtues, qualifies as a story. While the answer to this question is to a certain extent a semantic one, I suggest that these visual presentations, in and of themselves, cannot send an unambiguous message. It is only because these individuals are already recognized, and their causes already understood, that these images of embattlement can function in powerful ways. We might say that since the story has already been assimilated, an illustration of it suffices.

Any scholar who produces a work for publication is, however modestly, making a bid for indirect leadership. I would not have written this book if I did not want my words to affect the way that my colleagues—and the general public—think about phenomena of leadership. In particular, my decision to survey the continuum from indirect to direct leadership represents an effort to change conceptions of leadership, to bring out, through an ordered set of case studies, the array of stories and embodiments that link the accomplishments of an Einstein or a Picasso with the feats of a Thatcher or a Monnet, that give flesh to the words of Keynes at the head of chapter 1.

While I have resisted the temptation to propose a "model" of leadership, I have introduced a number of themes that have guided my thinking. In this chapter, I have reviewed those facets of human development that seem most germane to an understanding of leadership: humans' primate heritage; the early emergence of a sense of the self and of others; the development in early childhood of powerful theories or "scripts" about the world; the marks of emerging expertise in the domains valued in one's society; and the specific ensemble of traits that may mark the emerging leader and the emerging follower. We may think of these elements as basic ingredients out of which a comprehensive model of leadership can be constructed.

Whatever facets of leadership may be shared by humans and other primates, the importance of symbolic communication is essentially restricted to our own species. Only we humans spend the bulk of our time trafficking in symbols. While human cultures host a variety of symbolic systems and messages, all place a special premium on those strings of words that we call stories. It is appropriate to turn at this point in "my story" to the compelling stories that lie at the heart of leadership.

# 3

## *The Leaders' Stories*

All leadership takes place through the communication of ideas to the minds of others.

—*Charles Cooley*

In a wonderfully evocative short story, the Chilean writer Isabel Allende relates the tale of Belisa Crepusculario, a beautiful young woman from a desperately poor background who makes a living by selling words. She sells memorized verses for five centavos, improves the quality of dreams for seven centavos, writes love letters for nine centavos, and, for twelve centavos, invents insults that can be directed toward mortal enemies.

Belisa's life changes dramatically when she is seized by a ferocious warrior known simply as "the Colonel." After his men rough her up and almost kill her, the Colonel explains the reason for this unwarranted and wanton treatment. "I want to be President," he declares. Moreover, he explains, he wants to become president not by seizing power but by gaining the majority of the popular vote—in my terms, he wants to become a leader, to gain authority by choice. "To do that I have to talk like a candidate. Can you sell me the words for a speech?" he implores.

Belisa creates a tapestry of words that promise to touch the minds of men and the intuitions of women. She then reads the speech aloud three times to the illiterate Colonel so he can memorize and deliver it. And deliver it he does, countless times during the election season, in an effort to convince citizens to vote for him. As Allende's narrator indicates: "They were dazzled by the clarity of the Colonel's proposals and the poetic lucidity of his arguments, infected by his powerful wish to right the wrongs of history, happy for the first time in their lives." In the canonically happy ending to this fable, the candidate wins the voters' support, and Belisa gains the Colonel's love.

Epitomizing this chapter's epigraph, from the American sociologist Charles Cooley, this brief story captures important truths about language

and leadership. Through sheer physical power, one can gain—and maintain—a position of authority over other people. This is how the Colonel had proceeded in the past. If one wishes to persuade others, however, it is necessary to convince them of one's point of view. Illiterate and inarticulate ("War's what I know," he admits to Belisa), the Colonel finds himself at the mercy of a woman who knows how to string words together compellingly. By using her words, he gains legitimacy. Homer underscored these complementary strands when he said of the heroic warrior Achilles that he was trained as a doer of deeds and a maker of speeches.

In recent years, social scientists have come to appreciate what political, religious, and military figures have long known: that stories (narratives, myths, or fables) constitute a uniquely powerful currency in human relationships. Many scholars have pondered whether the essence of the story is the existence of a sympathetic protagonist, the positing of plans and goals, the onset of a crisis that must be resolved, the initial buildup and subsequent release of a feeling of tension in an audience member, or the creation of a distinctive narrational voice. Many have sought to identify the prototypical narrative—the hero's quest, the journey away from home followed by the ultimate return there, or the clash between good and evil. Some have looked at the means available to the storyteller: logic, rhetoric, characterization, humor, and manipulation of the audience's mood and expectations. And still others have investigated the primary purposes of stories—the binding together of a community, the tackling of basic philosophical or spiritual questions, the conferral of meaning on an otherwise chaotic existence.

A definitive account of the nature and purpose of stories, scripts, and/or narratives may prove elusive. As the British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein showed in his analysis of the concept of "games," kinds of stories may bear at most a "family resemblance" to one another. For my purposes, this state of affairs is perfectly acceptable. In this study, I use the term *story* in a broad sense. While I focus on *narratives* in the linguistic sphere, I include *invented accounts* in any symbol system, ranging from a new form of explanation in the physical sciences to a novel mode of expression in dance or poetry. In addition, I span the poles introduced in chapter 2: the *overt* or *propositional account* communicated directly by the leader and the *vision of life that is embodied* in the actions and the life of the leader. True, I could create a separate term for each of these variants of the story. However, this tack would not only complicate the account but also suggest, misleadingly, that it is readily possible to distinguish a story from a fable or a structured dance sequence, or a message from an embodiment, a vision, or a dream.

I wish to underscore a contrasting claim. Using the linguistic as well as the nonlinguistic resources at their disposal, leaders attempt to communicate, and to convince others, of a particular view, a clear vision of life. The term





*story* is the best way to convey this point. I argue that the story is a basic human cognitive form; the artful creation and articulation of stories constitutes a fundamental part of the leader's vocation. Stories speak to both parts of the human mind—its reason and emotion. And I suggest, further, that it is *stories of identity*—narratives that help individuals think about and feel who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed—that constitute the single most powerful weapon in the leader's literary arsenal.

## *Stories through the Life Cycle*

Infants and toddlers communicate with their caretakers, often in surprisingly sophisticated ways. They can indicate want, fear, surprise, regret, and emotional well-being. By the age of five or so, the young child has already become a creator and a consumer of stories. These stories may be punctate, consisting of a single happening; or they may be picaresque, containing a large sequence of loosely coupled vignettes. For all their variety, stories at this time of life share a basic simplicity. In one especially common story, which I have termed the "Star Wars" plot, two forces or individuals (A and B) are opposed to each other (as in the series of *Star Wars* movies). There may well be a protracted struggle between A and B. In the end, A—generally identified with the good—is likely to prevail, though there are instances where B triumphs, most often temporarily. In nearly all cases, the child identifies strongly with the individual(s) and the cause(s) of Force A.

So powerful a place does this Star Wars scenario occupy in the mind of the child that it tends to impose itself on other narratives that enter the child's consciousness. In its initial form, a story may actually feature three or more protagonists, and the struggle among forces may be multifaceted, protracted, and indecisive. When it comes to the re-creation or retelling of this story, however, the revised version tends to coalesce around a simpler form: multiple participants are reduced to two (or to two "teams" or "forces"), and a subtle and ambiguous conflict reverts to a Manichaean struggle between good and evil.

One can behold this simple form at work both in the realm of imaginative play and in the child's reasoning about everyday events. Five-year-olds, with their *rigid dualities*, cherish fairy tales and other magical adventures where the forces of light and darkness clash. They can identify with the light, while both learning about and being attracted to the dark. By the same token, when asked about situations that arise in their own lives, youngsters also bring to bear this dualistic form of thinking, this construction of the world in terms of binary conflicts. And so, queried about friendship, they are prone to consider peers as all benevolent or, more rarely, as totally malevolent. By the same token, when pondering a moral dilemma, they are likely to see an issue

in stark terms. For example, the decision to steal a drug in order to save someone's life is seen, alternatively, as a heroic act or a dastardly one that merits Draconian punishment.

Why zoom in on the narrational proclivities of young children, when I am concerned here with the stories told by disciplinary or national leaders? The answer is central to my purpose: Adults never lose their sensitivity to these basic narratives. And it is often the leader who can draw on or exploit the universal sensitivity to a Star Wars plot or a Grimm's fairy tale—the leader who can speak directly to the "unschooled mind"—that succeeds in convincing an audience of the merits of his or her program, policy, or plan. It is surely no accident that President Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative—an effort in the mid-1980s to build a shield that would protect the United States from a nuclear attack by the Soviet Union—quickly came to be known as the "Star Wars program." Reagan's so-called Star Wars initiative, often derided as simplistic by his political opponents, was considered by Margaret Thatcher to be the most important decision of Reagan's entire eight-year presidency.

But while they often remain "unschooled" in various domains, individuals can go beyond the five-year-old mind, and, indeed, many do so in the realm of narrative. If the five-year-old sees matters in terms of black and white, the ten-year-old is likely to exhibit a much more measured and evenhanded view of events. Indeed, the ten-year-old is *fair to a fault*. In considering two characters, she embraces the possibility that each harbors facets of both goodness and evil. The ten-year-old takes into account the intention underlying an action, as well as the consequences thereof.

If the five-year-old tends to be ruthlessly rigid, and the ten-year-old to be excessively fair, the adolescent—to be dubbed here as a fifteen-year-old—is superbly appreciative of a mutiplicity of interests and perspectives. In formulaic terms, we can say that the fifteen-year-old *revels in relativism*. No matter how strongly a certain personality or position might be promoted, the fifteen-year-old remains a tad skeptical of that perspective. Gods have flaws, devils harbor virtues, and the grass is always greener on the other side. If an entity appears in one way, it can also be conceptualized in a very different manner. Friends are seen as capable of many kinds of acts, and a friendship is conceived of as a dynamic and changing relationship. Any seemingly moral act may harbor in it the seeds of iniquity, just as the apparently amoral act may be justified in the light of some hitherto-unrecognized principle.

Not every adolescent achieves the stance of the relativist. Some individuals remain as egocentric as the five-year-old; quite a few more never transcend the conventional morality of the ten-year-old. In our contemporary society, many fifteen-year-olds flirt with relativism, but they often revert within a few years to an earlier, less fluid form of understanding and reasoning. Nascent tendencies toward relativism are slapped down quite decisively in traditional or in totalitarian societies. The unschooled or the less schooled mind beckons seductively and persistently.



Still, it is worth mentioning a more sophisticated stance toward the world, one that we might associate with the discerning twenty-five-year-old or the mature fifty-year-old. Such an individual can be said to synthesize two apparently warring sentiments: on the one hand, an awareness of the relativity of values and, on the other hand, the need to take a stance and to declare a specific position as more appropriate, at least in a given context. In his most eloquent speeches, the Roman master rhetorician and advocate Cicero sought to present the rounded view of each of the warring positions, but in the end he always came down squarely on one side of the dispute. I term this perspective a *personal integration*.

Let me put these four perspectives to work on a single example, Isabel Allende's Colonel on the campaign stump. Suppose that he is representing the interests of the peasants in a Latin American society that has hitherto been dominated by the proverbial twenty wealthy families. He directs Belisa Crepusculario to create speeches for four different audiences.

Appealing to the five-year-old Star Wars mind, the Colonel paints the peasants as towers of virtue, while tarring the wealthy families as the root of all the country's problems. In this stark and simplistic rendition, the only solution is for the peasants to overthrow the plutocrats, replacing the Awful Oligarchy with Delicious Democracy or with a Dictatorship of the Peasantry. Observers of twentieth-century history recognize this story as one told by totalitarian leaders on the left and on the right, by Mao no less than by Hitler.

Addressing the ten-year-old mind, which is "fair to a fault," the Colonel proposes that the wealth of the nation be divided equitably. The estates of the wealthy should be broken apart and divided equally among all the peasants. At the same time, he emphasizes, it is important to take into account the prior rights and obligations of the wealthy families. And so, for the next ten years, each wealthy person is allowed to keep twice as much land and twice as much money as his impoverished neighbor (shades of liberal democracy in a reformist mode—the kind of political compromise favored by a Franklin Roosevelt or Lyndon Johnson).

Now invited to convince the adolescent minds of the republic, the Colonel adopts a relativistic ploy. To begin with, he concedes that there are more than two interest groups in the country and that each of them has something to be said in its favor. To be sure, the peasants have been deprived of their fair share, but many have not taken their duties of citizenship seriously and have even failed to vote. For their part, many wealthy families have been selfish and exploitative, but some of them have been charitable as well, and others have

represented their nation effectively at international gatherings. Moreover, other stakeholders, such as the church, the educational system, and the communications media, need to be taken into account in any redistribution of resources.

Trying to mediate among these forces turns out to be a complex undertaking—one that taxes the problem-solving abilities of most of the audience. And so, after broadly describing the parameters, the Colonel proposes a sensible, relativistic solution: in an effort to honor the special perspectives of the various interest groups, each party will be given the power to veto measures affecting those issues that it especially cherishes. In reviewing sex and temperament in different societies, Margaret Mead sought to introduce her audiences to such a relativistic stance, in which multiple perspectives were jointly honored and no group was assumed to have a monopoly on the proper way to live.

Finally, the Colonel has the opportunity to address the wise elders of the land, women and men ranging in age from twenty-seven to seventy-two. In a polyphonic presentation, he touches upon the grave injustices that are manifest to the Star Wars mind, the need for fairness that animates the ten-year-old mind, and the recognition of relativistic claims that dominates the thinking of the adolescent. While acknowledging merit in each of these perspectives, he rises to the challenge of presenting a personal integration, which he hopes will appeal to the most mature minds in his land.

In this particular instance, he calls for a form of representative government, in which the claims of each of the constituencies are recognized as legitimate. At the same time, however, he espouses a radical transformation in the governmental processes. From now on, the claims of the peasants will receive first consideration, for they represent not only the numerical majority but also the group that has been discriminated against most consistently over the centuries. The status of every other party is determined by an analogous calculation. In making such a complex statement, the Colonel has in effect left the land of electoral politics altogether; he (or, most likely, a ghost writer) is ready to author a document like a federal constitution or a philosophical tract or equity, and thereby become the indirect leader of a domain.

## *Stories Struggling with One Another*

This study—and for that matter, life in general—would be simpler if one could hear and evaluate one story at a time. Such a scenario would be possible if the mind were a blank slate, if the mind could focus on one story alone, or if each new story were to topple or erase all of its predecessors or competitors. But none of those conditions holds.

By the age of four or five, most youngsters have constructed dozens of





scripts based on daily experience; moreover, they have heard dozens of stories from their elders and perhaps scores from the communications media that happen to be prevalent in their societies. No doubt, the number of scripts and stories continues to mount in the years thereafter; and, as already suggested, these narratives become more complex, subtle, and ambiguous. I would not be surprised if most adults in Western society possess a hundred or more regular scripts and have internalized several hundred stories. And in the fabled country inhabited by Belisa Crepusculario and the Colonel—one still rich in the oral tradition—inhabitants no doubt carry within their heads an even larger ensemble of stories.

The challenge confronting the storyteller becomes clear. To the extent that she creates a familiar or formulaic story, it will be readily assimilated. No one will object to it, but its distinctiveness and power may prove minimal. To the extent that an innovative story is created, it may well attract initial attention; after all, the new creation differs from earlier stories, so it cannot simply "pass" for one of its predecessors.

However, decided risks attend the creation of a new story, which might well be misinterpreted; erroneously assimilated into an old story, one with which it was meant to be contrasted; or seen as irreverent or even blasphemous. To be concrete: If the Colonel is the first person to suggest that members of the twenty most powerful families should be required to carry out community service, his proposal is likely to attract the interest of journalists and of peasants who have felt disenfranchised. But he runs the risk either of being misinterpreted as saying that the twenty families should simply continue their earlier noblesse oblige or of being attacked verbally or physically by members of the leading families, who do not appreciate being told what to do, particularly by an upstart, hitherto-illiterate colonel in *their* army.

What happens when a number of different—and often frankly contradictory—stories are competing for attention, acceptance, and ascendancy among the various members of an audience? This situation resembles the usual state of affairs in most contemporary societies, including the ones encompassed in this study; every story encounters *counterstories*, and every new story engenders resistances. Authorities differ dramatically in their views, depending on whether they adopt a cognitive or an affective perspective on the issue. In short, what happens in a struggle between the schooled and the unschooled mind?

As espousers of the rational tradition, cognitivists are inclined to believe that the more sophisticated story will prevail. That is, because the mind prefers to function in its most developed form, more primitive expectations and explanations tend to be overridden by more complex and subtler ones. According to this argument, youths who have held the Star Wars position will tend to be convinced when they hear a spokesperson embrace "fairness

to a fault," but few believers in fairness will be persuaded by a more primitive appeal to good/bad dualism.

The strongest evidence in favor of the cognitivist position comes from experimental studies. As children get older, they tend to espouse more sophisticated accounts and to spurn especially simplistic ones. More dramatically, when youngsters of different degrees of sophistication debate some point, it is more probable that the less sophisticated youngsters will come to adopt the more sophisticated argument than that the more sophisticated youngsters will be "dragged down" by the reasoning customarily invoked by their less sophisticated contemporaries.

Rationalistic considerations, however, do not always carry the day. Individuals argue positions for a variety of reasons, and their stances are prompted by a plethora of goals. Cases are made by implicit as well as explicit arguments, and unconscious as well as conscious factors drive conclusions. Stories appeal at least as strongly to listeners' emotions as to their calculation. Social psychologists have shown repeatedly that the prestige of a spokesperson, the identities of a speaker's friends and enemies, and the exploitation of nostalgia or grievances more strongly shape attitudinal change than the sheer merits of a rational argument do.

When it comes down to it, the argument that carries the day may well be the one that exerts the strongest affective appeal, rather than the one that triumphs on debating points. For every Abraham Lincoln, whose speeches were more tightly reasoned than those of rival Stephen Douglas, we must countenance the possibility of an Adolf Hitler, who baldly appealed to the lowest common denominator of the German citizenry and found that he could dissolve reason by arousing passions.

The limitation of a purely rational analysis of argument was brought home dramatically in the presidential debates of 1960 between John F. Kennedy, the Democratic candidate, and Richard M. Nixon, the Republican candidate. Nixon was the more experienced politician and, as a trained debater, took pains to answer, point-by-point, the various arguments Kennedy put forth. Those who heard the debate on the radio generally believed that Nixon had won. A quite different result occurred among television viewers, who had been positively affected by Kennedy's appealing appearance and manner, his capacity to speak directly to an audience, and his ability to convey—indeed, to embody—the points that were central to his vision of a new frontier. In contrast, viewers were put off by Nixon's haggard "five o'clock shadow" appearance and antagonized by the harshly pedantic style in which he sought to refute Kennedy's points: consequently they did not focus on Nixon's positive program. Far more people watched the debates on television; they considered Kennedy to be the winner and, by a narrow margin, awarded him the presidency.



I have delineated contrasting outcomes of what might happen when stories compete. On the one hand, considerable developmental evidence indicates that older individuals are capable of apprehending and creating more complex and multiperspectival stories than are their younger counterparts. Under certain idealized conditions, the more developed stories and the schooled mind carry the day. And so, for example, in debates within Margaret Mead's anthropological community, relativistic interpretations and personal integrations may well prevail over power- or fairness-based perspectives.

However, rational considerations do not stand alone. Stories can appeal for a variety of reasons, and listeners harbor a multitude of motives for attending, apprehending, and acting. Particularly once one ventures beyond a domain or discipline, particularly when one is confronting the diverse population within an institution or a nation, developmental dimensions become attenuated. The leaders of Weimar Germany may have offered a more sophisticated vision of a functioning society, but to many citizens it was not as persuasive as the simple picture of Aryan superiority and German retribution communicated by Hitler and his Nazi supporters.

A final point: In the cases reviewed so far, stories are seen as struggling against one another, with one or the other ultimately prevailing. Some storytellers are so skilled, however, that they are able to create narratives that appear to satisfy both parties in a controversy or to operate effectively at more than one developmental level. Through choice of words, through selection of examples, and through the use of nonlinguistic cues, a leader may be able to convince adherents of each perspective that he or she is on *their* side. The delivery of stories—for example, biblical parables—can be sufficiently polyphonic so as to please individuals of different ages, persuasions, and sophistication. Indeed, precisely this feat has been achieved by such superlative speakers as Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan, and by such skilled negotiators as Jean Monnet and Mahatma Gandhi.

To summarize the discussion to this point: Throughout life, individuals hear stories and have to evaluate their merits consciously and unconsciously. There is always the chance that a more sophisticated story will prevail, particularly when the teller is skilled and the audience is sophisticated. However, my study provides abundant evidence that, more often than not, the less sophisticated story remains entrenched—the unschooled mind triumphs.

## *The Subject and the Content of Stories*

Individuals create stories on every conceivable topic—and indeed on some topics that are barely conceivable! The very absence of a story on a topic provides a tempting stimulus for a born (or made) storyteller to concoct a new

one on the spot. Belisa prided herself on giving every person his or her own special word, his or her own unique story, for "it was not her intention to defraud her customers with packaged words." Whether the Colonel would find a new story appealing is another matter; as a leader, he sought not to be original but to be convincing. Piggybacking on entrenched stories has often proved an effective route to a presidency or a prime ministership; this tack permits ordinary (as compared with innovative) leaders to achieve their ends.

While it would be futile to attempt to delineate all possible stories, it is important to chronicle the major topics and kinds of stories that leaders have related. In my analysis, these stories address the most essential questions raised by human beings and seek to provide comprehensive and satisfying answers to those questions. By and large, the origins of stories go back to the concerns of early childhood, and they focus on the issues that themselves arose at that time and continue to endure throughout one's conscious existence—issues of self, identity, group membership, past and future, good and evil. About thirty years ago, the African American leader Malcolm X summarized well the mission of the storyteller when he asked his followers: "We want to know what are we? How did we get to be what we are? Where did we come from? How did we come from there? Who did we leave behind? Where was it that we left them behind and what are they doing over there where we used to be?"

In 1992, the presidential candidate Ross Perot described in equally vivid terms the answers that are sought by such audiences: "We owe it to the American people to explain to them in plain language, where we are, where we are going, and what we have to do. Then we need to build a consensus to do it." And from her different vantage point, the literary critic Diana Trilling has put it this way: "This is the unresolved question that imaginative people will always have in every time of life, in every part of the world: Where do I belong? And what price do I pay for where I choose to stand?"

In what follows, I delineate stories in three broad categories: stories about the self, stories about the group, and stories about values and meaning. I intend no suggestion that a story can fit in only one category, nor, indeed, that all stories told by leaders necessarily fall neatly under this taxonomy. But I believe that most of the stories that leaders tell are created in response to the pervasive human need to understand better oneself, the groups that exist in and beyond one's culture, and issues of value and meaning. Indeed, stories in the broadest sense—narratives, visions, dreams, embodiments—are most effective when they provide at the same time nourishment for the mind (or the understanding), on the one hand, and a feeling of belonging and security, on the other. In that sense, irrespective of purpose and complexity, the stories of the leader revisit the basic agenda confronting each young child as he takes his first steps into the larger community. For each topic that I survey, audience members encounter stories at many levels of sophistication. These stories struggle with one another, with the presumption being that the less schooled versions (those that address the five- or ten-year-old mind) will not readily be replaced by the more schooled versions.



## The Self

Initially, one establishes clues about one's identity on the basis of information given by those closest to oneself—parents, other relatives, or distinctively clad representatives of the religious and social communities within which one lives. But particularly as they venture forth from home, individuals also look to the leaders of the wider social and political entities (the head of the church, the leader of the country, and so on), and to others with whom they identify (often including individuals from sports or the media), for clues to the perennial question "Who am I?"

A concern with the delineation of one's identity is scarcely a new phenomenon. The Athenians took an oath that stated: "I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritance, rightful expectations, and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point." I am reminded as well of Diogenes' more visionary challenge to his countrymen: "I am not an Athenian or a Greek but a citizen of the world."

When confronted by stories of apparently greater cogency and sophistication, many individuals find it comforting to adhere to simple, black-and-white stories. Still, as a means of conveying the kinds of answers that have been given to the question of personal identity, we can consider different levels of developmental sophistication with respect to a sense of self:

- With young children, answers in terms of physical attributes and simple psychological traits constitute the point of departure. A five-year-old sees herself as a short (or tall) individual, a white-skinned (or black-skinned) person, and an individual who resembles (or does not resemble) others in her family and her community. Racial or ethnic stereotypes are readily grasped. Perhaps compensating for their still-diminutive stature, such youngsters (or older individuals who favor the five-year-old story) often see themselves as heroes who are strong and for whom right derives from might.

- Going beyond manifest physical attributes, the identity of ten-year-olds encompasses psychological traits such as honesty, dutifulness, and fairness. The schoolchild considers it important that one be seen as a person who behaves properly and helps others. By the same token, the growing child spurns individuals, including aspiring leaders, who defy these attributes of

the "good boy" or the "good girl." It is disconcerting to think of oneself as a bad person, though some individuals, including future leaders of a destructive turn (like young Benito Mussolini, who stabbed fellow students), may gain a perverse pleasure in a label of this sort.

• By adolescence, the individual becomes capable of a far more differentiated view of self. A person can exhibit a variety of traits, including ones that may be in conflict with one another—such as generosity in certain circumstances and stinginess in others. One can have certain surface traits (being tall) that are either reinforced or undermined by underlying psychological traits (being timid or being tough). And one may oscillate between competing identities, one of which is regarded positively by the rest of the society, another of which is considered antisocial or eccentric. The adolescent is struck by the realization that a person who has been portrayed in one way (say, the U.S. president or the queen of England) actually exhibits many contradictory features, and the same ambiguity can characterize the adolescent herself. Monnet faced the challenge of convincing citizens of once-warring European nations that they could also think of themselves as part of a larger unified entity called Europe.

• Finally, in one's adult years, the range of traits can be seen as summing up to reflect a certain kind of person. In the happier case, a person feels integrated, at peace with what he has accomplished and how he is regarded in the community. In the less happy event, a person feels frustrated or desperate, either because the traits do not sum up at all or because they yield a kind of individual with whom the individual feels little sympathy. In either case, however, there is at least an effort to form a composite identity; aspiring leaders must convey this coherent sense to a wider public and must help members of their audience achieve a comparable sense of integration. As Stephen Skowronek says in his study of the American presidency, every successful president must present "a coherent and compelling narrative about his place in history."

It should be evident that much of the task of creating a sense of self belongs to the individual himself. And especially in societies that are skewed toward the recognition of individual rights and obligations, the task of creating an identity proves to be a major and consuming one for most people. Nonetheless, there is no need for the individual citizen to engage in a solipsistic endeavor. Leaders who help individuals conceptualize a personal identity perform a crucial function. Thus, when Lenin saw himself not as an ivory-tower theorist, but rather as a student of history, an extrapolator from events, and a man of action, he conveyed a potent and enabling sense of self



to his followers. Similarly, when in 1992 Bill Clinton presented himself to the electorate as a "new Democrat" who would not repeat the mistakes of previous unsuccessful Democratic presidential candidates, he induced many voters to think of themselves in new and more positive ways, not just as persons with views more liberal than those of the rival Republicans. Most memorably, when Franklin D. Roosevelt declared in his first inaugural address that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself," he gave new hope to millions of citizens who had been mired in an economic and psychological depression.

## *The Group*

Every individual's sense of identity is rooted largely in his or her place within various groups. Nearly every individual belongs to several groups, whose missions and memberships may or may not overlap. A significant portion of early socialization consists in the discovery of the groups to which one belongs, a determination of one's feelings toward the various groups, and, ultimately (if ideally), the melding of one's several group memberships into a coherent whole.

Bearing in mind that views considered more developed will not necessarily triumph in a "Darwinian competition" among stories, one may consider a variety of perspectives on membership in groups:

• The five-year-old, while dimly aware of membership in multiple groups, has difficulty in comprehending the implications of such multiple identities. It is easiest for that child to see herself as a girl or a member of the Greenspoon family or a resident of Georgia than as someone who belongs to a number of separate but partially overlapping collectivities. By the same token, the child of this age is prone to deal with group membership (and group leaders) in stereotypical terms: girls are all good or all bad; Daddy Greenspoon can do no wrong (or, less frequently, nothing right); individuals from Georgia will either inherit the world or go to the devil. The eighteenth-century pamphleteer Tom Paine evoked this sentiment in the minds of his American compatriots when, in the influential essay "Common Sense," he portrayed the British as a group of tyrants and argued self-servingly that "the cause of America is in great measure the cause of all mankind." Paine was certainly not the last political figure to press this "unschooled" case.

• By the age of ten, the youngster can easily appreciate the existence of different groups and the possibility of overlapping memberships and conflicting loyalties. The individual wishes to believe that the groups he is affiliated with are positive ones, while hoping to have a minimal connection with groups

that are alien or antagonistic. At the start of the American Civil War, southerners felt pulled in two directions: as American patriots and as loyal children of the South. Many southern patriots struggled to reconcile the rival accounts set forth by Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. To maintain a sense of security and intellectual coherence, many sought to resolve their conflicting loyalties expeditiously by abrogating one set of ties.

• The adolescent is aware that groups have long and complex histories and that no group has a monopoly on either virtue or vice. This individual also accepts the fact of membership in multiple groups and may even gain a measure of stimulation from their apparent inconsistencies, and, indeed, from contradictions in general. (J. Robert Oppenheimer and Robert Maynard Hutchins often reveled in such contradictions.) The adolescent is also capable of thinking of groups as deviating from their current status or practices. However, this gift of hypothetical or visionary thinking is sometimes purchased at the cost of unwarranted idealization of certain practices or philosophies. The adolescent will instantly give her life for a cause, in the way that neither a child nor a middle-aged person is likely to comprehend. The same adolescent who can appreciate, intellectually, the merits of the claims of the several parties involved in the French Revolution or the Iranian Revolution may end up embracing an absolutist position. Relativism and absolutism are not always mutually exclusive; the skilled leader of a terrorist group can exploit the adolescent's blend of idealism and cynicism.

• Finally, the seasoned adult can assume a distance from his group memberships and appreciate that he might well have belonged to a different set of groups, and thence have entertained a quite different philosophy of life. But rather than defending each set of groups as equally viable (as the relativistically oriented counterpart is wont to do), such an adult at least attempts to justify the particular ensemble of group memberships to which he is fated to belong.

And what of those cases where the ensemble of group memberships does not add up to an acceptable package? The reflective individual will clearly be on the lookout for the leader who offers a different set of options with respect to group memberships, including the possibility of creating new groups. No doubt the unhappy experience of being a German citizen in punitive post–First World War Europe engendered many political options, ranging from a liberal Weimar Republic to a Soviet-style Communist regime to the molding by Hitler of a new National Socialist Party. The choice made by an individual reflected his or her willingness to be inclusionary—to tolerate a range of viewpoints.





While it is tempting to highlight the positive facets of group membership, one must keep in mind as well the malevolent uses to which collective identities can be put. Reflecting on the post–cold war era, when nationalism and tribalism have reemerged as potent political forces, one sees all too clearly how group identity can be exploited in an exclusionary fashion. Because of the propagation of myths on the state-owned and -operated television system in the former Yugoslavia, for example, the Serbs have come to believe that they have been systematically targeted for extinction, so they have retaliated by attempting to eradicate the rival Muslim group. The novelist Kurt Vonnegut has written of "Granfalloon"—the deliberate invention of alien and unsympathetic groups, such as "those liberals" or "those Washington insiders." And the influential Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko captures well the ambiguity of group membership during the Soviet era. He salutes the country's symbol:

> Goodbye our Red Flag.
> You were our brother

But then he voices the crushing disappointment of the Soviet people:

> But like a Red curtain you concealed behind you
> the Gulag
> Why did you do it, our Red Flag?

It is one of the ironies of the age that the end of the struggle between the two superpowers should give rise to heightened group tensions rather than to the forging of broader identities.

## *Values and Meaning*

Most individuals attach meaning and value to the ideas that they develop, with or without formal tuition, about themselves and their group. Indeed, it is more difficult—if not unnatural—to think about these realms in a value-free way than it is to attach some kind of a weighted significance to thoughts about oneself, one's group, and the world of other individuals.

But most human beings also crave an explicit statement of value—a perspective on what counts as being true, beautiful, and good. Traditionally these views have come from art or religion; more recently, they have come as well from philosophy, science, and newly constituted secular groups. Personal introspection and discussion are additional sources of value systems. At times of stability, the accepted norms may be adhered to without discussion. But particularly in times of crisis or cataclysmic change, individ-

uals crave a larger explanatory framework. They pay special—and perhaps undue—heed to those who can provide some kind of broad orientation, if not definitive answers, to essential questions: the purpose of work, the value of prayer, the just distribution of rewards and punishment, and the stance to assume in the face of death and other ultimate human concerns.

Again, one can discern developmental trends that occur with respect to values. The young individual expects an unambiguous panorama of the good and the bad; he or she attributes all values and judgment to some kind of overarching and unquestioned world intelligence. Somewhat older children become aware of competing value systems; they hope that reconciliation among them may prove possible. By adolescence, the plethora of meaning systems has become all too evident, and most youngsters despair at any kind of a synthesis: they are likely either to abandon any pretext of a coherent philosophy or, as a reaction, to embrace a momentarily appealing one uncritically.

A genuine synthesis—in part personal, in part extending beyond the person—becomes a more plausible goal in later life, and, especially, as the end of life draws near. Most individuals ultimately embrace some kind of organized religious or philosophical system even as they retain the option of conferring a personal touch on this already available synthesis. The formidable challenge confronting the visionary leader is to offer a story, and an embodiment, that builds on the most credible of past syntheses, revisits them in the light of present concerns, leaves open a place for future events, and allows individual contributions by the persons in the group. Martin Luther's ideas, for example, spread with such amazing rapidity partly because he built on the strengths of Catholicism, addressed the legitimate concerns about inequity on the part of a pious community, and invited personal thoughts and personal callings. Contemporary leaders as diverse as J. Robert Oppenheimer, Pope John XXIII, and Martin Luther King, Jr., all sought to create a worldview that was adequate to their tumultuous times and meaningful to their troubled constituencies.

## *Other Topics, Other Stories*

While the realm of personal relations has always held special appeal, human beings have also been enormously curious about the other realms around them: the world of naturally occurring physical objects, the world of manufactured objects, the world of living nonhuman entities, and the worlds of time, space, and the various enigmatic forms of internal reality (such as dreams, fears, and memories). Toddlers play, often tirelessly, with instances of these various worlds. Young schoolchildren pose dozens of questions about these entities and ponder the often unsatisfactory and sometimes contradictory responses that they receive. Older schoolchildren try to master the



explanatory systems that have been created within their culture. And adults hope that they will eventually synthesize the explanations offered by their culture with more personal answers that they have evolved on the basis of their own experiences and reflections.

Through prehistory and much of recorded history, the pictures of the world put forth by individuals have come from two primary sources: their own imaginative constructions, and the images given in the art and mythology of their society. While not necessarily at odds with one another, these lines of explanation can be thought of independently. Imaginative constructions emerge from commonsense observations: the world looks flat; entities that move on their own seem different from entities that do not; one cannot proceed backward in time in mundane reality, though one can do so in dreams or films. While Piaget thought that such ideas tended to disappear with age, they have proved to be enduring even among citizens of a complex, contemporary society.

Artistic and mythological explanations constitute distillations of the thoughts and experiences of individuals who lived in earlier eras. Thus, those living in ancient Egypt believed in an afterlife buried underground, while those living in a Christian society locate an afterlife in a blissful heaven or a punitive hell. The ancient Greeks saw human beings as unique creatures, while those who lived in the surrounding pagan societies discerned more of a continuity between humans and nature.

The various academic disciplines and specialties that evolved in the last two millennia have led to a conception of knowledge as constructed by communities of experts and as subject to continuing change and expectable (if often surprising) modifications in the light of new data and new theories. Within the disciplines, individuals look to the leading practitioners for a "readout" on the current state of knowledge about the various worlds (and microworlds) in which we live.

Most individuals harbor deep questions about the nature and future course of the world. But there is a gap, ever widening, between the disciplined perspectives embraced by experts and the unschooled opinions held by the rest of us. Given this state of affairs, direct leaders must select from among options. They must master the insights of the disciplines, in the process becoming experts themselves; cede this territory to the expert, parroting her findings and offering no personal view; or, spurning the apparent progress of understanding within the disciplines, embrace a more traditional or more personal philosophy.

This last option is often followed by those of a fundamentalist persuasion. Ignoring the overwhelming scientific evidence for the existence of processes of evolution over the millennia, for example, these individuals cling to the notion of a Creator who caused the world to come into being at one moment

a few thousand—or perhaps a few million—years ago. Those who do not wish to offend fundamentalists hold their tongue whenever they encounter a tension between scientific and religious beliefs.

More generally, leaders face a set of choices when they enter realms in which disciplinary expertise has developed. Stories about identity—individual and group—are essentially personal ones, to which disciplinary experts have no unique contributions to offer. But traditional stories about the objects and the course of the universe have been radically altered by the work of scholars over the centuries. Domain experts like Oppenheimer or Mead must decide how much of this discipline-based story to promulgate when they address broader audiences. And leaders who presume to lead across domains must situate themselves with reference to domain expertise, on the one hand, and the overwhelmingly unschooled perspective of their audience, on the other.

## *Cultural Stories*

Whether living in bucolic Samoa, peasant China, tribally constituted Africa, or a modern Western industrialized city, an individual will in some way confront the ensemble of issues that I have just reviewed. However, these themes are unlikely to be encountered in explicit form—in a naked discussion of issues like identity, group membership, the spectrum of values, or the ontology of the world. Most people avert abstract theories, and most storytellers revel in the concrete—be it the colorful details of specific narratives or the vivid virtues embodied in a dramatic life. We encounter the themes of life and death on television, in the movies, and on the pages of the daily newspapers—and not, primarily, in lectures by learned philosophers or theologians.

Over the millennia, leaders and storytellers have created characters, settings, and events to crystallize these issues and convey a perspective on them through a kind of shorthand that works well for members steeped in a specific culture. Like other founding civilizations, the Greeks and the Romans constructed extensive mythologies, within which issues of life and death, the physical and the spiritual world, individual and group identity were vividly explored. The formal Christian religion performed much the same function for nearly two thousand years in the Occident, just as Buddhism, Islam, and Confucianism accomplished similar missions in the great Oriental civilizations of the last two millennia. Pope John XXIII built upon the Christian heritage, while Mahatma Gandhi fused several spiritual traditions.

Each nation has its own set of cultural heroes and villains. In the United States much of political experience is interpreted in the light of George Washington, Benedict Arnold, or Robert E. Lee; Otto Bismarck, Adolf Hitler, or Konrad Adenauer assumes a symbolic role in Germany; Joan of Arc, Napoléon, or Charles de Gaulle constitutes a point of reference in France.





Within intellectual circles, specific artists, writers, and thinkers (William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Virginia Woolf, Martha Graham) serve as comparable overarching figures. Mere allusions to these figures may suffice to elicit a rich narrative fabric. A century ago in the United States, one could expect even a moderately educated person to be able to quote at length from the Bible and the plays of Shakespeare; in his speeches and writings, Martin Luther King, Jr., presupposed his audiences' familiarity with biblical stories and foundational American documents.

In more recent times, a different set of cultural stories has increasingly taken over. The creations of the media (such as the personae conveyed by the movie stars Clint Eastwood and Marilyn Monroe) and the successful products of the consumer society (like Coca-Cola or Nike sneakers) have come for many to crystallize notions of heroism, beauty, and the good life. In fact, youngsters today, in many countries, move more comfortably through the worlds contrived by Walt Disney, George Lucas, or Jim Henson than through the realms of classical mythology, religion, or literature.

For the most part, the messages concerning values that are embodied in daily interactions the world over have stressed the virtues of one's own group and the vices of others' groups. In this sense, the messages blend all too easily with the prejudices of the unschooled mind. Of special interest, accordingly, are those worldviews that are more moderate—those that discern strength in the golden mean; that recognize a value in grayness, as well as in black or white; that speak to interpretation, reflectiveness, and self-consciousness, rather than to absolute truth and unremitting falsity. Those who promote a more inclusionary sense of identity are always clashing with those who foreground older, deeply entrenched senses of exclusivity. Nuanced, pluralistic, and "open" perspectives become especially important when, in chapter 14, we turn our attention to those leaders who aspire to address the concerns of the planet.

## *Media: The Vehicles of Stories*

Traditionally, a story is told by a parent to a child as they sit near a fire or, perhaps, by a political or religious leader to his or her flock. Contemporary political leaders seek to recapture this atmosphere when they speak informally to their constituencies, through devices such as a "fireside chat," an "open town meeting," or an apparently spontaneous conversation with a reporter that just happens to be broadcast nationally.

In recent times two factors have combined to complexify, in fascinating ways, the communication of stories from leaders to their groups. The first has been the proliferation of technological media. The first megaphones and microphones seem but the most primitive modes of communication when

contrasted with radio, network television, cable television, electronic mail, and other recent points of access on the global information highway. Gandhi may have despised the accoutrements of Western civilization, but his protests would have failed utterly had they not been communicated instantly by telegraph all over the world. King assumed that his confrontations with racist officials would be widely viewed. Through her exquisitely staged documentaries, the German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl contributed materially to the myth surrounding Hitler and the Nazis. And the careers of contemporary martyrs—as well as current terrorists (who may see themselves as martyrs)—would be unthinkable without their ready access to media that broadcast their inspiring or nefarious messages around the world. Visual media obviously have a tendency—perhaps approaching compulsion—to reduce information to the sharpest and most pithy sound bite. This proclivity makes it difficult to deal, except in a ridiculing way, with issues of any complexity. And for better or worse, most mass print media have begun to follow the examples of the visual broadcast media.

The second factor has to do with the construction and manipulation of the image of the leader. Leaders have always had advisers, and occasional leaders like the biblical Moses are said to have had spokesmen (in his case, his more loquacious brother Aaron). Today, however, it has become the job of dozens of "handlers" to compose every word and to script every nuance in the public appearance of a national leader in accord with what the public is supposed to crave. The role of the citizens who constitute "focus groups" has become so important that the influential Republican media adviser Roger Ailes was moved to quip: "When I die, I want to come back with real power. I want to come back as a member of a focus group."

Accordingly, it is no longer clear to audience members whether they are being exposed to an authentic individual, speaking her actual words, or to a personage created by media advisers. More than one leader has *become* the persona that was initially invented by those expert in the creation and transformation of images. The desire for authentic experience—for direct contact with the genuine, unadorned leader—remains a positive motive. Politicians like Perot gain points when they can claim that they are *not* the creation of the media or its myriad of advisers. Yet even the claim for authenticity can be manufactured (good actors know how to feign sincerity), while many "authentic" individuals simply look awkward or amateurish when sitting under klieg lights.

## *Kinds of Syntheses*

As individual members of an audience confront various stories and storytellers, and the ensemble of messages and embodiments that populate their



society, they are inevitably called on to make some kind of judgment, to reach some kind of synthesis. Early in life, people can easily live with contradictions, because they do not sense the tension between a belief in "A" and a belief in "Not A," or they sense it slightly and fleetingly. However, with the advent of greater cognitive sophistication, most individuals experience at least some tension between apparently contradictory propositions or schemes and some impulse to reconcile these perspectives.

Individuals differ enormously from one another in the extent to which they take up the challenge of synthesis. For one thing, cultures and subcultures do not necessarily draw explicit attention to consistencies and/or contradictions, nor do they necessarily place a premium on efforts to reconcile these tensions. Just compare for a moment a Cartesian society, which prides itself on regulation by logical consistency, and a Hindu society, where different beliefs are allowed to accumulate haphazardly, or even productively, alongside one another. Or consider the difference between a society that berates individuals for expressing contradictory beliefs and one that, with Ralph Waldo Emerson, dismisses consistency as the "hobgoblin of little minds."

But apart from different cultural norms, individuals within a society also differ in the extent to which they search for synthesis and the extent to which they can live with contradiction. In the psychological parlance, these variations in threshold constitute "individual differences." Some individuals, of the sort that the Greek poet Archilochus called foxes, like to immerse themselves in the details of many competing systems; others, whom he dubbed hedgehogs, prefer to believe in "one big thing." Individuals also differ in the extent to which they can tolerate ambiguities. Again, borrowing from the archives of psychological analysis, we can contrast two groups. Those who score high on the psychological scale that measures fascistic tendencies crave order and organization above all; those with modest scores on this scale are comfortable with, or even look out for, a degree of chaos, inconsistency, and contradictory minutiae.

Leaders both exemplify and play into these individual differences. Even as they themselves differ in the personal drive for synthesis, they will differ in the extent to which they attempt to provide a well-organized and internally consistent narrative for their followers. Some American presidents, such as Reagan, were not bothered in the slightest by apparent contradictions: Reagan could swear his undying allegiance to a balanced budget at the same time that he smilingly signed in a bill that in effect increased the deficit. Other presidents, such as the former engineers Herbert Hoover and Jimmy Carter, were conscious of apparent inconsistencies and sought whenever possible to be consistent, even at the cost of awkward moments and ultimately unsuccessful bids for reelection.

Earlier, I pointed to the appeal of those individuals whose stories and

embodiments are consistent with one another; such a synthesis satisfies the aesthetic sense of many leaders and many followers. Here I must acknowledge that such coherence is not a necessary mark of success. Many, if not most, auditors would prefer to hear a number of individual stories that are singly appealing than to obsess about a possible inconsistency between story A and story F. And many auditors are happy to ignore inconsistent embodiments so long as they find each story appealing enough in itself.

## Issues about Stories

Time for a brief summary: I have argued that a key—perhaps *the* key—to leadership, as well as to the garnering of a following, is the effective communication of a story. While my definition of a story is broad, it calls attention to a common core. I maintain that the most fundamental stories fashioned by leaders concern issues of personal and group identity; those leaders who presume to bring about major alterations across a significant population must in some way help their audience members think through who they are. Given this analysis, the prominent featuring of stories raises a number of searching issues.

To begin with, determining the stories of the leaders is not necessarily a straightforward task. Leaders say many things, at many times; not everything said is a story, nor is every story in the repertoire coherent or consistent with others. In this study, with rare exceptions, I do not consider statements or stories that have been mentioned only once; instead, I look for those stories and those embodiments that occur frequently, those that can be said to define the individual, at least during a particular historical epoch. Understandably, I am also concerned chiefly (though not exclusively) with those stories that seem to be effective in their context. It is my contention that any set of judges who examined the historical and biographical record would arrive at a similar set of stories; moreover, if one were to interview associates of the leader, they too would mention the stories and embodiments that I have singled out.

A second point has to do with the way in which stories are characterized. Here I take the liberty of expressing stories in as elemental a way as possible, often using words and images that are even more basic than those offered by the leaders themselves, and typically not spelling out the moves of particular versions. While each story could be drawn out in length, number of characters, episodes, and crises, I count on readers to fill in the background texture. I do this so that I can discuss the stories in terms of the framework introduced in this chapter: the particular content (for instance, about identity or group membership), the level of sophistication (for example, the struggle between good and evil, the relativistic perspective), and the kind of value system that is embodied.





My approach exposes me to two probing lines of criticism. First, it can be argued that the meaning and use of stories are chiefly in the ear of the beholder. A story that is about identity for one person touches on issues of value or group membership for another; what is simple for one person is complex for another. The occasion on which a story is used, the identity of the person who is telling the story, and the status of the audience hearing the story prove at least as important as the manifest (literal) content of the story.

Rather than rejecting this contextualist position, I wish to embrace it—though with reservations. Not only do stories always represent an interaction between the words of the teller and the ears of the audience, but many of the most skilled leaders play on this ambiguity, hoping that an apparently singular message will exert desired but different effects on diverse audiences. Certainly, when Martin Luther King, Jr., gave a major speech, it was crafted for the ears of numerous audiences, ranging from those sympathetic to segregation, to committed civil rights workers, to funders and politicians drawn from the middle of the ideological spectrum. Far from ignoring this multiplicity of goals and meanings, we, as analysts, must try to understand it. At the same time, I must assert my own, decidedly non-postmodern conclusion: Humanistically oriented scholarship would grind to a halt if we could not determine some meanings that transcend the specific contexts in which words are uttered or messages are conveyed.

The second vexed issue about stories concerns my adoption of a developmental stance. It is developmental both in the sense that I am studying the development of leaders (and their followers) and in the sense that I have characterized particular stories in terms of their supposed developmental sophistication.

To my mind, many advances in the social sciences have come about because of scholars' willingness to look at organisms and institutions in their initial form and to trace the continuities and discontinuities in the course of their evolution to some version of maturity or disintegration. The potential for leadership (and followership) exists early in most of us; but full leadership is never achieved—it always remains "in formation." By the same token, it is only through the vigilant maintenance of a developmental perspective that we can appreciate the constant dynamic that unfolds between leaders and their followers over significant stretches of time.

More controversial is the decision to characterize stories as reflecting different levels of sophistication. I could justifiably point out that this claim is an empirical one that has already been borne out. In dozens of studies, researchers have spelled out the ordinary differences among the schemes and the worldviews of the five-, ten-, and fifteen-year-old. Yet, in fairness, I should point out as well that most of these studies have been carried out in modern Western societies and that they have tended to be based on dilem-

mas posed in laboratory settings rather than on ethnographic work in natural settings.

However, my use of a developmental descriptive scheme has other rationales. At the least, it provides a convenient way of analyzing stories that can be employed whether or not one believes that the scheme exhibits universality. (Thus, for example, the scheme could be used even if, in some newly discovered society, young children were found to be relativists and senior citizens emerged as absolutists.) Relatedly, the scheme provides a way of comparing the stories that often compete and clash with one another, for those stories may differ not only in purpose or content but also in the cognitive mechanisms entailed in their comprehension and transmission.

My primary purpose for using the scheme, however, is to challenge conventional theorizing. Among developmentalists, it is generally assumed without argument that individuals pass through stages; that the later stages subsume the earlier ones; and that, in any competition, more developed forms are likely to triumph. My iconoclastic conclusion, mentioned earlier, is quite different.

As I see it, stories operate in many ways and compete with one another at many levels, unconsciously as well as consciously. Developmental sophistication along some metric is one factor, but it is not the only one. And in many, if not most, instances it is not the determining one. Among experts, to be sure, there is a reasonable chance that the more sophisticated version will prevail. But once one moves beyond the realm of expertise, and, indeed, once the expert herself is addressed as a member of a heterogeneous community, then "all bets are off." In addition to the diverse motives that may induce individuals to be attracted to one story or embodiment rather than another, every leader must somehow deal with a potent fact: the enduring strength of the unschooled mind. Because of this fact, those who fashion a more sophisticated account of identity are often bested by those whose identity stories are simpler, if not simplistic.

In what follows, I make no effort to categorize each story and counterstory in terms of its specific developmental level—that is both unwarranted and unnecessary. Instead, I speak in terms of the relative sophistication of stories that are enunciated by leaders; and I record their fate as they compete with other stories in the culture and other stories that are put forth by rivals. As shown repeatedly, a more sophisticated account of identity (or values or meaning) is often bested by an account that is simpler and has a broader appeal. A convenient summary of major stories and counterstories is provided in Appendix I.

Enough for preliminaries. It is time to turn to the issue at hand—the study of different kinds of leaders. As we turn our attention, in part II, to particular leaders in particular situations, we see at work the various kinds of stories



that have, in bare-bones form, been outlined here. We witness the ways in which these stories struggle with other ones, in the minds of aspiring leaders no less than in the minds of potential followers. And we have a chance to consider the scope of the stories created by leaders and the extent to which leaders and their followers feel the impulse to integrate the individual stories into some kind of overall coherent framework.

As I have noted, this particular study grew out of an earlier study of creative individuals, ones who were instrumental in transforming the domains in which they worked. Appropriately, then, the current survey begins with two leaders who, in early life, were considered among the most creative workers in their respective domains. If Margaret Mead was not quite the equal of Sigmund Freud, she changed conceptions of human nature; if J. Robert Oppenheimer was not quite the peer of Albert Einstein, he added to our understanding of the physical world.

But neither Mead nor Oppenheimer was content to remain as a disciplinary expert, addressing those trained in one domain. By paths that I trace, both found themselves addressing increasingly wide audiences, on increasingly broad topics. Indeed, by the end of their careers, they had made the transition from indirect leadership to direct leadership. At the heights of their public careers, they were speaking directly to audiences about those fundamental questions of identity and value that most deeply affect the human condition. Thus, while representing one end of the continuum of leadership, they also embodied over the course of their lives the full sweep of that continuum.