

ETHICS OF LEADERSHIP

Conflict & Transformational Leadership

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

- Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Background

This reading by James MacGregor Burns lays the foundation for his acclaimed account of transformational leadership. According to Burns, a transformational leader helps his or her followers operate at a higher level of moral development by raising their consciousness about their goals and values and what these goals and values ought to be. In particular, an effective leader will use conflict within each follower's value system to achieve this goal and thus create a vision for the group to follow. Put in the terminology of this class, Burns seems to understand a leader as someone who transforms the individual (and possibly selfish) ethics of followers into a coherent and cohesive group ethic that strives towards something greater.

Questions

1. Burns suggests (on page 36) that the "moral legitimacy" of leadership depends upon competition and conflict, while illegitimate "brute power" denies competition and conflict. What exactly is Burn's argument to justify this claim?
2. In the majority of this reading, Burns presents an extended argument trying to show how leaders "*can exploit conflict and tension within persons' value structures*" (p. 42) in order "*to make conscious what lies unconscious among followers*" (p. 40). What is it about conflict that makes it an effective tool to do this? What is a leader supposed to make his or her followers conscious of and how does the leader do that? How does this process lead followers on a path towards higher levels of moral development? (You might think about how civil rights leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X exploited conflict in this way.)