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Leadership in a Nutshell

The terms ‘leader’ and ‘leadership’ are predicated (said of their subjects) analogously—with somewhat the same and somewhat different meanings. Both are found throughout the animate and inanimate world. Wherever they exist, being a leader and leadership are chiefly a communications activity.

Leaders and leadership communicate to followers a receptivity to take direction from the leaders by overcoming any resistance followers might have to take direction from them. Leadership is simply a communication quality, disposition or habit, possessed by leaders. Such communication need have nothing to do with reasoning, persuading by argument.

When we are persuaded, strictly speaking, we are never persuaded, convinced, by arguments. We are persuaded by understanding, immediate induction, insight—not by deductive or inductive arguments. To be persuaded a person must say to himself or herself, “I understand. What I am being told to do or not to do makes common sense to me.” I am persuaded by my understanding that, considered in part or as a whole, an argument contains some intelligible content that makes common sense to me. Strictly speaking, my understanding of the argument—even if it be wrong—not the argument considered in part or as a whole, persuades me.

Arguments precede and/or start a new line of reasoning after a person is persuaded by his or her understanding of some intelligible content in them.

Human leaders are chiefly behavioral and organizational psychologists. They have an exceptional understanding of real human nature, and of how to incline other people to listen to, and take direction from, them.

An essential difference exists between being a leader and being a good organizational leader. Anyone who can incline other people to follow him or her is a leader. Often, such people are bad organizational leaders. Instead of building and sustaining organizations, they destroy them. Good and great organizational leaders have the ability to distinguish between really possible and really impossible deeds.

As Étienne Gilson had recognized in his beautiful, metaphysical, aesthetic, book, *Painting and Reality* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1957), two species of possibility exist. One is abstract and conceptual. The other is concrete and really doable. Bad leaders are unable to make this distinction. Gilson states that abstract and conceptual possibility consists in being able intellectually to conceive of something as being non-contradictory. In contrast, really doable possibility consists in being able to conceive of something being conceptually non-contradictory and really doable for this or that human being at this or that time, in this or that place—as situationally, circumstantially, doable for someone in the here and now.

Through a natural endowment (not a natural faculty or power) that St. Thomas Aquinas referred to as the 'habit' (*habitus*) of understanding, he maintained that good and great organizational leaders immediately induce through understanding the proximate causes, principles, that make an action doable in the individual situation. This includes what are often called by students of St. Thomas the conditions of a moral act: Who, or what; is doing what; with what; where; why, when; and how. In reality, because doable deeds always involve coordinating organizational activity through harmonious unity of organiza-

tional parts with the help of some organizational leader, they exist in every organizational act.

Again, according to Aquinas, this habit is not an acquired disposition, quality, of a human soul, or of a person's psychological constitution. Instead, all relatively healthy human beings—even infants—are born with some measure of qualitative greatness of this ability to recognize doable and undoable deeds in the individuals situation, and the circumstances needed to execute them.

In Latin, Aquinas called this limited measure of psychological ability by the technical and interchangeable terms 'virtual quantity' and 'intensive quantity.' He understood the term *virtus* ('virtue'—'excellence') to be simply a contraction of 'virtual quantity.'

Hence, he maintained that all somewhat healthy human beings who understand the meaning of the words being used are naturally endowed with a relative magnitude of qualitative greatness in possessing the observational *habitus* of understanding to induce *per se nota* (known through themselves, or self-evident) first principles of observational knowing. In addition, he claimed that, by means of practical and productive knowledge acquired from practical experience and learning from people with experience, through the dispositional and habitual exercise of naturally endowed talents and virtues, such people are also capable of acquiring inductive understanding of experientially based practical and productive (*per aliud nota*—known through another, evident through practical experience at living) proximate principles and causes of practical and productive activity—and how to exercise them well in the individual situation.

This includes being born with a qualitative inequality of greatness in possessing different intellectual, productive, practical, and moral virtues (such as an ability immediately to induce/understand and apply mathematical principles, paint, and play music; the cardinal moral virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice—and other moral virtues that act as aids to them).

In good and great leaders, once they understand some deed is doable and needs to be done in the here now, this *per aliud nota habitus* of understanding immediately induces them to pursue having all the enabling means, resources, to execute right reason and right action in the individual situation. Included among these resources is help from talented and morally virtuous (prudent, temperate, courageous, just people—people with organizational, uncommon common sense—prudence!).

In a religiously oriented leader like the Dominican Preacher, St. Thomas Aquinas, these natural, moral virtues are supernaturally and qualitatively surpassed by theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity existing in the soul of a person, organizational leader, possessing sanctifying grace—which makes him or her a friend of God.

Because virtue consists in qualitative excellence, by nature, all virtue is essentially beautiful. For this reason, beauty is an irresistibly likable good. It essentially pleases a human being when perceived because it shocks our intellectual and sense faculties by the excellence, perfection of its form. Hence, when we experience it, it inclines us to jump with joy and to applaud.

One way good organizational leaders are able initially to attract prudently talented people to work with and for them is by causing their followers to respect and love them. They tend to be able to do this by themselves possessing the ‘contending’ (irascible) emotion, passion, of hope and the moral, practical, productive, and intellectual virtues of honesty (truthfulness) and prudence—essentially proximate causes and first principles of uncommon organizational common sense, prudence, which they incline to instill in their coworkers! Bad leaders, on the contrary, chiefly use lies and fear to get others to follow them. In the process, they destroy organizations. Good organizational leaders tend to communicate understanding by use of what logicians call an ‘enthymeme.’ Because doing so wastes valuable time and costs money or other resources, they do not spell out every step of an organizational reasoning process.

They tend to assume understanding of the principles of activity on the part of team members of an organization (common understanding, or common sense); and they tend to get annoyed by team members who do not understand what they are supposed to do as a qualified team member at this time, place, situation. They tend to consider team members who ask such questions to lack organizational common sense. I often call such people “encyclopedias open to the wrong page!” Organizational first principles of common sense are principles that need not be articulated to properly qualified team members. They are not logical abstractions. They are concrete causes of action in the individual situation, circumstance. No need exists to explain why they should be done in this or that situation. That they should be done here and now is organizationally evident—goes without the need to say why for anyone with organizational common sense.

According to Aquinas, the intellectual virtue of *docilitas* (docility/teachability) is a necessary condition for becoming educated. St. Thomas maintained, further, that the moral virtue of prudence, which is a species of common sense, causes *docilitas*. He tells us that, before being taught outside the home, children generally learn some docility from their parents and their individual conscience—which, according to him, is the habit of prudence acting as judge, jury, witness, prosecution, and dispenser of rewards and punishments for moral choices we make. In learning docility, we all acquire some common sense.¹

Common sense is simply some understanding of principles that are causing some organizational whole to have the unity it has that causes it to behave the way it does. It is an understanding common to anyone who intellectually grasps the nature of something: the way the parts (causal principles) of a whole incline to organize to generate organizational existence, unity, and operation/behavior.

Strictly speaking, common sense is the habit of rightly applying principles as measures of truth in immediate and mediated

¹ S.t. 1, q. 13.

judgment, choice, and reasoning. Considered as such, it is the measure of all right, sound, reasoning!² Through application of organizational common sense, good, especially great, leaders, harmonize the behavior of talented team members to execute exceptionally beautiful organizational activities in the individual circumstance, situation. They are able to do this chiefly because they are great organizational, behavioral psychologists and all talentfully executed activities are organizationally virtuous. Since all virtue is essentially beautiful, all exceptionally beautiful organizational activities must be beautiful.

Considered as situational, operational activities are not intellectual abstractions. Good and great leaders understand that the chief first principles (proximate causes) of successful organizational action does not reside in abstract reasoning and argumentation. It resides in harmonizing the talent of qualified, organizational team members in the here and now. Good and great organizational leaders know this, in addition, precisely because they recognize that, to execute common and uncommon common-sense (prudential) action in the individual situation, two diverse faculties of human understanding—one in the intellectual part of the soul and the other in the animal part of the soul—must be coordinated to harmonize execution of numerically one organizational activity here and now.

According to St. Thomas, neither the human intellect nor the human senses know. The human person—including good and great organizational leaders—knows through coordinating the action of different psychological and physical faculties at this or that time and place. For Aquinas, the intellectual part of the human soul possesses a faculty of understanding that abstracts from individual time, place, and situation. In and of itself, it can never execute a human act. In contrast, the animal part of the human soul possesses a faculty of understanding that Thomas says is analogous to ‘instinct’ in animals. Unhappily, he refers to

² S.t. 1, qq. 47~49.

this faculty interchangeably as particular reason and cogitative reason.

I call referring to these terms the way he does ‘infelicitous’ because, both on the intellectual and sense levels, he is not talking about a faculty of reasoning. He is talking about an act of immediate understanding, induction, insight. Analogously considered, because they do not engage in abstract reasoning at all, when confronted by immediate danger or some healthy good, brute animals cannot engage in lengthy, abstract, logical, reasoning in the individual situation! For this reason, similar to commonsense organizational team members, brute animals employ a psychological activity resembling a logical ‘enthymeme’ (what business sales professionals often call the elevator pitch) immediately to induce what in an educated human being is the middle term of a practical or productive syllogism—the essential means to achieve the numerically one end they are chiefly seeking to realize. When sensing the presence of a wolf, the psychologically healthy sheep immediately runs. And it does not do so because it does not like the color of the wolf. It is not an animal racist or bigot. It runs because it immediately induces that wolves are the natural enemy of sheep, and they have a natural inclination immediately to eat sheep.

The sheep does not engage in abstract logical deductions. Similarly, when a wolf senses a rabbit, it immediately perceives food, not Peter Cottontail; and immediately runs after it to eat it. In all animals, human and non-human, as in the immediately preceding examples, the contending (irascible) emotions, passions, of hope and fear help generate in us complete human understanding. In so doing, they help us to harmonize all human action into numerically one organizational operation of understanding and action. For this reason, Gilson says we humans sense with our individual intellect and intellectualize with our senses. This is human, uncommon common sense—about which, the great Christian philosopher and theologian C.S. [Clive Staples] Lewis sagely admonishes us:

It still remains true that no justification of virtue will enable a man to be virtuous. Without the aid of trained emotions the intellect is powerless against the animal organism. I had sooner play cards against a man who was quite skeptical about ethics, but bred to believe that 'a gentleman does not cheat,' than against an irreproachable moral philosopher who had been brought up among sharpers. In battle it is not syllogisms that will keep the reluctant nerves and muscles to their post in the third hour of the bombardment.

The crudest sentimentalism ... about a flag or a country or a regiment will be of more use. We were told it all long ago by Plato. As the king governs by his executive, so Reason in man must rule the mere appetites by means of the 'spirited element'. The head rules the belly through the chest—the seat, as Alanus tells us, of Magnanimity, of emotions organized by trained habit into stable sentiments. The Chest-Magnanimity-Sentiment—these are the indispensable liaison officers between cerebral man and visceral man.

It may even be said that it is by this middle element that man is man: for by his intellect he is mere spirit and by his appetite mere animal... A persevering devotion to truth, a nice sense of intellectual honour, cannot be long maintained without the aid of a sentiment... It is not excess of thought, but defect of fertile and generous emotion, that marks them out. Their heads are no bigger than the ordinary: it is the atrophy of the chest beneath that makes them seem so.

We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honour and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.³

According to Thomas, common sense—and with it the first beginnings of observational and actionable prudence—are located in the faculty of particular reason. He states that all forms of

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, New York: Touchstone, 1996, 35–37.

prudence—observational, and operational—are generated in the human soul through the psychological quality of *solertia*. He adds that this quality is generated by possessing the psychological dispositions of *solers* (shrewdness) and *citus* (quickwittedness). Possessing these psychological dispositions causes a person to possess the psychological quality of *synesis*. Such a person, in turn, possesses a psychological disposition that is the contrary opposite of a person in a state of *asynesis*. Such a person is *asinine*—lacks common sense.⁴

According to Aquinas, practical and productive (concretely operational) prudence—and, subsequent to them, abstractly observational prudence—first develop within an individual culture when, to some extent, within that culture, the knowing activity of ‘conscience’ connects human activity to the natural law principle of ‘synderesis’: Do good and avoid evil.

Conscience is simply the moral virtue of prudence—to whatever extent it has developed as a natural and acquired *habitus* within an individual—sitting as judge, jury, witness, prosecution, and dispenser of rewards and/or punishments—of the excellence and beauty, or ugliness and deformity, of some moral choice a person has made or might be considering to make.⁵

In conclusion, following prudence in our activities, we human beings do nothing other than measure our behavior to conform to the God’s prudence contained within natural law as it applies generically, specifically, and individually to rational animals. Such individuals do more than follow brute, animal instinct. We follow the rule of eternal, divine, and human law as principles of human action that exist within the providential order as measures of divine prudence given to members of the human species by a providential God.

In its healthy form, conscience, thereby, connects human beings to sense reality. In so doing, it connects us to the proxi-

⁴ S.t. 1, q. 51, a. 3.

⁵ S.t. 1, 17, arts. 12 and 13.

mate principles and causes of achieving fully human perfection and of living a beautiful human life in all respects that prudent application of such principles can enable us to achieve and to live.