

ETHICS of LEADERSHIP

Corrupting Influences of Power

As you read the material for our 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 reading:

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Plato. (1992). [The Ring of Gyges]. In G. M. Grube & C. D. Reeve (Trans.), *Republic* (Revised ed., pp. 34-36). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett. (Original work written c.380 BCE).
- Ludwig, D. C., & Longenecker, C. O. (1993, April). The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 12(4), 265-273.
- *Optional*: Kurtz, H., & Powell, M. (2004, June 17). Bill Clinton's Very Personal Reflections. *Washington Post*. Retrieved January 8, 2017, from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A47877-2004Jun16.html>.

Background

As we have seen, there appears to be a real need for persons to occupy positions of power and influence within a group. However, this immediately raises a concern about how they ought to use that power and influence. The readings here show concern for how power and success can corrupt even the most admirable of leaders, leading them to pursue their own personal self-interest at the expense of the interests of the group and others in it. First, the character Glaucon from Plato's *Republic* begins with an account about the origins of justice, which should sound very similar to what we read in Thomas Hobbes. To this, Glaucon adds that no one practices justice willingly, and he illustrates this with the story of the "Ring of Gyges", which gives an account of how power (in this case through a magic ring) corrupts even the most just of persons. Dean Ludwig and Clinton Longenecker use the biblical story of King David and Bathsheba to make a similar point: the real source of corruption is that good people like David are typically not prepared to handle the increases in power associated with successful leadership.

Questions

1. What claims about human motivation does the story of "The Ring of Gyges" illustrate? (Hint: this should be familiar from our reading of Thomas Hobbes.) According to this story, why does corruption increase as power increases? (The optional reading about President Clinton's abuse of power for personal gain may also shed light on this issue.)
2. Ludwig and Longenecker believes that the "Bathsheba Syndrome" provides the best explanation for corruption. What is this "syndrome"? How does it explain the corruption of successful leaders with respect to the "four potential by-products of success" presented by Ludwig and Longenecker?