

Ethics of Leadership

Does Tyranny Pay?

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- Plato, "Tyranny and the Tyrant" (PDF on webpage).
- Susan Dominus, "Is Giving the Secret to Getting Ahead?" (PDF on webpage).
- "Bad Bosses Drain Productivity" (PDF on webpage).

Background

In Plato's *Gorgias*, Polus and Callicles claim that a person with power and influence would find the greatest happiness as a tyrant dominating over others. In Plato's *Republic*, however, Socrates converses with Adeimantus and, towards the end, Glaucon, attempting to show them why the tyrant is truly unhappy. The discerning reader will notice this account shares similarities to several of Hobbes' assumptions about human motivation—though Socrates suggests these egotistical motivations only occur in tyrannical individuals ruled by uncontrolled desire and not in the "healthy and moderate" whose reason controls desire. So, unlike Hobbes, Socrates believes that egotistical motivations are not inevitable but can and should be controlled. Indeed, the article by Susan Dominus about Management Professor Adam Grant suggests that non-egotistical motivation actually contributes to happiness.

Questions

1. According to the excerpt from Book VIII of *The Republic*, what sorts of things does a tyrant do to gain power and then retain it? Why does this slowly turn the tyrant's followers against him? Book IX then provides a psychological account of the desires of a tyrant, which is supposed to explain why the tyrant behaves as he does. What is this account, and why does it ultimately lead the tyrant to be miserable and unhappy? Do you find this account convincing? (You might use as examples the various cases of corruption that we have already seen.)
2. How do you think the research of Adam Grant characterizes the proper relationship between a leader and their followers? Do you find the evidence for this characterization compelling?
3. Together Plato and Grant seem to suggest that selfishness makes one unhappy and altruism makes one happy. However, by appealing to happiness, are they really, at bottom, providing prudential (i.e., self-interested and ultimately selfish) reasons for not being tyrannical? That is, are they both just sophisticated egoists?