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INTRODUCTION

WEBS OF SIGNIFICANCE

T

HIS BOOK IS ABOUT the dark side of the human condition. It paints leadership in shades of gray—and in black.

In spite of all the work on leadership that assumes it by definition to be good, I describe how we exercise power, authority, and influence in ways that do harm. This harm is not necessarily deliberate. It can be the result of carelessness or neglect. But this does not make it less injurious, and in some cases calamitous.

Often a leader is assumed to be all-powerful. But we must remember that leaders acting alone are not responsible for bad leadership. Thus, the web symbolizes the many different strands that always constitute the leadership process.

What are the webs of significance—the webs of leadership? Threaded through the whole is the leader. The leader may or may not hold a formal position of authority; position is not the point. Rather, it is the leader as protagonist that matters. As I define it, a *leader* chooses a particular course of action and then in some way gets others to go along; or, more subtly, the leader encourages the led to “choose” the course that the group will follow.

That followers matter is a presumption now widely shared. Still, even sophisticated students of leadership tend to focus on leaders and shortchange followers.

Our fascination with the man (usually it is a man) on the white horse remains constant. Like most other animals, we have tended to look to strong males to provide what's most important: safety and security. Robert Sapolsky, baboon expert extraordinaire, describes a troop leader and alpha male named Solomon. "Solomon was in his silver years and resting on his laurels, persisting out of sheer psychological intimidation. He was damn good at it. He hadn't had a major fight in a year. He would just glance at someone, rouse himself from his regal setting and saunter over, at the most swat him, and that would settle things. Everyone was terrified of him."¹

The human animal resembles the baboon. We, too, have typically deferred to males whose strength and capacity to lead ostensibly have been proven. Still, there is no leadership without followership. Leaders *cannot* lead unless followers follow, passively or actively.

Finally, leadership does not take place in a vacuum. All leader-follower stories are set in the particular contexts within which they unfold. Robert Caro, author of a prodigious multivolume biography of Lyndon Johnson, titled the third volume *Master of the Senate*. As the title implies, this is a tale about a legislator, but it is also, inevitably, about the legislature within which he did his work. Caro makes plain that it is impossible to understand Johnson's power over his fellow senators without understanding the Senate itself. Johnson, Caro writes, was "master of an institution that had never before had a master, and that . . . has not had one since." So, he continues, "This book is a study of —the story of— America's Senate itself."²

Webs of leadership are tangled, the strands—the leader, the followers, and the context—hard to separate one from the other. Unlike great tapestries, in which countless threads are precisely woven into magical panoramas, webs of leadership are not so neatly delineated.

James O'Toole has used a nineteenth-century painting by the Belgian artist James Ensor to make a similar point. *Christ's Entry into Brussels* is a vast canvas of particular people—including one leader and many followers—in a particular place. But the crowded and chaotic street scene leaves us uncertain. So O'Toole asks, "Where is Christ in all this confusion? Shouldn't he be in the forefront, *leading* the parade? Shouldn't he be the visual focus of the painting?"³

Ensor's work is a radical departure from the art that preceded it. For nearly two millennia Christ—the leader/Redeemer—*was* the center of attention. But on this particular canvas, he is in the background, "almost lost in a throng of revelers that threatens to engulf him."⁴ O'Toole's point is that Ensor was the first to illustrate the modern condition: one in which secular democracy has rendered traditional forms of leadership nearly obsolete.

The painting depicts the complex nature of a leadership process in which more than one player is center stage and in which back-drop matters. Yes, Christ is in the frame; and so there is, as we can plainly see, a leader. But the uncertain relationship between Christ and everyone else, and the obvious importance of the setting, the street scene in Brussels, depicts a dynamic that is complex and fluid rather than simple and preordained.

To see leadership in shades of gray, and in black, is to see it in a way that's another sort of departure from the past. What does "bad leadership" mean? Does it mean leadership that is immoral, unethical? Or does it mean leadership that is incompetent, ineffective? And what about the word *leader* itself? Isn't there a widely held view, at least in the United States, that it is good to be a leader because to be a leader is, ipso facto, to be good?

Questions like these have no easy answers. This should not intimidate us, but it does. Bad leadership is a phenomenon so ubiquitous it's a wonder that our shelves are not heavy with books on the subject. But they are not. Maybe there's a connection: Maybe we avoid the subject because bad leadership is located in what Harlan Cleveland refers to as the "untidy" world of human relations.⁵ Bad leadership may be even untidier than good leadership.

Can you easily explain followers who willingly, sometimes even eagerly, do the bidding of leaders who are evil?

As we shall see in the pages that follow, even in the untidy universe of bad leadership, patterns emerge. Seven types of bad leadership are identified, which begin to impose an order on the whole.

Finally there is the ultimate question: What is to be done to maximize good leadership and minimize bad leadership? To address this issue, each of the seven stories on each of the seven types concludes with some thoughts about what leaders, and followers, could have done differently—what they could have done to prevent bad leadership in the first place or stop it after it started.

As the final chapter further suggests, this book is intended also to be prescriptive. I take it as a given that we promote good leadership not by ignoring bad leadership, nor by presuming that it is immutable, but rather by attacking it as we would a disease that is always pernicious and sometimes deadly.

PART ONE

THE BAD SIDE

*But I'd shut my eyes in the sentry box,
So I didn't see nothin' wrong.*

—Rudyard Kipling

CLAIMING THE BAD SIDE

WHEN HE WAS INSTALLED as president of Harvard University in October 2001, Lawrence Summers delivered a speech in which he declared that “in this new century, nothing will matter more than the education of future leaders and the development of new ideas.”¹ In this single sentence the new head of Harvard made at least two important assumptions: that people can be educated in ways that relate to being leaders, and in ways that relate to being *good* leaders.

This kind of positive thinking explains why leadership education has become a big business. The “leadership industry”—so tagged because in recent years it has grown so big so fast—is dedicated to the proposition that leadership is a subject that should be studied and a skill that should be taught. To meet the burgeoning demand for leadership education and training, a cadre of experts has emerged. These leadership scholars, teachers, consultants, trainers, and coaches work on the optimistic assumption that to develop leaders is to develop a valuable human resource.

The academic work that supports the leadership industry generally shares this positive bias. The titles of many of the best and

most popular leadership books of the past twenty years send messages that make the point. Targeted primarily at those in the corporate sector, they include Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman's *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*;² Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *The Change Masters: Innovation & Entrepreneurship in the American Corporation*;³ Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus's *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*;⁴ John Kotter's *A Force for Change: How Leadership Differs from Management*;⁵ Noel Tichy's *The Leadership Engine: How Winning Companies Build Leaders at Every Level*;⁶ and Jay Conger and Beth Benjamin's *Building Leaders: How Successful Companies Develop the Next Generation*.⁷ Each of these books assumes that people can learn to be leaders and that to be a leader is to be a person of competence and character.

Good cheer of this kind is in even greater evidence among those who write for the general public. Authors such as Steven Covey, Kenneth Blanchard, and Spencer Johnson continue to sell tens of millions of books that suggest that you too can learn how to be a (good) leader, and in no time flat.⁸

By now such optimism has come to pervade not only American schools of business but also American schools of government. On the reasonable assumption that if leadership education makes sense for graduate students entering the private sector, it also makes sense for those entering the public and nonprofit sectors, schools of government now offer courses on how to manage and how to lead. Moreover, even though bad political leadership is as ubiquitous as bad business leadership, the prevailing view of leadership is rather relentlessly positive. As John Gardner wrote in the first of a series of highly influential leadership essays, "In our culture popular understanding of the term [leadership] distinguishes it from coercion—and places higher on the scale of leadership those forms involving lesser degrees of coercion."⁹

In this book I argue that there's something odd about the idea that somehow leadership can be distinguished from coercion, as if leadership and power were unrelated. In the real world, in everyday life, we come into constant contact not only with good

leaders and good followers doing good things but also with bad leaders and bad followers doing bad things. In fact, anyone not dwelling in a cave is regularly exposed, if only through the media, to people who exercise power, use authority, and exert influence in ways that are not good. Still, even after all the evidence is in—after the recent corporate scandals, after the recent revelations of wrongdoing by leaders of the Roman Catholic Church, and before, during, and after political leadership all over the world that is so abhorrent it makes us ill—the idea that some leaders and some followers are bad, and that they might have something in common with good leaders and followers, has not fully penetrated the conversation or the curriculum.

The positive slant is recent. Historically, political theorists have been far more interested in the question of how to control the proclivities of bad leaders than in the question of how to promote the virtues of good ones. Influenced by religious traditions that focused on good and evil, and often personally scarred by war and disorder, the best political thinkers have had rather a jaundiced view of human nature.

Machiavelli provides perhaps the best example. He did not wrestle with the idea of bad—as in coercive—leadership. He simply presumed it. He took it for granted that people do harm as well as good, and so his advice to princes, to leaders, was to be ruthless. Consider this morsel about how leaders should, if need be, keep followers in line: "Cruelties can be called well used (if it is permissible to speak well of evil) that are done at a stroke, out of the necessity to secure oneself, and then are not persisted in but are turned to as much utility for the subjects as one can. Those cruelties are badly used which, though few in the beginning, rather grow with time."¹⁰

As the Gardner quotation makes plain, today leaders who use coercion are generally judged to be bad. But to Machiavelli, the only kind of bad leader is the weak leader. Machiavelli was a pragmatist above all, familiar with the ways of the world and with a keen eye for the human condition. And so, to him, the judicious use of cruelty was an important arrow in the leader's quiver.

Although it seems counterintuitive, America's founders thought like Machiavelli, at least insofar as they also believed that people required restraint. They were products of the European Enlightenment, but as they saw it, their main task was to form a government that was for and by the people but that would simultaneously set limits on the body politic and on those who would lead it.

To be sure, the emphasis was different. Whereas Machiavelli was concerned primarily with the question of how to contain followers, the framers of the U.S. Constitution were concerned primarily with the question of how to contain leaders. Alexander Hamilton, for example, was, in comparison with his peers, a proponent of a strong executive. But even he considered it ideologically important as well as politically expedient to focus not on the possibilities of presidential power but on its limits.

In *The Federalist Papers*, Hamilton acknowledged America's "aversion to monarchy"—to leaders who inherit great power. He dedicated an entire essay to distinguishing between the proposed president, on the one hand, and the distant, detested British monarchy, on the other, an essay that made one main point: The U.S. Constitution would absolutely preclude the possibility that bad leadership could become entrenched. The very idea of checks and balances grew out of the framers' presumption that unless there was a balance of power, power was certain to be abused. Put another way, the American political system is the product of revolutionaries familiar with, and therefore wary of, bad leadership.

But as sociologist Talcott Parsons observed, on matters that relate to the importance of power and authority in human affairs, American social thought has tended toward utopianism.¹¹ For whatever reasons, most students of politics shy away from the subject of bad leadership and especially from really bad leaders, such as Stalin and Pol Pot. In other words, no matter how great and obvious its impact on the course of human affairs, "tyranny as such is simply not an issue or a recognized term of analysis."¹²

The question is, why do we tend toward utopianism on matters relating to the importance of power and authority in human

affairs?¹³ Why do we avoid the subject of tyranny in our leadership curricula, thereby presuming that tyrannical leadership is less relevant to the course of human affairs than democratic leadership? Why does the leadership industry generally assume that a bad leader such as Saddam Hussein has nearly nothing in common with a good leader such as Tony Blair, or that the Nazis were one species and the Americans another? Is Bernard Ebbers really so very different from Louis Gerstner Jr.? How did *leadership* come to be synonymous with *good leadership*?¹⁴ Why are we afraid to acknowledge, much less admit to, the dark side?

These are the questions to which I now turn.

The Light Side

We want to read books about good leaders such as John Adams, Jack Welch, and Nelson Mandela. We don't want to read books about bad leaders such as Warren Harding, David Koresh, and Robert Mugabe.

This preference is natural. We go through life accentuating the positive and eliminating the negative in order to be as healthy and happy as possible. As Daniel Goleman put it, "[O]ur emotional and physical well-being is based in part on artful denial and illusion." In other words, for us to cultivate an "unfounded sense of optimism" serves a purpose. It is in our self-interest.¹⁵

In the leadership industry, this disposition has now moved from the level of the individual to the level of the collective. Those of us engaged in leadership work seem almost to collude to avoid the elephant in the room—bad leadership.¹⁶ We resist even considering the possibility that the dynamic between Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his most ardent followers had anything in common with the dynamic between Adolph Hitler and his most ardent followers; or that John Biggs, the admired former CEO of TIAA/CREF, has skills and capacities similar in some ways to those of Richard Scrushy, the disgraced former CEO of HealthSouth.

As we have seen, the human predisposition to denial and optimism does not stop everyone from assuming the role of the hard-nosed pragmatist. Machiavelli and Hamilton understood that the human animal cannot be relied on to be good, and they prescribed accordingly. So what happened in the recent past to explain why the leadership industry and the general public have become positively disposed?

Reason 1: The Use of Language

In 1978 James MacGregor Burns, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and political scientist of impeccable repute, published *Leadership*, a book now widely regarded as seminal. The time was right. Even in higher education, there was growing support for the idea that “great men” mattered; and in the wake of Vietnam and Watergate and the assassinations of John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., Americans were increasingly persuaded that there was a “crisis of leadership.”

Because the book itself was impressive, because for decades there had been nearly no good work on leadership per se, and because *Leadership* was published just as questions about governance in America became urgent, Burns’s work had considerable impact. In fact, his two types of leadership—transactional and transformational—became part of the leadership lingo among those interested in both political and corporate leadership.

Thus the way in which Burns chose to define the words *leader* and *leadership* mattered. “Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize . . . resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers,” he wrote. “This is done in order to realize goals mutually held by leaders and followers.” Burns was unwilling to call those who “obliterate” followers “leaders.” Instead he labeled them “power wielders.” “Power wielders,” Burns argued, “may treat people as things. Leaders may not.”¹⁷

The fact that Burns’s book came out just when the leadership

how people understood the word *leadership*. Even now it is Burns’s particular definition of leadership—a definition that excludes leaders who, even though they may exercise power, authority, or influence, fail to “arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers”—that dominates the field. Warren Bennis, one of the gurus of corporate leadership, has taken a semantic stance similar to Burns’s. In the new (2003) introduction to his classic *On Becoming a Leader*, Bennis restates the position he took when the book was first published (1989): that leaders engage others by creating shared meaning, speaking in a distinctive voice, demonstrating the capacity to adapt, and having integrity. In other words, like Burns, Bennis generally assumes that to become a leader is to become a good leader.¹⁸

Reason 2: Business Trumps Everything Else

During the last quarter of the twentieth century the leadership industry developed primarily in response to the demands of American business. The reason was simple: By the mid-1970s, American business was in trouble. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter put it in *The Change Masters*, published in 1983, “Not long ago, American companies seemed to control the world in which they operated.” Now, she went on, they were in a much scarier place, one in which factors such as the control of oil by OPEC, foreign competition (especially from Japan), inflation, and regulation “disturb[ed] the smooth workings of corporate machines and threaten[ed] to overwhelm us.”¹⁹

In response to the growing concern, American business (and American business schools) began pouring millions of dollars into developing a cadre of people who might fix what was wrong. The content of the behavioral sciences changed, and a new area of study developed with remarkable rapidity: leadership as a business management skill. Scholars, teachers, and consultants were now being paid very well indeed to teach people to lead companies that ran smoothly—and turned a profit.

schools that study and serve it started slowly to equate the learning of leadership with the learning of good leadership. It can be argued that this new definition of the word *leadership* accounts more than anything else for the explosive growth of the leadership industry. In particular, in keeping with the spirit of American capitalism, programs and curricula that claim to grow (good) leaders fill seats—and coffers.

Reason 3: The American National Character

The leadership industry is an American product—an American seed planted in American soil and harvested almost entirely by American experts. It is small wonder that the industry mirrors the American experience, in particular its self-help optimism.

Repeatedly, America's great leaders have given voice to this sense of the possible. In his Farewell Address, George Washington foretold an America that would "give to mankind the magnanimous and too novel example of a people always guided by an exalted justice and benevolence."²⁰ In his second inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln spoke of binding "the nation's wounds,"²¹ even though North and South had not yet finished fighting their excruciating Civil War. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King, Jr., described his dream, in which his children would "one day live in a nation where they will be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."²² And both John Kennedy and Ronald Reagan borrowed from John Winthrop the picture of America as a city on a hill. As Reagan put it while running for president the first time, "We can meet our destiny—and that destiny is to build a land here that will be, for all mankind, a shining city on a hill."²³

Our newfound belief in the individual and collective benefits of leadership learning originates from this wellspring. We presume that to be a leader is to do good and to be good. We presume that all of us can, and that some of us will, build "a shining city on a hill."

The Dark Side

But the leadership industry has a problem that years ago I named Hitler's ghost.²⁴ Here is my concern. If we pretend that there is no elephant and that bad leadership is unrelated to good leadership, if we pretend to know the one without knowing the other, we will in the end distort the enterprise. We cannot distance ourselves from even the most extreme example—Hitler—by bestowing on him another name, such as "power wielder." Not only was his impact on twentieth-century history arguably greater than anyone else's, but also he was brilliantly skilled at inspiring, mobilizing, and directing followers. His use of coercion notwithstanding, if this is not leadership, what is?

Similarly, it makes no sense to think of corporate lawbreakers as one breed, and corporate gods as another. Why would we preclude people at the top of the Enron hierarchy—chairman Kenneth Lay, CEO Jeffrey Skilling, and CFO Andrew Fastow—from being labeled leaders just because they did not "realize goals mutually held by leaders and followers"? The fact is that Lay, Skilling, and Fastow were agents of change. What they did affected the lives and pocketbooks of tens of thousands of Americans, many of whom were not Enron employees. Let's be clear here. These men were not just a few rotten apples. Rather, they created, indeed encouraged, an organizational culture that allowed many apples to spoil and, in turn, ruin others.

Thus the fundamental proposition of this book: To deny bad leadership equivalence in the conversation and curriculum is misguided, tantamount to a medical school that would claim to teach health while ignoring disease. Some might argue that the differences are merely semantic—that although Burns and Bennis equate the word *leadership* with good leadership, the rest of us are free to define leadership as we see fit. But words matter. Inevitably, the fact that the overwhelming majority of leadership experts use *leadership* to imply *good* leadership affects how we think about a

subject that is far more complex, and frightening, than this dewy-eyed view would suggest.

Limiting leadership to good leadership presents three major problems.

- *It is confusing.* Try telling the average undergraduate, or a non-American, or the proverbial man on the street, that the most reviled of recent American presidents, Richard Nixon, was something other than a leader. Most folks use the word *leader* as it has always been used: to refer to any individual who uses power, authority, and influence to get others to go along. The *New York Times* does not refer to former Libertarian president Charles Taylor as a “power wielder,” even though he stands accused of murder, rape, abduction, and other crimes against humanity. Nor is L. Dennis Kozlowski, the astonishingly successful former CEO of Tyco, considered by most people to be any the less a corporate leader because it was finally revealed that he was greedy to the point of being corrupt.

- *It is misleading.* As Bernard Bass has observed, “[T]here are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.”²⁵ For example, leadership can be considered the exercise of influence, or a power relation, or an instrument of goal achievement, or a differentiated role. The point is that each of these definitions is value-free. It makes no sense therefore to distinguish between leaders and power wielders. In fact, to compare them is not to compare apples and oranges, but apples and apples.

- *It does a disservice.* All of us want good leadership—to live in a world of good leaders and good followers. We want good leadership at home, at work, and in the various communities of which we are members. One way to increase the probability of good leadership is to encourage as many people as possible to study it, teach it, and practice it.

to explore bad leadership. How will we ever stop what we refuse to see and study?

Americans are familiar, of course, with bad leadership. We are not strangers to ineffective leaders and followers, nor to unethical leaders and followers. But it is also true that at the highest national level, the United States has never had a leader who was bad in the extreme. Unlike people in most of the rest of the world, Americans have never suffered under authoritarian rule, and so the dark side of public leadership has remained at a remove. Our bad leaders tend to disappoint because they are inept or corrupt, and not because they are despots. Even the worst of our national leaders, presidents such as James Buchanan, Warren Harding, or even Nixon, who resigned before he could be impeached, tend to be judged stupid, maladroit, sleazy, or ignoble rather than tyrannical.

But the American experience is not everything. Leaders and followers can be bad in ways that are of a different magnitude. In a foreword to *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, Martin Malia identifies several regimes by the brutal tyrants who led them: “Stalin’s Gulag, Mao Zedong’s Great Leap Forward and his Cultural Revolution, and Pol Pot’s Khmer Rouge.” Malia reminds us, in the event we need reminding, that Communism was a “tragedy of planetary dimensions”; its victims are estimated to number between 85 and 100 million. Moreover, he makes clear that it is impossible to understand what happened without understanding those who were immediately responsible.²⁶

Those who are immediately responsible for bad leadership include bad followers just as much as bad leaders. Like leaders, followers run the gamut. At the extreme, there are those who commit “crimes of obedience.” Herbert Kelman and Lee Hamilton demonstrated that such crimes take place not only in contexts of conflict—for example, when members of the military engage in sanctioned massacres—but also in political and bureaucratic settings. They point out that the burglars were the “foot soldiers of

wrongdoing in Nixon's White House continued in a series of "cover-up actions" that reached all the way down the chain of command to the clerical staff.²⁷

So bad leadership is not solely the fault of a few bad leaders. We are all, every one of us, in this together.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu has said that his experience of South Africa taught him "two contradictory things." On the one hand, we "have an extraordinary capacity for good." But on the other hand, we have "a remarkable capacity for evil—we have refined ways of being mean and nasty to one another [through] genocides, holocausts, slavery, racism, wars, oppression and injustice."²⁸

Because leadership makes a difference, sometimes even a big difference, those of us who desire to make the world a better place must do what Tutu did. We must come to grips with leadership as two contradictory things: good and bad.

REASONS FOR BEING BAD

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHERS have generally agreed on one important thing: People in a state of nature are not, in the usual sense of the word, "good." This is not to insist that people are bad but rather that the human animal cannot be relied on to behave well.

Because virtually all men, women, and children live in groups, and because some men, women, and children are bad some of the time, the overriding question is how bad behavior can and should be constrained. Freud wrote that primitive peoples lived in groups "ruled over despotically by a powerful male" and that only later, along with the beginnings of religion and social organization, was the "paternal horde transformed into a community of brothers."¹ It is this transition—from natural humans living in a "paternal horde" to more civilized humans living in a "community of brothers"—that has been grist for the mill of political philosophers from Aristotle and Confucius to Montesquieu and Mill. The most pressing political concerns have been and continue to be about governance: how people in groups are best ordered and organized.

In the classic *Leviathan*, English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) asserted that people in their natural state are rapacious and aggressive. Therefore, to ensure what's most important—self-preservation—individual rights must be subsumed under the rights of a state charged with keeping order. Hobbes argued that without strict political arrangements and rule by a leader with an iron fist, we would inevitably descend into chaos and war.²

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1712–1778) view of human nature was much different from Hobbes's. But by the time he wrote *The Social Contract*, a small book that had a big impact on eighteenth-century Western thought, Rousseau similarly argued that it was in our self-interest to surrender at least some individual rights. Unlike Hobbes, Rousseau did not consider people territorial and aggressive.³ Still, he concluded that we are most likely to lead a good life by living in organized groups in which the whole, a community of some kind, is authorized to govern the individual parts.⁴

As we have seen, Machiavelli's (1469–1527) *The Prince* spoke to the virtue of order, however secured. Thus the ruler's first responsibility was to do whatever was required to impose it. Like Hobbes, Machiavelli asserted that we can choose to be free or to be ruled, but if we opt for the former over the latter we do so at our peril.⁵ The trade-off for followers is obvious: less freedom in exchange for more security.

Machiavelli wrote about restraints because his primary interest was in securing the power of the leader. John Locke (1632–1704) wrote about restraints because his primary interest was in securing the rights of the led. Curiously, the premise that underlies the work of these two very different political thinkers—and indeed of virtually every great treatise on government—is more or less the same: To contain the dark side of human nature, some sort of structure, generally enforced by law, must be imposed. In other words, although it seems counterintuitive, the philosophers of the European and American Enlightenment were every bit as concerned with how to control the people as they were with how to liberate them. Whereas Locke's more tempered view of human

nature permitted him to consider the primary function of government to be the protection of property and not, as with Hobbes, the protection of life, the result is not very different from that of his great predecessor. Like Hobbes, Locke preached the need for constraints imposed by government and the rule of law.⁶

America's founders generally followed Locke's line of thought, which can be described as simultaneously enlightened and pragmatic. As *The Federalist Papers* testify, when the time came to codify a political system, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay argued for checks and balances. Why? It was because they did not trust all the people all the time. Simultaneously hopeful and hard-nosed, *The Federalist Papers* remind us of “both the light and dark sides of human nature—of man's capacity for reason and justice that makes free government possible, of his capacity for passion and injustice that makes it necessary.”⁷

For those of us with a particular interest in leadership, the seminal readings in political theory are a treasure trove. Together they provide the single best explanation of why leaders lead and followers follow: self-interest. In nearly every case, leaders and followers engage to protect against the anxiety of disorder and the fear of death.

Of course our willingness, even our eagerness, to live with limits means that they must first be established and then enforced. Someone must do this collective work. That is, someone, or several someones, must lead this effort, and this is why, except for diehard anarchists, not one of the great political philosophers has a worldview that dispenses with leaders altogether.

Let me make clear that even though I have focused so far on political arrangements, the need for leadership applies to every area of human endeavor. All of us belong to groups and organizations of various kinds, ranging from the family to the work place. Virtually every one of these groups and organizations maintains some kind of order, and some kind of order means some kind of leadership.

In *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding tells of a band of boys brought together accidentally, having no resources other than the

ones they alone can muster. Soon the motley crew becomes an organized group, with a clear leader. Almost imperceptibly but with growing self-confidence, Ralph takes on the role. "I'm calling an assembly," he said. One by one, the [others] halted, and stood watching him." Ralph, emboldened by the attention and sensing that he's filling a vacuum, continues. "With the conch. I'm calling a meeting even if we have to go on into the dark. Down on the platform. When I blow it. Now."⁸

Ralph's grab for power—and the other boys' willingness, at least initially, to go along—tells us what we already know. Most of the time someone is willing, even eager, to lead, however obscure and uncertain the rewards. And most of the time others are willing, even eager, to follow, however obscure and uncertain their reasons for doing so. Of course, the type of leadership that emerges will depend not only on the group members but also on the nature of the task at hand.

A question arises: Given that the need for leadership is demonstrable and universally shared, and given that the roles of leader and followers are readily filled, why does so much go so wrong so often?

Why Do Leaders Behave Badly?

In this book I do not explore the psychosocial genesis of individual behavior. But even to approach the question of how to minimize bad leadership, we must have some understanding of what motivates it.

Leaders are like everyone else. They—we—behave badly for different reasons, and they—we—behave badly in different ways.

Sometimes the context fosters bad behavior. A city in which corruption has long been tolerated is more likely to be defrauded by its elected officials than is one that has a long and strong tradition of good government.

Sometimes followers entice leaders to go astray. People in positions of authority are not immune to the influence of others,

especially close advisers who, although perhaps misguided, are nevertheless determined and single-tracked.

But, in the main, leaders behave badly because of who they are and what they want.

Traits

Leadership scholars used to think that the leader's traits were more important than any other variable to the way leadership was exercised. But now they're more skeptical. Traits once considered of paramount importance, such as intelligence, are viewed as having fuzzy and imprecise denotations. (Cognitive intelligence? Emotional intelligence? Practical intelligence?) And traits considered essential in some situations are now seen as virtually irrelevant in others. In any case, the explanatory power of traits is now viewed as less than it once was. It is now widely agreed that to overemphasize the leader's traits is to underemphasize other important variables, such as the situation, the nature of the task at hand, and of course the followers.⁹

But even though the trait theory of leadership is out of fashion, at least in academe, it's silly to pretend that traits don't matter. Traits once considered of consequence still are.¹⁰ And average people who exercise leadership still exceed the average members of their groups in traits such as intelligence (however defined), sociability, persistence, alertness, verbal facility, level of energy, and adaptability.

In short, the trait approach to leadership is a relatively simple way of understanding why people behave the way they do. Moreover, whether a leader has or lacks a particular trait is likely to tell us a fair amount about how and why good, or bad, leadership was exercised.

Consider the explanatory power of an ordinary trait such as greed. Greedy leaders crave more—more success, more money, more power, or more whatever, such as sex. This is not to say that all leaders who aspire to have more are bad. In some measure, rewards such as money and power are simply the benefits expected

from hard work. Rather, when leaders' appetites for more are excessive, it is likely to intrude on their capacity to exercise leadership for the common good.

American business has been riddled in recent years by scandals brought on primarily by rich corporate leaders who apparently wanted nothing so much as to get even richer. One of the poster boys for wrongdoing in the mutual fund industry was Richard Strong. Charged with sins ranging from late trading to improper market timing, Strong was finally forced to resign as chairman, chief executive, and chief investment officer of Strong Capital Management, a firm he had founded. Similarly, Raymond Cunningham, chief executive of Invesco, one of the world's biggest money managers, was hit by civil fraud charges filed by both the Securities and Exchange Commission and New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer. Cunningham reportedly was engaged in a massive mutual fund scheme from which he and his cronies profited handsomely while ordinary investors suffered millions of dollars in losses.

But greed is not measured in dollars alone. Because the modern American presidency offers heady, extravagant benefits, it comes as no surprise to learn that those who sit in the Oval Office are also inclined to want more, sometimes more than they can, or should, have. Lyndon Johnson wanted both guns and butter—American dominance abroad and the Great Society at home. Richard Nixon tried further to tighten his already tight grip on the American political system. And Bill Clinton's presidency will long be stained by his uncontained appetites. When leaders are unwilling or unable to control their desire for more, bad leadership will be the result.

Greed is likely to be most pernicious when it entails a hunger for power. Sometimes this results in little more than the leader's unwillingness to share power by, for example, delegating tasks and consulting with others.¹¹ But in its more extreme form, a craving for power can be dangerous. It is no stretch to say that the root cause of totalitarianism is a leader whose need for control is all-consuming.

Character

Psychologists and psychiatrists base their analyses of character on clinical observations. Historians and political scientists, on the other hand, assess character by studying the behavior of public officials over long periods.¹² In any case, character is considered the core of the personality system, the foundation on which personality structures develop and operate. Unlike traits, which are viewed as amenable to change, character is a more permanent condition, fundamental and fixed. Character is embedded in who we are; it is who we are.¹³

As the word is commonly used, we also presume that to know a person's character is to know his or her moral compass. When we say of leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Jimmy Carter that they are men of good character, we are saying they are good men, decent and honorable deep down as well as to all appearances.

The connection between character and leadership is easiest to make at the extreme. Political scientist Betty Glad studied three very bad leaders: Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein. She concluded all three were "malignant narcissists" who, in effect, could not help being aggressive and sadistic in their relations with others.¹⁴ Put another way, malignant narcissism is not considered to be a mere trait. To label these three men malignant narcissists is to stamp their characters and to tell us what we need to know about why they behave as they do.

Why Do We Follow Leaders Who Behave Badly?

Unless followers are pressured or coerced into going along with bad leaders, they resist them—right? Wrong. We know full well that bad leaders of various kinds abound and that their followers usually follow, even when they know that their leaders are misguided or malevolent. Why? The answer to this question matters, because we can't expect to reduce the number of bad leaders unless we reduce the number of bad followers.

Individual Needs

Even bad leaders often satisfy our most basic human needs, in particular safety, simplicity, and certainty.

The quest for safety, for self-preservation (think Hobbes), is arguably the strongest of our basic needs.¹⁶ Before anything else, we seek food, shelter, and protection from harm. As infants and small children, we are completely dependent on adults, usually our parents, to meet these primary needs. Consequently, one of the first things we learn during childhood is to follow—to do what our parents tell us to do. Getting along by going along is one of life's earliest lessons. Freud explicitly connected parenting and leading: "We know that the great majority of people have a strong need for authority which they can admire, to which they can submit, and which dominates and sometimes even ill-treats them. We have learned from the psychology of the individual whence comes this need of masses. It is the longing for the father that lives in each of us from his childhood days."¹⁶

Of course, our need for safety plays itself out at many levels other than the original, familial one, and this is why we follow the leader in everyday life. To be a well-behaved child is generally not to question the teacher, even when the teacher is somehow bad. When we are adults on the job it's the same: By and large we toe the line. We do what we're told and play by the rules, even when the rules are unfair, and those who set them badly equipped or disposed. We follow because the cost of not following is, more often than not, high.¹⁷

We also follow because of our need for simplicity and stability. Leaders, even bad ones, can provide a sense of order and certainty in a disordered and uncertain world. Moreover, to resist leaders is to invite confusion and upset. To resist leaders is demanding in a way that going along is not.

It has been suggested that the construct of the leader itself is a manifestation of our preference for simple as opposed to complex explanations. To have a leader is to have an observable someone, potentially replaceable, who is responsible for what happens.¹⁸ In

any case it's hard to argue with the proposition that leaders help us to make sense of the world in which we operate. Bill Gates explains and now even symbolizes the success of Microsoft, just as Cardinal Bernard Law came to explain and finally even to symbolize the cover-ups that stained the Roman Catholic Church.

Among the most compelling explanations for our willingness to obey authority is the need to keep things simple. Many reasons have been given to explain why, in Stanley Milgram's notorious experiment, ordinary people designated as "teachers" were willing to inflict painful shocks on those designated as "learners."¹⁹ It was dismaying in any case, indeed horrifying, to discover how readily the likes of you and me hurt others if ordered to do so by someone with power or authority. Milgram himself explained it by saying that his "teachers" shifted their moral concern from the "learners" to the authority figure, in this case the experimenter who gave the instructions.²⁰ But it has also been argued that the teachers (followers) obeyed orders to inflict pain because of their overriding need to keep things simple in a stressful situation. Evolution favors creatures that make quick decisions based on their prior experience. So yet another reason to follow leaders, even bad leaders, is simply because it's often easiest to assume that they know what they're doing.²¹

Finally, sometimes followers follow bad leaders because of their—our—need for certainty. Although we are always vulnerable to existential angst, it can reasonably be argued that in the wake of September 11, 2001, for Americans at least this vulnerability became more acute. In our eagerness to quell our anxiety, we are more willing than we would be otherwise to go along with leaders who give the appearance of being strong and certain.²²

Group Needs

Followers follow bad leaders not only because of their individual need for safety, simplicity, and certainty but also because of the needs of the group. Groups go along with bad leaders because even bad leaders often provide important benefits. In particular,

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leaders maintain order, provide cohesion and identity, and do the collective work.

As we have seen, political theorists agree that we require leaders to keep the peace. Empirical evidence supports this proposition. Hierarchy, it turns out, is the natural order of things. Patterns of dominance and deference among primates are particularly relevant. Although some thinkers quarrel with the notion that there is any link between the human animal and, say, the baboons referred to in the introduction to this book, it's hard to imagine that there exists no connection at all. As *Lord of the Flies* suggests, whenever a group forms, a leader will emerge. Our nonhuman ancestors—primates—exhibit the same behavior; that is, they exhibit social ranking. Therefore our own social, political, and economic hierarchies are in keeping with, rather than opposed to, our primate heritage.²³

These connections also pertain to the role played by all leaders, including bad ones, in providing the group with cohesion and identity. Human groups have evolved from small-scale societies to the complex nation-states that characterize the modern world. This evolution has had implications for leadership systems. In general, the more complex the society is, the greater the number of groups, organizations, and leaders.²⁴ Leaders hold groups and organizations together as they develop and change. Leaders enable groups and organizations to distinguish themselves one from the other. And leaders at the top symbolize the whole.

The final point usually is underestimated: Leaders meet the needs of groups and organizations because they take on the collective work. In fact, as societies increase in size, they become even more dependent on leaders to order, organize, and carry out their collective activities. "Thirty people can sit around a campfire and arrive at a consensual decision; thirty million people cannot."²⁵

No one has written about this phenomenon as persuasively as Robert Michels, an early twentieth-century German social scientist. After observing firsthand the gap between the socialist ideal of egalitarian governance and what actually transpired, Michels concluded that *all* groups and organizations, even those that deeply

value collective decision making, develop oligarchic tendencies. Michels's "iron law of oligarchy" says simply that, utopian ideologies notwithstanding, there will always be leaders. There will always be those tasked with getting the group's work done.²⁶

For reasons that are now quite clear, followers have good and sound reasons for following, even when their leaders are bad. To meet their needs, as individuals and as members of groups, followers usually conclude that it's in their interest to go with the flow. Another, perhaps more persuasive way of putting it is this: *Not* following is not in their interest. Not following can entail risk—to family, to position, and even to life. In particular, actively to protest against the powers that be takes time, energy, and, more often than not, courage.

Why Do Followers Behave Badly?

It's one thing for followers to follow bad leaders merely by going along. It's quite another for them to lend bad leaders strong personal support. What I am arguing is this: Followers who knowingly, deliberately commit themselves to bad leaders are themselves bad.

Followers' dedication to bad leaders is often strongest when their leaders are very bad, as opposed to only somewhat bad. Again, it's a matter of self-interest. Followers usually have no particular incentive to lend strong support to a leader who is merely ineffective. Going along is good enough. On the other hand, intimates of frankly unethical leaders often stand to benefit financially or politically from the relationship.

The corruption that took place in companies such as WorldCom and HealthSouth by no means involved only the CEOs. Both Bernard Ebbers and Richard Scrushy were surrounded by small groups of followers who knew what the score was, participated actively in the wrongdoing, and stood to profit substantially from the company's fraudulent practices. These members of the two men's respective inner circles were separate and distinct from the

larger group of followers, who were out of the loop and who, whatever suspicions they might have had, were not directly involved in the corruption.

The most extensive study of bad followers has been the case of Nazi Germany. At the risk of oversimplifying but in the interest of distinguishing among the kinds of followers, I will divide Germans during the Nazi period into three groups: bystanders, evildoers, and acolytes. (Only a handful of Germans actively opposed Hitler, and they often paid with their lives.)

Bystanders went along with Hitler and the Nazi regime, but they were not fervent Nazis. Bystanders' motivations ranged from self-interest (on matters relating to stability and security) to being part of a national group (Germany was, after all, their *Heimat*, their homeland) that was cohesive and provided a sense of identity.

Evildoers were members of units such as the SS-Einsatzgruppen. One of this unit's first goals during the Second World War was to massacre as many Soviet Jews as possible. The 1941 slaughter at Babi Yar, a ravine in Kiev, was testimony to its efficiency: In only two days members of this unit shot to death 33,771 Jews. Why did members of the German SS become, in the words of Richard Rhodes, "masters of death"?²⁷ The reasons varied. Some were genuine sadists. Others had been persuaded that they were killing "vermin." Still others turned brutal because they themselves were being brutalized by violence or the threat of violence. Finally, however weak in retrospect this line of argument, German soldiers were like soldiers everywhere. They were told what to do and they did it.

Acolytes were true believers: followers who were deeply committed to Hitler personally and to his political program. Although the acolytes who constituted Hitler's inner circle stood hand-somely to profit from their association with the Führer, in fact most were mesmerized by his charisma and ideas long before realizing rewards such as money and power. As early as 1923 Hermann Göring referred to Hitler as the "beloved leader of the German-freedom movement."²⁸ And only a few years later, in 1926, Joseph Goebbels gushed, "He [Hitler] is a genius. The natural,

creative instrument of a divine fate . . . I feel completely bound to him. The last doubt in me has disappeared."²⁹

Most people behave rationally most of the time. In Hitler's Germany, bystanders behaved badly either because they had no issue with the Nazi agenda or because, if they did, they calculated that the cost of resisting was greater than the cost of doing nothing. Evildoers behaved badly because it's how they were told to behave. And acolytes behaved badly because behaving badly is what they wanted to do. Acolytes were so dedicated to the Führer that his wish was, literally, their command.

Until now, I have spoken of bad leaders, bad followers, and bad leadership as if the different ways of being bad were more or less alike. But we know that being bad takes different forms. Because our interest in these matters is practical as well as theoretical, these differences may be of consequence. For example, holding a callous corporate leader accountable is one thing; holding a corrupt elected official accountable is a different thing entirely. Similarly, we know that deposing an incompetent mayor is rather a different undertaking from deposing an evil dictator. It is therefore important to make meaning of being bad, a task I turn to next.

MAKING MEANING OF BEING BAD

IN A TALK I once gave to the New Haven Jewish community, I referred to Hitler as a bad leader. The words were hardly out of my mouth when a member of the audience rose to differ. "Hitler may have been 'bad' as in 'ethically bad,'" he said. "But he was a good leader in that he was very effective."

The man was right. Given the ideology of National Socialism and the particulars of the Nazi agenda from 1933 to 1941 (when Germany made the mistake of invading the Soviet Union), Hitler's political and military strategies were nearly impeccable. Moreover, even between 1941 and 1945—the period leading up to Germany's defeat—at least one of Hitler's most cherished objectives, the annihilation of European Jewry, was realized with astonishing efficiency. Does this make Hitler a "good" leader?

If the lines of demarcation between effective and ethical blur for a leader as obviously evil as Adolph Hitler, it is no wonder that judging other leaders, less extreme, is harder. Was Ronald Reagan a good president? In many ways he was effective, much

more effective than his Hollywood career might have predicted. But to liberal Democrats, who even in retrospect detest his domestic agenda in particular, to label Reagan a “good” president seems absurd.

The lack of clarity about what exactly defines a good leader, and how to distinguish a good leader from a bad one, is mirrored in the follower. Consider this question: Should followers follow the leader, or the dictates of their consciences? On the one hand, a strong argument can be made that to maintain order and get work done, followers should go along with their leaders except in dire circumstances. On the other hand, followers are not sheep, nor should they necessarily be part of any herd.

When Argentines took to the streets in early 2002 to protest the parties and politicians who had been discredited by the country’s economic collapse, one might say that by noisily insinuating themselves into the political process they were being disruptive. Or one might take the opposite view: that by speaking out for what they believed, they were doing what good followers should do.

In an infamous case, Sherron Watkins, at the time vice president of corporate development at Enron, sent Kenneth Lay, Enron’s CEO, a six-page memo in 2001 detailing her fears that the company would implode in a wave of accounting scandals. At first glance Watkins appears to be a good, even a very good, follower. But a closer look suggests that the picture is more complex. After the scandal broke and Watkins testified before Congress, some saw a traitor, a woman who was flagrantly disloyal to former colleagues at every level and indeed to Enron itself.

If we ask whether the end justifies the means, we further complicate the conversation. A letter sent anonymously to the president of a major university complained about the coach of the women’s basketball team. The coach, a woman, was described as abusive to the point of creating an “extremely unhealthy and unproductive team environment.” Specifically, her “primary leadership tools” were “criticism, public humiliation, demands of compliance, screaming and yelling, pitting players against one another,

and other ‘old-school’ boot camp techniques.”¹ Here’s the question: Should the coach be judged on the basis of her performance, or that of her team?

The same issue arose with regard to Bobby Knight, once the legendary basketball coach at Indiana University (since 2000 he has been at Texas Tech University). Although as individuals his players were at the mercy of his frequent verbal and infrequent physical abuse, his team as a whole did brilliantly. How should Knight be judged? He got the end part right: His team was a winner. But his means were questionable: He browbeat undergraduates. So, finally, our assessment of a coach or leader, such as Knight, is bound to be subjective, personal, and value-driven. You might not like the idea of anyone ever striking a twenty-year-old. But given Knight’s remarkable record as a winning coach, I might not find it so objectionable.

Clearly, means versus ends issues are like good versus bad issues: impossible to sort out with precision. No wonder the leadership industry simplifies things. No wonder it defines leaders simply as “people who do the right thing.”²

But as we know, sometimes leaders do the *wrong* thing. Even the best and brightest aren’t precluded from being seduced by power. Some of the twentieth century’s most eminent intellectuals fell for really bad leaders in a really big way. The great German philosopher Martin Heidegger joined the Nazi Party because he longed to “return to some imaginary pre-modern idyll.” Other Europeans of high repute, such as the leading French writer and philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, became enamored of Stalin because there was nothing they hated so much as bourgeois capitalism.³ Nor were Americans exempt from such foolish flirtations, especially, again, with Stalin. Out of willful ignorance and misguided optimism, writers such as Lillian Hellman and John Steinbeck spent years making excuses for the Soviet despot, apparently believing that all would be right in the end.

I do not underestimate the challenge of explaining followers like these, nor do I minimize the task of explaining bad leadership more

generally. But if we have any hope of moving from bad leadership to better leadership, we must strike a balance between looking at the light and seeing in the dark.

Ineffective Leadership Versus Unethical Leadership

Bad leadership falls into two categories: bad as in ineffective and bad as in unethical. This distinction is not a theoretical construct. Rather, it is based on the empirical evidence. Look around and you will see that all bad leadership is bad in one, or sometimes both, of these ways.

The distinction between ineffective and unethical brings us back to the question of means and ends. Let's assume that Bill and Hillary Clinton's ambitious health care proposal was a well-intentioned initiative that, initially at least, had the support of most of their followers. But the means used—the ways in which the president and the first lady tried to get the American body politic from point A to point B—were inadequate to the point of being hapless. By the time the proposal was dead, even many of its early supporters had abandoned it. We can say, then, that at least in the area of health care policy, President Clinton was not a good leader. His good intentions notwithstanding, he was ineffective. Even his supporters would have to admit that his strategies and tactics were not up to the task, and so the job never got done.

By the same token, sometimes leaders and followers deploy effective means to unethical ends. It has become clear that for many years Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law (along with others in the Roman Catholic hierarchy) considered it his main mission to protect the good standing of the church. The problem was that this mission took precedence over the more immediate and humane one: to shield parishioners from predatory priests. Finally, the wrongdoing that kept the clergy's misconduct hidden from public view—the transfers, the payments, and the cover-ups—undermined the very church that the Cardinal wanted so badly to secure.⁴

Ineffective Leadership

Ineffective leadership fails to produce the desired change. For reasons that include missing traits, weak skills, strategies badly conceived, and tactics badly employed, ineffective leadership falls short of its intention.

One way to think about an ineffective leader is to reverse the ideal: If the ideal leader has traits such as intelligence, persistence, flexibility, and an even disposition, the leader who lacks many of these will likely run into trouble. The same holds for leadership skills. If the ideal leader is able to communicate, mobilize, collaborate, and make good decisions, leaders who are unwilling or unable to employ such skills are less likely to perform well than their better-disposed and better-endowed counterparts.

The rule for followers is analogous: Ineffective followers lack, or do not demonstrate, the traits and skills necessary for good followership. Robert Kelley found that the best followers were “strong, independent partners with leaders. They think for themselves, self-direct their work, and hold up their end of the bargain. They continuously work at making themselves integral to the enterprise, honing their skills and focusing their contributions, and collaborating with their colleagues.”⁵ By these measures, ineffective followers are weak and dependent, and they refuse in any significant way to commit or contribute to the group.

A final point: Leaders are generally judged ineffective because of the means they employ (or fail to employ) rather than the ends they pursue. Most leaders set goals that seem reasonable to at least a substantial minority of their constituents. But not many leaders and followers have the capacity to reach these goals. To be sure, the deck is often stacked against them. Context matters a great deal, and the challenges they face are, objectively, difficult. But in many cases leaders and their immediate followers simply lack the traits and skills required to surmount the long odds.

By all accounts Gray Davis, California's erstwhile governor, was in a situation fraught with political peril. The state was faced

with formidable challenges, in areas ranging from deficits to demographics, and the citizens were restless. Even though no one complained that Davis was unethical, the impression gradually became widespread that he and his team were ineffective—so ineffective that in a special recall election he was unceremoniously dumped.

Unethical Leadership

Unethical leadership fails to distinguish between right and wrong. Because common codes of decency and good conduct are in some way violated, the leadership process is defiled.

In chapter 1, I take issue with James MacGregor Burns's definition of the word *leadership*, in which leadership is, necessarily, an ethical act. Let me now return to the exact way that Burns uses the word, particularly in the phrase “transforming leadership.” For Burns, leadership is implicitly ethical in that it “is done to realize goals mutually held by leaders and followers.” In his view, transforming leadership goes a step further; it’s even better. “Such leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.”⁶

In Joanne Ciulla's collection of essays, *Ethics: The Heart of Leadership*, Burns takes yet another cut. Here he distinguishes among three types of leadership values: ethical values, moral values, and end values. Although he does not so group them, Burns is writing, on the one hand, about the leader's private self (the leader is honest, kind, and so on) and, on the other hand, about the leader's public self (the leader furthers the common interest).⁷

Burns goes on to suggest the following.

- Ethical leaders put their followers' needs before their own. Unethical leaders do not.
- Ethical leaders exemplify private virtues such as courage and temperance. Unethical leaders do not.

- Ethical leaders exercise leadership in the interest of the common good. Unethical leaders do not.

Most contemporary leadership scholars agree that the first principle is critical. Robert Greenleaf's “servant leader” leads because of a desire to serve others.⁸ Joseph Rost sees leadership as “noncoercive influence” that leaves followers free to decide for themselves whether to go along.⁹ And Edwin Hollander is content to bestow on leaders benefits, such as money and prestige, if in turn the leaders are accountable to followers.¹⁰

The second principle might seem new, and especially pertinent in a time of relentless media intrusion into the private lives of leaders such as Bill Clinton and Jack Welch. Although in recent years the question of whether a leader's private behavior impinges on public performance has been a hot topic, political philosophers have been interested in the issue for centuries. In general, the tolerance for moral fallibility, even if evident only behind closed doors, has been low. Confucius declared, “He who rules by virtue is like the polestar, which remains unmoving in its mansion while all the other stars revolve respectfully around it.” In response to a question from Lord Ji Kang (“What should I do in order to make the people respectful, loyal, and zealous?”), Confucius urged him to be what today we call a role model: “Approach them with dignity and they will be respectful. Be yourself a good son and a kind father, and they will be loyal. Raise the good and train the incompetent, and they will be zealous.”¹¹

To act in accordance with the third principle is to exercise power, authority, and influence in the interest of the public welfare. To be sure, the contemporary literature on democratic theory argues that each of us, every citizen, bears the individual burden of assessing “the moral authority of political mandates.”¹² But a good case can be made for the proposition that political leaders have a special responsibility to support the government and uphold the law only if they can do so in good conscience. If they cannot—if they are expected, for example, to uphold what

they consider an unjust law—they are morally obliged to try to change course. One need hardly add that corporate, nonprofit, and military leaders should be held similarly accountable.

Ciulla argues that “leaders who do not look after the interests of their followers are not only unethical but ineffective.”¹³ At the same time, she takes the position that the standards to which we hold leaders should be the same as those we hold for everyone else—no lower and no higher. How then might this translate? If we accept Aristotle’s dictum that virtues such as honesty and justice are acquired by practicing them, then leaders should do as Aristotle instructed: They should practice virtue because they want and intend to be virtuous.¹⁴

Nor are followers exempt. Like leaders, they are accountable for what they do.

- Ethical followers take the leader into account. Unethical followers do not.
- Ethical followers exemplify private virtues such as courage and temperance. Unethical followers do not.
- Ethical followers engage the leader and also other followers on behalf of the common good. Unethical followers do not.

Kelley found that followers were more troubled by ethical issues than were leaders. It’s common for followers to be faced with an ethical dilemma: a situation in which they feel obliged by authorities to behave in ways that make them uncomfortable. Kelley writes that exemplary followers address the problem by demonstrating a “courageous conscience.” Such followers have “the ability to judge right from wrong and the fortitude to take alternative steps toward what they believe is right.”¹⁵ Followers who lack a courageous conscience, particularly those who do not act even when something is obviously and egregiously wrong, are unethical.

Kelley is not, of course, suggesting that followers take on leaders freely and easily. In fact, his work supports the first principle, which clearly implies that leaders cannot be effective without cooperative followers. But followers are more obligated to the

community as a whole than they are to any single individual, including the leader.

Kelley’s research was conducted in the corporate sector. In contrast, John Rawls’s seminal volume *A Theory of Justice* is about public life. Here too followers—citizens—are obliged to resist if resistance, rather than acquiescence, is in the common interest. Rawls describes civil disobedience as a “public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government.”¹⁶

Note that if a protest such as this one is successful, followers become leaders. Consider first the followership and then the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr.—a subtle transition he described in a letter. “As the weeks and months unfolded,” King wrote from his Birmingham, Alabama, jail cell in 1963, “we [Negroes] realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. The signs remained. Like so many experiences of the past we were confronted with blasted hopes, and the dark shadow of a deep disappointment settled upon us. So we had no alternative except that of preparing for direct [nonviolent] action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and national community.”¹⁷

The mixture of the ineffective and the unethical in bad leadership can never be known or measured precisely. This is a truth of the human condition. The important tasks then are to develop a greater awareness of the dynamics of bad leadership, and a better understanding of the different ways that leaders’ actions can be both ineffective and unethical. Thus, I propose a typology of bad leadership that will highlight and distinguish the various ways in which we lead badly.

Types of Bad Leadership

After looking at hundreds of contemporary cases involving bad leaders and bad followers in the private, public, and nonprofit

sectors, and in domains both domestic and international, I found that bad leadership falls into seven groups, which I have typed as follows:

- Incompetent
- Rigid
- Intemperate
- Callous
- Corrupt
- Insular
- Evil

To posit a typology is to invite argument. No less an expert than Max Weber, the German sociologist whose three types of authority—rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic—continue to influence leadership scholars some eighty years after his death, was wary of his critics. “The fact that none of these three ideal types . . . is usually to be found in historical cases in ‘pure’ form, is naturally not a valid objection to attempting their conceptual formulation in the sharpest possible form,” Weber wrote. “Analysis in terms of sociological types has, after all . . . certain advantages which should not be minimized.”¹⁸

Let me echo Weber’s defense and provide a few cautionary notes about this typology in particular:

- These types are no “purer” than any other types, including Weber’s.
- The range is wide. Some leaders and followers are very bad; others are less bad. Moreover, in some cases the consequences of bad leadership are major, in others minor.
- Opinions change. When Harry Truman left office in 1953, his approval rating was a dismal 32 percent. But in 2000, historians rated him among the greatest of American presidents, just behind Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, Washington, and Theodore Roosevelt.¹⁹

- Views differ. About Thomas Krens, controversial director of New York’s Guggenheim Museum, two contrasting questions were asked. Was Krens “an egomaniac who squandered the museum’s resources on a quest to expand his empire”? Or was he instead a “brilliant, misunderstood radical who inherited an institution with a relatively small endowment and stagnant program and wanted to try something more daring than mounting the umpteenth Picasso show”?²⁰
- As it is used here, the word *type* does not mean personality type, nor do I intend to suggest that to be rigid, for example, is a personal trait in evidence at every turn. Rather, *rigid* refers to a set of behaviors in which leaders and followers mutually engage and that results in bad leadership.

Nevertheless, dividing the universe of bad leadership into seven types gives us, as Weber says, certain advantages. First, the ability to distinguish among the ways of being bad orders an untidy world, where the idea of bad leadership is as confusing as it is ubiquitous. Second, the seven types serve a practical purpose. They make it easier to detect inflection points—points at which an intervention might have stopped bad leadership or at least cut it short. Finally, the types make meaning of being bad. They enable us to know better and more clearly what bad leadership consists of.

Before I describe the seven types, two additional notes. First, the first three types of bad leadership tend to be bad as in ineffective, and the last four types tend to be bad as in unethical. I set up a continuum in which the first type of bad leadership, incompetence, is far less onerous than the last type of bad leadership, evil. But of course the lines blur: Sometimes leaders and followers are ineffective and unethical. For this reason I simply describe the seven types of bad leadership in sequence. Second, although one of my themes is that bad followers are as integral to bad leadership as are bad leaders, in the following section the brief examples allude only to the leader.

Incompetent

Bernadine Healy served effectively as dean of the Ohio State University Medical School and as the first woman director of the National Institutes of Health. But during her brief tenure (1999–2001) as head of the American Red Cross, Healy lost her touch. She was a driven professional, determined rapidly to change the deeply ingrained Red Cross culture, with which she was unfamiliar. In short order, members of the staff, as well as the fifty-member Red Cross board, decided that Healy was too assertive, too critical, and too pitiless. Once she compounded her errors by presiding over a debacle involving donations accumulated in the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center, she was dismissed. In short, whatever Healy's previous successes, and for whatever reasons, as leader of the Red Cross she was incompetent.²¹

Incompetent Leadership—the leader and at least some followers lack the will or skill (or both) to sustain effective action. With regard to at least one important leadership challenge, they do not create positive change.

Incompetent leaders are not necessarily incompetent in every aspect. Moreover, there are many ways of being incompetent. Some leaders lack practical, academic, or emotional intelligence.²² Others are careless, dense, distracted, slothful, or sloppy, or they are easily undone by uncertainty and stress, unable effectively to communicate, educate, or delegate, and so on. Note also that the impact of incompetent leadership is highly variable. Sometimes, as in the case of pilot error, it leads to disaster. At other times it amounts to mere bungling.²³

The case of incompetent leadership on which this book centers is that of Juan Antonio Samaranch, president of the International Olympic Committee from 1981 to 2000. His accomplishments were considerable, but toward the end of his tenure something went badly wrong. During his final years in office, Samaranch and

his close followers ignored and thus implicitly sanctioned widespread corruption in the Olympic movement, thereby disgracing the very games they were supposed to honor as well as sustain.

Rigid

As soon as he took office, Thabo Mbeki, who succeeded Nelson Mandela as president of South Africa in 1999, took issue with the West and its approach to AIDS. Mbeki maintained that HIV did not cause AIDS, that leading AIDS drugs were useless and even toxic, and that poverty and violence were at the root of his country's rapidly growing problem with the lethal disease.

As a result of his hostility to the West and his notoriously unyielding quest for an African remedy, Mbeki continued to withhold from HIV-positive pregnant women the antiretroviral drugs that would have cut in half the transmission of the disease to their babies.²⁴

Rigid Leadership—the leader and at least some followers are stiff and unyielding. Although they may be competent, they are unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information, or changing times.

Mbeki can be described by Barbara Tuchman's phrase "wooden-headed"—a leader who consistently refuses to be "deflected by the facts."²⁵ Rigid leaders can be successful up to a point. But if they refuse to change with the changing wind, the result will be bad leadership.

The case of rigid leadership examined in chapter 5 is that of financial analyst Mary Meeker. During the 1990s, while the prices of technology stocks skyrocketed, Meeker rode high. But when the market changed, she did not. Unable or unwilling to acknowledge that the party was over, Meeker and her like-minded collaborators told her legions of listeners to hold on to their stocks even as the market tanked.

Intemperate

Russian President Boris Yeltsin, an alcoholic, was often intoxicated in private and in public, much to the embarrassment of his government and the Russian people. In 1999, to take only one example, Yeltsin was too drunk to get off a plane to greet the visiting prime minister of Ireland, who was left cooling his heels on the tarmac.²⁶ Alcoholism is a disease. But Yeltsin's failure to treat his problem affected his capacity to serve as Russia's head of state.

Intemperate Leadership—the leader lacks self-control and is aided and abetted by followers who are unwilling or unable effectively to intervene.

In their book *Leadership on the Line*, Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky cautioned leaders to control their impulses: "We all have hungers that are expressions of our normal human needs. But sometimes those hungers disrupt our capacity to act wisely or purposefully."²⁷ Because we live in a time when all top leaders are gripped for the media mill, the risk of such disruption is far greater than it was in the past.

The case of intemperate leadership on which this book focuses is that of Marion Barry Jr. Although Barry was elected mayor of Washington, D.C., no fewer than four times, almost throughout his time in office he lived a life of excess. In the end, his own inability to control his various hungers, particularly for crack cocaine, and his followers' inability to get him the proper help, dearly cost him as well as the city he had been elected to govern.

Callous

Most Americans who have any interest in such matters know the story of Martha Stewart. She has become rich and famous by figuring out that homemaking—cooking, gardening, sewing, entertaining, cleaning, indeed every conceivable domestic chore—could reflect artistry as well as drudgery.

But even before her indictment on charges stemming from insider trading, Stewart had acquired a bad reputation. Although she is a brilliantly accomplished and hard-working businesswoman, nearly from the start of her career she has been rumored to be unpleasant and unkind, particularly to employees. How many of these personal attacks are the consequence of Stewart's being a woman in a man's world is difficult to say. Most observers would agree that the rules for women at the top of the corporate hierarchy are different from the rules for men. Most would likely also agree that if Stewart is not exactly a monster or a sociopath, she can be mean. Described variously as a harridan, an uncaring mother, and nasty to those in her employ, Stewart has made bad manners part of her legend: "Neighbors and acquaintances said she was aloof, inconsiderate, and selfish. Employees said she was 'hot-tempered and unreasonable and left them little time to cultivate a garden of their own.' It was as if she created a vision that none around her could live in."²⁸

Callous Leadership—the leader and at least some followers are uncaring or unkind. Ignored or discounted are the needs, wants, and wishes of most members of the group or organization, especially subordinates.

Al Dunlap, the former CEO of Sunbeam Corporation, is the case of callous leadership described in chapter 7. Brought in in 1996 to turn around the fortunes of the appliance maker, Dunlap, through his abrasiveness, instead depleted morale and impaired the company's ability to function. As Sunbeam continued its downward spiral, Dunlap, with the support of his closest followers, cut himself off from the company and willfully ignored its ignominious descent. By the end of his tenure in 1998, Sunbeam had filed for bankruptcy.

Corrupt

In 1983, Michigan mall developer A. Alfred Taubman bought Sotheby's, the legendary auction house known, along with Christie's,

for having cornered the market on the sale of fine art, jewelry, and furniture. Because the auction business had become increasingly competitive, by the mid-1990s Taubman and his Christie's counterpart, Sir Anthony Tennant, were illegally conspiring to raise commission rates.

A few years later the scheme was discovered, and in 2001 Taubman was found guilty of price-fixing, sentenced to a year and a day in prison, and ordered to pay a \$7.5 million fine. In addition, Sotheby's and Christie's were ordered to settle class action suits with more than one hundred thousand customers for \$512 million.²⁹

Taubman did not act alone. For her part in the price-fixing scheme, Sotheby CEO Diana (Dede) Brooks was sentenced to six months of home detention, three years of probation, and one thousand hours of community service. Brooks, a Yale-educated former Citibank executive whose tenure at Sotheby's had been viewed as highly successful, was spared a more severe sentence only because she cooperated with government investigators to provide evidence against Taubman.

Corrupt Leadership—the leader and at least some followers lie, cheat, or steal. To a degree that exceeds the norm, they put self-interest ahead of the public interest.

Corrupt leaders are usually motivated by power or greed—by the desire, in any case, to acquire more of a scarce resource. For example, to make more money, corrupt leaders take bribes, sell favors, evade taxes, exaggerate corporate earnings, engage in insider trading, cook the books, defraud governments and businesses, and in other ways cut corners, bend rules, and break the law.

Chapter 8 tells the story of William Aramony, once the highly respected head of United Way of America. Aramony's tale is not unfamiliar: It is about the head of a large organization caught lying, cheating, and stealing. But it is at odds with how we think about charitable organizations and those who lead and manage them.

Insular

When the streets of Monrovia began to run with blood, Liberians begged President George W. Bush to intervene, to stop the conflict by sending troops. At first he dithered, siding for a time with those who said, in effect, "Our hands are too full to rescue a distant people determined to murder one another."³⁰

Those who chose to differ, Secretary of State Colin Powell among them, argued for intervention on the grounds of national interest and because they considered it the right thing to do. "Liberia is not just another African country," one interventionist argued. "It is an American creation, founded by former slaves 150 years ago, reflecting our image and legacy."³¹

In terms of American foreign policy this might be considered yet another debate between isolationists and interventionists. But as far as the quality of leadership is concerned, the debate over whether or not to intervene in Liberia reflected the tension between those who believe that leaders are responsible only to their own constituencies and those who consider that they have a broader mandate—one that includes trying to stop large numbers of men, women, and children from being hacked to death, even in a distant land.

Insular Leadership—the leader and at least some followers minimize or disregard the health and welfare of "the other"—that is, those outside the group or organization for which they are directly responsible.

Bill Clinton is the exemplar of insular leadership, as profiled in chapter 9. Although the president knew of the genocide in Rwanda, he paid it little attention. Having been burned by his experience in Somalia in particular, Clinton, along with the rest of his foreign policy team, made the decision to steer clear of a calamity that was taking place far from home.

Evil

In 1991, Foday Sankoh, an itinerant photographer and army corporal with a primary school education, gathered a group of guerrillas and started a civil war in Sierra Leone. Sankoh was known for his extraordinary charisma. But his followers, many of them poor boys from the countryside, were notorious above all for their brutality. They killed, raped, and spread terror across the small West African nation by chopping off the hands, arms, and legs of innocent civilians—men, women, and children alike. Sankoh was unperturbed. In fact, when some of his close associates spoke out against the flagrant abuses and violations of human rights, they were summarily executed.³² In 2000, Sankoh was captured by British troops operating under the auspices of the United Nations; later he was turned over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The seventeen-count indictment charged him with crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, and extermination. Foday Sankoh died in custody in July 2003.

Evil Leadership—the leader and at least some followers commit atrocities. They use pain as an instrument of power. The harm done to men, women, and children is severe rather than slight. The harm can be physical, psychological, or both.

Evil leaders are not necessarily sadistic. But some experts argue that our notion of evil should include the intent not only to terrorize but also to prolong suffering. They believe that all evildoers derive some sort of satisfaction from hurting others.³³

The case of evil leadership described in chapter 10 is that of Radovan Karadzic. As Bosnian Serb president during the early and mid-1990s, Karadzic, along with his followers, was responsible for the rape, murder, and pillaging of thousands of Bosnian Muslims and Croats, and for the infamous massacre in Srebrenica.

The Heart of Darkness

Making meaning of being bad is difficult. Consider this confusion: *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* properly refers to Hitler as an “absolute dictator.” But, perhaps because he was a wartime ally, the same dictionary describes Stalin only as a “Soviet politician who was general secretary of the Communist Party and premier of the U.S.S.R.” This, even though we now know that Stalin was directly responsible for the deaths of some twenty million people.³⁴

Moreover, like all typologies, the one in this book raises questions just as it provides answers. It’s fair to ask, for example, whether leaders should be considered incompetent if the demands on their time preclude attention to all matters of importance. Similarly, one might reasonably wonder whether leaders are intemperate if they are not monogamous but still not promiscuous. The questions pertain to followers as well. Are you corrupt if you cheat, ever so slightly, on your taxes, knowing that many others are doing the same thing? Am I evil if my leader compels me to commit evil acts?

To avoid as far as possible the inevitable pitfalls of the inevitable complexities, I use only cases in which the evidence of bad leadership is overwhelming. In other words, because I recognize that even generally competent leaders are sometimes incompetent and that even generally kind leaders are sometimes callous, the examples of bad leadership used in this book are at the extreme—virtually indisputable.

The paradoxes of leadership—leaders who are, for example, corrupt and effective at the same time—further complicate the difficulty of making meaning of being bad. As I describe in more detail later, in 2000 Vincent A. (Buddy) Cianci Jr., the mayor of Providence, Rhode Island, was sentenced to five years and four months in jail after being convicted of soliciting bribes for city contracts. But before being thrown into prison, Cianci had

"transformed Providence from a grimy industrial backwater into the liveliest, most appealing city in New England."³⁵

New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani presents a different kind of paradox. In the wake of 9/11, Giuliani was hailed as a hero, a leader worthy of comparison to Churchill. But before his appointment with history, Giuliani's approval ratings had been low. The mayor's rigid refusal to reach out to members of New York City's minority communities, particularly to people of color, meant that in at least one important way, he was inadequate, a bad leader.

Finally, problems of objectivity and subjectivity inevitably muddy the water. In all but the most egregious cases, opinions will differ about who deserves to be called a bad leader and why. As far as possible I head off this argument by choosing to focus on cases of bad leadership on which there is broad consensus.

The heavy lifting notwithstanding, we know three important things:

1. Sometimes leaders, and followers, make a difference.
2. Sometimes this difference is significant.
3. Sometimes the outcome is bad.³⁶

We turn now to the seven types of bad leadership: incompetent, rigid, intemperate, callous, corrupt, insular, and evil. The chapters that follow are about the dark side—about how we get caught in webs we ourselves spin. It is my hope and intention that by discussing and distinguishing among the primary forms of bad leadership, we might ourselves avoid becoming entangled, both as bad leaders and as bad followers.

PART TWO

LEADING BADLY

*Man is an animal suspended in webs
of significance he himself has spun.*

—Clifford Geertz