

Materials to Guide Reading

LECTURE FOUR

Julius Caesar:

Much of the play's dialogue concerns the sense of honor-most famously, in Mark Antony's funeral oration. How do you understand honor? It seems to go with the unChristian virtue of pride-a sense of one's worth derived from your membership in a group (a family, a military unit, a nation), which has given you something to live up to, a sense of the value of your social identity and of the obligations that come with it. Can one be proud of being oneself? Are you proud of your ancestry? Of your parents? Of the business corporation to which you belong? Have they given you a sense of identity and of the obligations accruing to it that you try to live up to? When membership in a group is not lifetime membership but a transitory thing, can it invest one with a sense of honor?

Julius Caesar is a study of four distinct styles of leadership, represented by Caesar, Brutus, Cassius and Antony. How would you describe the leadership style of each? By way of a benchmark, I cite some words from a Harvard Business School case-study, "The Parable of the Sadhu". The sentiment about leadership that they embody can be found in virtually every book on business leadership that I have read in the last twelve years.

Effective managers are action-oriented people who resolve conflict, are tolerant of ambiguity [this means that they are not indecisive even when choices are not clear], stress, and change, and have a strong sense of purpose for themselves and their organizations. . . . People who are in touch with their own core beliefs and the beliefs of others and are sustained by them can be more comfortable living on the cutting edge. At times, taking a tough line or a decisive stand in a muddle of ambiguity is the only ethical thing to do. If a manager is indecisive and spends time trying to figure out the "good" thing to do, the enterprise may be lost.

In this connection, consider as well that *Julius Caesar* is very much concerned with the ways in which people's sense of self-regard makes them liable to manipulation by others. How important is living up to an image of yourself? How important is it for a corporation to live up to the image of itself that it fosters or promulgates about itself-the stuff of "vision statements", in other words? Anthony is the man without an image of himself. He is faithful to the image of Caesar; otherwise he is a player, a manipulator of images. How good a leader is he? How important is the image that other people have of you? In the first exchange with Cassius, Brutus seems to reject the notion of living by the estimation that others have of you. Does this make him peculiarly independent of baser motives like ambition or peculiarly insensitive to their place in the minds of others?

In a book entitled *Credibility*, two distinguished business consultants argue that credibility is the most important characteristic of a senior executive - outweighing, both in their view and in the view of those managers consulted in a survey that they conducted, such traits as intelligence and competence. Reading the book, one discovers that "credibility" is less about being believed than about being trusted: managers don't want to believe *the statements* of the CEO so much as they want to believe *in* the CEO. Consider in this light the characters of Caesar and of Brutus. Do they embody "credibility"? If so, surely they do not embody credibility in the same way. In this connection, the play deliberately contrasts Caesar's genial favoritism in private life - his courtesy towards his friends in private - with his unshakable resolve as public authority (Note his reply to a suitor: "What touches Caesar most shall be considered last", or his speech comparing his constancy with the constancy of the north star.) If Caesar is on an ego-trip, it is not a mean-spirited ego that he is serving. "What touches Caesar most shall be considered last",

expresses a resolve that is far from Thrasymachus's tyrant, whose justice serves only his own interests. How necessary is it for one in authority to cultivate and try to live up to an extreme image of him/herself?

There are other views of management. Consider a maxim attributed to Sun-Tzu, which goes, roughly: "The poor leader is hated; the good leader is worshiped; the great leader is not noticed." Is there a value in this maxim? Or perhaps we should try to distinguish between "leadership" and "management". How would you distinguish between *embodiment* and *participation* in managerial style? Offer a few examples of individuals from business or government who seem to embody their enterprises. Do they make good leaders? Do they make good managers? For his part, Brutus heads a conspiracy. Is conspiracy sometimes justified? In what sense is a conspiracy like a corporation? In what sense not?

Machiavelli:

The reading by Machiavelli concerns the distinction between the motives of an executive and the image that he or she must sustain. How could Brutus or Caesar have profited from this lesson? At one point in his text, Machiavelli says that unlike other writers addressing themselves to princes and talking of government, he will speak about the real world, not an imaginary or ideal one. Yet what he speaks of is largely the need to maintain illusions. Indeed, you might sum up Machiavelli's teaching as follows: "Never mind reality, the image is everything".

Machiavelli says that people will trust someone who breaks his or her word because (a) one can always give good reasons for breaking one's word; (b) people are "so ready to obey present necessities" that they allow themselves to be deceived. What is meant by "present necessities"? Is the notion of "*allowing* yourself to be deceived" a coherent notion? "Il Principe" (Numero Uno) is presumably clear-eyed about deception and does not allow himself to be deceived, not even by himself. Does anyone in *Julius Caesar* fulfill this characteristic of leadership?

Machiavelli reserves special praise for Hannibal, whose "inhuman cruelty, together with his infinite other virtues, made him always venerated and terrible in the sight of his soldiers." No doubt in Hannibal's day, and perhaps in Machiavelli's too, the nature of armies made fear of swift and terrible punishment an emotion that a commander-in-chief had to cultivate. It may seem that Hannibal, the army commander, is not a fit model for top-level business management. But Machiavelli's advice was intended for rulers in times of peace as well as war and concerned the nature of command, which has always to deal with the image that the ruler must project if he (or she--but that possibility never occurred to him) is to be effective both within the state and without. A contemporary correlative to Hannibal's image would be something like "decisiveness to the point of ruthlessness"--a lack of hesitation, a readiness to make quick decisions adversely affecting, perhaps to the point of total dislocation, the lives of people both without and within the corporation. Is it wrongheaded to advise CEO's to adopt this model?

Machiavelli was frequently chastised (after his death, of course) for articulating the maxim that "the ends justify the means". What else can justify them? Is the maxim "the ends justify the means" only a cover for the notion that the real end and aim of the means is simply the means themselves - that is to say, the exercise of power? Or we might put the criticism the other way about. Machiavelli's adage, "The ends justify the means," is justly famous, yet Machiavelli does not say simply that the means that are instrumental to a good end are just - on the contrary, he says that they are often unjust, that a wise administrator "must learn how not to be good" Is this a coherent notion? If something is justified by the good that it produces, why not speak of it as good?

Machiavelli advises the ruler to be both beast and human being. Is this like wearing two hats, one for the office and another for home? Can you put on and take off the hat of a beast at will? Machiavelli indicates pretty clearly that you must never seem to take off the religious hat--

i.e. that the religious necessity is uncompromising and therefore you must always secretly wear your princely hat under the religious one. If there is some compromise possible, for us, which will be subordinate to which?