“Leadership, Democracy, and a More Thoughtful Public” Final Paper

**Introductions**

Leaders must be aware of how their actions have echoes. With every choice that they make, they construct a model of how the world should be. Understanding “good” leadership – leadership that is both ethical and effective – means understanding the conditions required for its foundation: perceptions of human nature, choices a leader must make and qualities they embody, and characteristics of society necessary to enact the previous values and characteristics. In “Leadership, Democracy, and a More Thoughtful Public,” Roger Soder asked us as students to consider six propositions as we worked our way through ten weeks of coursework and hundreds of years worth of scholarship and insight regarding leadership. I have chosen three of these propositions to consider as the subject of this paper in an attempt to unpack what being a good leader means.

**Proposition Five: Leadership always involves assumptions (tacit and acknowledged) about human nature.**

There are two different sorts of human nature. There is the scientific view, the biology of humans over which we have no control and is thus not deeply relevant to leaders as it cannot be changed. Then there is human nature in the philosophical sense: the characteristics by which we define humanity. All leaders are human, prone to the same follies and pitfalls as any other person navigating this vastly complex world, and thus to consider leadership we must also tackle human nature. All leaders also must make choices. As Soder suggests in *The Language of Leadership*, any time we have a choice to make, we are on moral grounds, and ethics and human nature overlap considerably. Choices declare priorities, an ‘ordering of the goods.’ Leaders must consider what kind of worldview they craft when making decisions. What are the implications of their actions, the ripples of precedent in the pond that extend beyond the immediate influence of their choice? In deciding the kind of world they want to live in, leaders inadvertently make statements about who they wish to be and how they wish to define human nature. Though pinning down an absolute definition of human nature is an elusive impossibility that has evaded generations of philosophers, I’d like to evaluate scholarship from this quarter for their perceptions and assumptions about human nature and the repercussions of each on leadership.

**“The Grand Inquisitor”**

To me, the most striking deliberation on human nature we read this quarter was Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “The Grand Inquisitor” from *The Brothers Karamazov.* Dostoevsky establishes two opposing worldviews in his allegorical figures of Christ and the Grand Inquisitor, deliberating respectively over the merits of free will versus comfort and security as fundamental and desirable to human nature. Leaders frequently encounter such conflicts of values when attempting to sort out the qualities of human nature and by extension the worldview they desire. Here, I choose to impose the moral framework of Immanuel Kant’s categorical imperative, stating that any one moral decision must be able to form a universal imperative on which society can reasonably operate. Accepting the view of either Christ or the Grand Inquisitor means defining human nature and thus society in a particular way that extends beyond just this conflict – this idea is effectively demonstrated in the chapter by the fact that both Christ and the Grand Inquisitor are significant leaders in their spheres. In unpacking the problems with the Grand Inquisitor’s view, I hope to demonstrate the repercussions of assumptions about human nature on worldviews and hence leadership.

What makes the deliberation between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor remarkable is that the points that the Grand Inquisitor proposes are compelling. There is truth to the idea that humans are fallible, fall prey time and time again to vice and pettiness, amorality and apathy. Why waste a life on the suffering that comes with freedom, trying to avoid damnation, if the results are all but inevitable? But is this reason enough to denounce free will? Again assuming Kant’s categorical imperative: if society operated on the principle that only those who can achieve success should be offered the opportunity for anything – majors, jobs, marriage, parenting, to use a few common modern examples  – then society would be one of an elite few awarded these privileges and an awful lot of rejects living empty lives on the outskirts. We could keep raising standards and slicing populations until almost no one could ever attempt anything for fear of failing. But if we do not allow people to try to be good, to grapple with their own moral conditions and obligations, for fear that they cannot possibly be successful, we deny room for opportunity, for mistakes and learning and growth. Our speech and idioms, our nursery rhymes and fairy tales, are all riddled with second chances, trial and error and eventual triumphs: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” “Fall down seven times, get up eight.” Though the Grand Inquisitor offers a practically utopian view of life, a world without problems or mistakes, a gentle carriage ride to oblivion, he also denies mankind its nature, in all its scrappy, screwed-up glory. The line ringing in my ears for the duration of “The Grand Inquisitor” was: “Man is condemned to be free,” perhaps the most famous quote from existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre. Whether religiously granted or otherwise, freedom is our curse. We are condemned, perhaps even damned, but we hold our own agency. We can try ridiculous hobbies that last a week, fall in love and out of it again, shed career paths and personalities like trying on hats. We can find those that love us and hate us and meet hundreds that fall in between. We can stumble, lose our ways, find terrible paths that will linger in our bloodlines for generations, see war and devastation leave their scars on this earth. But through all of it, we have the power to choose. We are free to live our lives, love our lives, lose our lives. We can choose what is right, what is good, maybe once in a lifetime, both. For better or worse, we are condemned to be free.

In examining and denouncing the Grand Inquisitor’s worldview, I have made an assumption about human nature, a choice about how I view humanity and how I wish the world to operate, just as leaders must do. Indeed, this choice of freedom over complicity is one that I view as fundamental to leadership: as offered in one of Soder’s propositions that I do not have the space to fully address, leadership exists in the context of larger society and leadership within a democracy is fundamentally different than leadership in other regimes, particularly despotic or oppressive ones. Societies such as democracies rely on assumptions about human nature and the views of the world these assumptions establish. Leaders must understand how the assumptions they make about human nature have consequences for the societies they establish and the citizens within them.

**“Shooting an Elephant”**

George Orwell’s conflict in Burma is another example of how choices carry weight in establishing societal worldviews and human nature alike. Though not as overt as the Grand Inquisitor’s proclamations defaming Christ and promoting the Church, Orwell’s narrative again offers a series of choices that establish a worldview, a society where saving face is valued more highly than sensitivity to an animal’s suffering and complicity with the desires of a crowd outranks following one’s innate sense of morality. A leader must consider what statements Orwell’s choices in the narrative make about human nature, and whether a world with morals like Orwell’s is one in which they would like to live and lead.

It’s important to acknowledge that, like with the Grand Inquisitor, Orwell’s choices can be defended in a number of ways. What’s interesting in this essay in particular is the clash of opposing social groups, a circumstance many leaders might encounter. Orwell is caught in the middle of the Burmese and the British, identifying as the latter but agreeing intellectually with the former. Orwell does not want to shoot the elephant, coming up with a variety of objections both moral and economic, but also does not want to become the British oppressor he so scorns  by opposing the wills of the local Burmans. Orwell appears threatened by the crowd, coerced into taking an action he does not agree with, though the crowd never explicitly threatens him or verbalizes any expectation at all. It is the *perception* of what the crowd desires that drives Orwell to take the action he does: his prior contentious relationship with the Burmans and his desire for them to view him as an ally, rather than an oppressive enemy. Orwell contends with the imperialist society he inhabits, the relationship between foreign oppressors and the local population, his own social status within this messy regime, and even the economic implications of the elephant’s life and its worth. Ultimately, these factors win out over any empathy towards the creature, leading him to the choice he makes.

Personally, I disagree with Orwell’s decision to shoot the elephant, but I understand his process of decision-making. In the moment, he did what he felt he had to. But what Orwell does not consider in this story is the larger implications of his actions. He sets himself on a path where the shooting of the elephant feels inevitable, the only possible response to his situation. Along the way, he makes dozens of seemingly insignificant choices – the choice to send for a gun, the choice to pursue the elephant despite the fact it was no longer wreaking havoc. Each of these choices carried weight and contributed to his final decision to shoot. These choices also established Orwell’s morals, what he viewed as most important in that moment. Again employing the categorical imperative: every action that Orwell took in Burma set a precedent for a permissible pattern of complicity and violence within his society. As a leader and as a person alike, Orwell’s choices make a statement about what humanity is allowed to become.

**“Democracy in America – Why The Americans Are Often So Restless In The Midst Of Their Prosperity”**

In chapter 13 of *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville cautions against what can happen to society if people and especially leaders are not self-aware of their own human nature. Without self-awareness, there can be no conscious choice, and no consideration of the large-scale repercussions of choice. Without choice, there can be no change. Leaders must be able to incite change when systems no longer function or serve the values leaders want to promote. Thus, leaders must be aware of human nature and how it affects the functions of society.

There are parallels between the society Tocqueville observes under America’s government and the society the Grand Inquisitor outlines under the reign of the Church. Both describe societies of citizens that seem distant from their sources of governance, and relatively unconcerned with a wider society beyond their immediate spheres. In both cases, citizens have given up this power to their governments willingly. However, the principle difference is that, under the guise of democracy, Tocqueville’s citizens believe they still possess free will, while the Grand Inquisitor’s citizens consciously give up their freedom. In my view, this makes Tocqueville’s society all the more dangerous. The Grand Inquisitor’s world is oppressive and bleak, but at least people are remotely knowledgeable in their oblivion. They have chosen not to choose, opted for happiness over the burden and responsibility of freedom. Tocqueville’s citizens believe themselves to be free and responsible, yet lapse into apathy. They fall asleep at the wheel and let society run amok. I think it far worse to believe yourself to be free but not shoulder the accompanying responsibility than to willingly sacrifice freedom altogether.

Tocqueville’s writing draws attention to the responsibility of leaders to their citizens. Leaders must actively examine their ideal view of human nature and whether their citizens are acting towards this ideal. In making assumptions about human nature and establishing a worldview, leaders must actively work to establish the conditions in which citizens can enact these ideals. Ability to enact change is key for a leader, but change cannot take place in a society where apathy runs rampant. Thus, leaders must utilize practical skills such as persuasion to work towards change.

**Morals, Motivations, Means and Ends**

Motivations complicate the idea of morality. It is not enough to just do correct actions. The reasons behind these actions also must be considered. As Soder suggests with his example of why a child should love their grandma, the motivations behind actions define the world we live in as much as the choices we make. We must consider not just what we should do, but why we should do it. Self-awareness and examination of our own values help serve as a compass in a vastly complex world toward what is right and what is good, and maybe occasionally both.

         Morals and motivations provide a theoretical perspective on assumptions about human nature, but leaders must consider the practical angle as well. Leaders must consider the overarching ends they desire and the concrete means they utilize to get there. As Spencer Welch suggested in his presentation on leadership, ends and means serve as yet another method of establishing the world we want to live in. When leaders consider human nature, they must also consider how these ideals play out in application.

**Proposition Three: Good leadership involves ethical and effective information seeking. A leader must have knowledge of what must be done, knowledge of what it takes to persuade others of what must be done (and, in persuading, helping to create a more thoughtful public), and knowledge of how an audience/public will respond. Only with a thorough understanding of the principles, strategies, and costs of information seeking will one be able to engage in ethical and effective leadership.**

Moving leadership from theory-based quandaries about human nature to practical applications: this proposition lists *ethical* and *effective* as the traits required for good leadership. In my view, all other aspects of information-seeking and persuasion worth considering work to serve a leader’s ethicality, effectiveness, or both. In examining and unpacking the principles, strategies, and costs of information-seeking, leaders come to understand how to utilize information to prompt the public to think more deeply about problems, persuade the public towards their stance on said problem, and consider the responsibility that accompanies knowledge of any kind. Ethical and effective leaders have a greater impact on the societies around them, and a greater chance to enact change for the better.

**“The Language of Leadership – Chapters One, Two, and Three”**

In *The Language of Leadership*, Roger Soder proposes persuasion as one of the most key and pervasive devices within society, from the ancient follies of Cassandra, gifted with prophecy but cursed never to be believed, to Winston Churchill’s speeches during the Second World War, which held England steady while the threats of Fascism pressed from all sides. As such, leaders must be prepared to employ persuasion as necessary to work towards their ends, their objectives.

However, to be a leader that is ethical as well as effective, a leader must also consider their means, the methods of persuasion they employ. Soder outlines some of the reasons people might choose to ignore persuasion, or situations in which such tactics may be ineffective or immoral. Persuasion is a cultural matter. Human beings tend to only accept new ideas when they can align these with their preexisting values and worldview – their assumptions about human nature. In the United States, issues such as same-sex marriage, abortion, and gun control have become so contentious and polarized between parties that neither side is willing to bend to recognize the opposite point of view. Persuasion becomes ineffective when individuals’ values and beliefs so powerfully override any sort of potential communication. Leaders must contend with people’s pre-existing ideas in order to persuade in ways that are at all effective. Soder also cites that distrust of persuasion has a foundation in truth, such as the imagery of dictators holding sway over crowds in Nuremberg and Red Square. Rhetoricians have been portrayed throughout history as sly or untrustworthy – modern examples include the ‘sleaziness’ of cars salesmen, many US politicians, and the advertising industry. Leaders must find ways to utilize persuasion while staying true to their values and morals. Finally, Soder argues that use of force is not only immoral, it does not qualify as persuasion at all.“…Force is not persuasion: force is evidence of a failure to persuade.” However, despite distrust and misuse of so-called persuasive tactics, persuasion remains pervasive all the same. From grant proposals to resumes, college applications to interviews, we rely on the power of persuasion in our everyday lives. The question then becomes how, both strategically and morally, persuasion can become a critical part of leadership.

Once leaders have recognized the importance of persuasion, they face the question of how to gather necessary information. Soder outlines three key reasons for information seeking: leaders must have knowledge of policy, the ability to expound on this policy to convince others of its rightness, and a sense of how people will respond to this policy. His ensuing discussion of principles and strategies of information-seeking highlight the fine balance leaders must walk between ethicality and effectiveness in their persuasion. Sometimes the methods that appear the most effective are also the most ethically shaky. For example, a leader who pretends to know less than they do so people can take pleasure in correcting them or filling in these gaps can be quite effective at acquiring information but can also appear devious. Other methods that may be deemed moral do not work effectively. For instance, a leader who denies seeking information to avoid gossip or scandal often lacks thorough understanding of their context or situation. Additionally, a refusal to seek information can come across as immoral in its alienation of citizens wishing to confide in or be understood by a leader, or in its easy slide towards apathy. Soder is not unique in identifying this fine balance; several others texts from across centuries delve into these dilemmas of ethicality and effectiveness in information-seeking and leadership.

**“In What Mode Flatterers Are To Be Avoided”**

In this chapter from *The Prince,* Niccolò Machiavelli discusses how leaders must safeguard their morals when seeking information. He suggests that leaders should put their faith in ministers who look out for those leaders and not just themselves. This relationship, when trusting on both sides, can be mutually beneficial. Machiavelli urges that leaders remember that ministers are there to ‘keep them good,’ or prevent leaders from becoming indulgent or corrupt. I took this to mean that leaders must remember they do not exist in isolation. By seeking information and counsel alike, leaders remain connected with society around them. Their actions are equally better-informed and more likely to be ethical through incorporating a multiplicity of perspectives from trusted sources.

Machiavelli goes on to describe how leaders must guard themselves against flattery: counselors speaking what they think leaders want to hear, rather than the truth. They must get their counselors to be truthful with them, but also not allow every citizen to share their truths, as this is time-consuming and counterproductive. Machiavelli claims that leaders should be selective in their information-seeking, taking counsel only when they choose, asking questions and demanding truthful answers. This advice demonstrates the power of information-seeking, and the ramifications it can have for leaders, as I will later delve into in my discussion of Francis Bacon’s “Of Counsel.”

Machiavelli concludes by noting that good counsel arises “from the prudence of the prince, and not the prudence of the prince from good counsel.” In short, leaders must listen to counsel, but ultimately have the wisdom to process information and make decisions for themselves. Leaders need a basis of knowledge to handle those around them, make their citizens feel important and helpful without inflating their self-worth, wheedle the information they need without making people feel used. And here again lurks the ethics of it all. Any such persuasion is a slippery slope into manipulation. No wonder ‘Machiavellian’ is used to describe politics gone awry. Machiavelli’s own counsel, his treatise on persuasion, embodies the fine balance between ethical and effective leadership, and the caution a leader must employ in balancing these while seeking information.

**“Letters to His Son”**

An examination of the principles of Lord Chesterfield also offer insight as to the balance between ethicality and effectiveness in information seeking. In *Letters To His Son*, Lord Chesterfield begins by cautioning his son not to presume everyone is always talking of him and taking offence. Rather, people must remain good-natured and feign ignorance, as people will then delightedly turn over information. Occasionally, people should pretend to know more than they do, to keep someone talking. They should then probe further for information, though not through direct questioning. Evidently, these strategies are all ones that Chesterfield has found effective in his social and professional proceedings, but a prudent leader must question the repercussions such strategies may have. As previously stated, strategies such as feigning ignorance have the potential for immorality even as they are effective at information-seeking. According to the categorical imperative, a leader lying or promoting falsehoods in the name of their end-goal establishes precedent for moral permissibility of these actions, the counterpoint to the traditional Machiavellian ‘ends justify the means.’ In a leader’s struggle between ethicality and effectiveness, there is no easy solution, only an ongoing situational balancing act to consider each of these according to priorities of circumstance.

**“Of Counsel”**

Francis Bacon’s *Of Counsel* also offers insight surrounding ethical and effective information-seeking and leadership. Bacon proclaims: “The greatest trust between man and man is the trust of giving counsel.” He goes on to describe the importance of wise counsel in politics, using a metaphor of Athena’s birth. Leaders must listen and absorb the wisdom of their counselors, as Zeus consumes Metis, then reassert control, reclaiming ideas as their own when they are shared with the world, as when Athena springs from the head of Zeus. Leaders must not become overly dependent on their council – they must remain independent authorities. Leaders must also ensure their counselors are not working for their own selfish purposes, nor working purely to attempt to please the leader, though no people can ever be truly impartial or free of bias. This wisdom parallels the sentiments of Machiavelli, where leaders must be selective with their information and counsel, filtering each fragment through their own system of values and goals. Again, leaders must keep their end-goals in mind, their own view of human nature and the world they wish to craft, while considering the means they take to get there.

According to Bacon, leaders must also be careful with their information and secrets, lest they get leaked and spiral out of hand. This evokes Soder’s concept that information-seeking itself provides information. Leaders must not only filter the information they seek and receive, they must also be conscious of what their information-seeking tells others. Soder’s example is of a new principal who arrives at a school and begins seeking information. What she chooses to ask about – budgets, racial dynamics within the school, standardized test scores – gives her staff information about her priorities as a leader. In gathering information or listening to counsel, a leader must maintain their authority, and cannot appear too dependent on any ideas or too eager for any slice of knowledge. The public image a leader must maintain adds yet another complication to the delicate task of obtaining information. Not only must leaders retrieve the information they need, they also must do so in a way that makes them appear (and feel) confident and in control, at the helm of the ship despite the crew they have pulling ropes and raising anchors. It’s difficult enough for a leader to consider themself when it comes to the skill of persuasion: their personal code of ethics, their intentions, the potential consequences or ramifications of their actions. Bringing public image into the mess only complicates things further. There’s no easy answer. This is why persuasion and counsel remain subjects of debate over centuries, why scholars study these texts still even now.

**“Lincoln’s Revolution”**

Following ethical and effective information-seeking, a leader must employ strategies of putting ethical and effective persuasion into practice. This brings me to Ralph Learner’s chapter “Lincoln’s Revolution” in *Revolutions Revisited*. Learner paints Abraham Lincoln, a significant American leader, as a politician who cares most utterly about both ethical and effective leadership. Lincoln realizes that “the government lies in public opinion,” and whoever can change the opinion of the public holds political control. He must effectively persuade his public in order to enact his end-goals of becoming president and abolishing slavery, and must choose his means very carefully. Lincoln recognizes the need to ignite and align with public passions for effective persuasion, but equally values reason and thoughtfulness for his platform to be sustainable. Ralph Learner frames the background of Lincoln’s political rise, pointing out how Americans post-Revolutionary War flatter themselves and the country they have created. This self-flattery prevents self-awareness, and Lincoln adopts the platform that Americans can only think well of themselves after they have learned to think critically. He first establishes the worldview he wishes his citizens to embody, namely a self-awareness of their own actions and their wider repercussions. He is then able to move forward to consider his own methods of persuasion.

Lincoln’s first dilemma is how to persuade the American people to accept such an unsavory, even radical platform as critical thinking and self-awareness of their own faults while still thinking well of Lincoln himself. He views transparent persuasion as key to politics. His mission of persuasion becomes openly shifting public opinion by inviting the public to reconsider issues alongside him, striving for people to obtain a fundamental understanding behind the opinions they hold. Lincoln knows his values, the worldview he wants to enact. He does not want to lead through fear or manipulation, but rather wants his citizens to be educated, and not only educated but desirous of knowledge. He embraces the challenges that accompany this value, including the struggle of getting people to like him even as he presents difficult truths in a political landscape that runs on popularity. Lincoln sees a thoughtful and critical public as fundamental to democracy. He considers this structure more fundamental that even his own political platforms, including the abolition of slavery, insisting on establishing a critical populous before he even attempts to persuade them of his political views. Lincoln establishes the worldview and accompanying ethics he desires, then develops his framework for effective persuasion around these values, upholding a balance between ethical and effective leadership both.

Lincoln also enacts effective persuasion by painting himself as a friend sharing a common heritage with the public in order for them to listen to his reason and come to understand his justice. By making the Declaration of Independence his central point of reference, Lincoln channels a higher power while still remaining soundly political. He frames his platform as key to honoring the past and continuing the work of the revolution. Lincoln cites America’s founding fathers as models for present politics, particularly pledging support of the Constitution. However, he does not encourage mindless adoration, but careful study of their legacy of successes. These tie-backs to the nation’s history serve as counters to accusations of Lincoln as a ‘revolutionary and destructive’ politician. Lincoln casts his revolution not through impressing radical new ideas on the population, but by framing the large systemic changes he wishes to impose (the abolition of slavery) as part of the history and tradition of the nation. In adopting American history as part of his mantra, Lincoln frames himself and his changes as part of the natural narrative of the American story, rather than a deviance or departure. In this way, he is able to tackle the fear of the unknown that always accompanies change, a brilliant method of enacting systemic change. By proposing his changes as aligned with tradition and traditional values, Lincoln is able to more widely persuade his audience of the benefits of his propositions. He is then able to lead a reluctant public to difficult political conclusions.

Lincoln’s revolution serves as a practical model for the application of ethical and effective persuasion, leading to ethical and effective leadership. By asserting and examining his values and encouraging the public to do so alongside him, Lincoln puts ethics at the forefront of his platform. He then employs methods of persuasion that align with these values while imparting key aspects of his political platform. Lincoln shows how it is possible for leaders to expand beyond theoretical reckonings and put ethical and effective leadership into practice

**The Public’s Response**

In all this consideration of ethical and effective persuasion, I have only acknowledged the leader, the person in the driver’s seat making the choices. As with choices surrounding worldview and human nature, acts of persuasion create ripples that affect more than just the immediate audience. Additionally, as Soder asserts, “persuasion is never unidirectional.” Audiences too have choices to make about what content they consume, whether they respond, and the way they choose to respond. What’s more, leaders are not leaders in every circumstance, and also find themselves as members of audiences. Ethicality and effectiveness are concerns of leaders in every circumstance, including as part of a collective. To what extent are *audiences* obligated to seek knowledge or information? (are these one and the same?) Personally? Professionally? As citizens of a democracy? How do they handle the risk that accompanies seeking information versus the risk of passively allowing it to come to them, or even actively avoiding it, particularly viewpoints they do not want to hear? Where does apathy lie in all this – is it apathetic to passively accept information versus actively avoid it, and which is worse? What seems clear to me is that there are no simple solutions, no one-time tricks that will answer these questions once and for all, for audiences or for leaders. Complexities lie on all sides of the spectrum. Ethical and effective information-seeking is a process that must be repeated over and over, within lifetimes and across generations as new conflicts arise, new circumstances come into play, and new values emerge and change. This requires effort - continual, committed effort, from leaders and audiences alike -  across space and time.

**Proposition Two: A more thoughtful public must not only be created and sustained but, given that things inevitably fall apart, must be recovered and reconstituted.**

The previous two propositions offered insight into the creation of leaders and systems of leadership. Leaders make assumptions about human nature, establishing a worldview that they wish to promote. They establish ends and means for ethical and effective leadership, many of which hinge on information-seeking and persuasion. These goals are not simply accomplished and finished, however. Leaders must be able to sustain their ideals, goals, and actions over time, and to recover and reconstitute when things inevitably fall apart.

Sustaining systems over time requires a different framework of thought than is typical. Most people, leaders included, think in the short term, focusing on immediate goals and actions. This mode of thought is necessary in many ways – if people exclusively thought in the long-term, nothing would get done day-to-day. However, it is easy to generate motivation when an idea is new and exciting, revolutionary even. What becomes difficult is maintaining this motivation over time, as people lose interest and drift away, preoccupied with some new revolutionary ideal, or as key players shift their attention elsewhere. Sustaining work towards an end-goal over time requires a different mode of thinking

**“The Clock of the Long Now”**

The Clock of the Long Now is a project that was started in 01996 (to use their notation of 10,000-year time). The Clock would tick once a year, the century hand would move once every hundred years, and the cuckoo would pop out every thousand years – measuring time in the long-term. The project is a physical monument that represents a societal shift away from short attention spans and towards a focus on long-term vision and responsibility. Brand makes the claim that “bad things happen fast… good things happen slow… The kinds of goals that can be reached quickly are rather limited.” Brand observes that large environmental systems manage change and absorb shock through a combination of fast- and slow-moving parts – these systems can weather change while still moving readily forward. Brand claims that to make man-made systems fault-tolerant, able to endure over time, leaders must be able to make small, local corrections that slowly permeate throughout the system.

Brand also asserts that oftentimes we entrust our institutions – governments and universities – with looking after the long view, but currently, our institutional memory is often fallible. Thus, leaders must consider in what way the long view is stored and maintained – what life goals take on outside the individual, and what small actions can be taken to maintain this lifeblood over time.  “You need the space of continuity to have the confidence not to be afraid of revolutions,” Brand proclaims. Leaders must be comfortable weathering change in their steady march forwards towards their ends. The more they can adapt long-term thought and sustain their systems over time, the more options they allow themselves in the future.

**“Democracy in America – What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have To Fear”**

Apathy and long-term sustenance go hand in hand: apathy can often be the reason long-term goals are not realized, and similarly a lack of effort towards realizing long term goals can promote apathy. In chapter six of *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville observes the effects of apathy in American society through a phenomenon he describes as ‘soft despotism.’ This despotism is milder and more widespread than the overt tyranny that might occur in a monarchical society. Each citizen concerns themself with only themselves and those immediately around them, losing sight of the wider society. Government is thus allowed to become an overarching, almost parental force, taking control of wider concerns to leave citizens to concentrate on small-scale, day-to-day worries. The government Tocqueville observes slowly guides and restricts its citizens, leaving them softer, less desirous of free will. Though it is never tyrannical, it morphs citizens slowly into ‘a flock of timid and hardworking animals with the government as its shepherd.’ Citizens feel that the fact that they elect their government proves they have the freedom of choice in their leaders, but Tocqueville asserts that the brief act of participating in democracy through voting is not enough to keep people from falling into the trap of apathy and thus despotism constructed within society. A ‘liberal, energetic, and wise government’ cannot arise from citizens so disinterested in their democracy and the prosperity of their society as a whole. Just as leaders must work to sustain efforts towards long-term goals, leaders must combat soft despotism and apathy in order to sustain a democracy and a society of thoughtful citizens. Leaders must not allow themselves to become closed off from their public; they must employ information-seeking and persuasive strategies to constantly engage their society in working towards their ends and ideal worldview.

**“The Language of Leadership – Chapter Five”**

As leaders work towards their goals, inevitably over time they will encounter difficulty. Long-term thinking will not prevent this. Combating apathy will not prevent this. In *The Language of Leadership*, Soder explains how leaders must be prepared to cope when things inevitably fall apart: within organizations, on large and small scales, and especially between people. Things fall apart for a variety of reasons, many related to corrupt human motives, and people can respond in numerous ways. As with information-seeking and persuasion, leaders must consider ethical and effective responses when things fall apart, efforts towards reconciliation and reconstitution. This is no simple matter. Reconciliation efforts must engage human relationships between conflict groups, people seeking apology, forgiveness, understanding, and knowledge of when to move on. This must not be a simple matter of “forgive and forget,” but rather a conscious respect for the parties and what they have endured in an effort towards truth and mercy, justice and peace. Reconciliation requires acknowledging the past without getting bogged down by it, and helping people to both honor the past and transcend beyond it.

Reconciliation and reconstitution for leaders must address deep structures and not merely superficial change. Leaders must see the large scale of the world, not just the small, considering the repercussions of their actions. For ethical and effective reconciliation, leaders cannot lie to themselves or to others. They must insist on seeking the truth and engaging honest public deliberation. They must commit the necessary time and resources to authentic processes of reconstitution and reconciliation. Finally, they must understand exceptions when the truth may not be productive. Knowledge of what to do when things fall apart may be among the most fundamental for leadership.

**“Philoctetes”**

Similar to how Ralph Learner’s Abraham Lincoln serves as a practical model for ethical and effective leadership, Socrates’ *Philoctetes* offers a model of how to cope when things fall apart. Odysseus opts for trickery to ‘convince’ Philoctetes to give him the bow of Hercules in this story, thus sacrificing any potential trust he or Neoptolemus might have established with Philoctetes. Odysseus also allows his own biases to cloud his information-seeking, concentrating solely on acquiring the bow, rather than the necessity of bringing Philoctetes to his side for his end-goal of victory over the Trojans. As Odysseus learns, there are consequences to any course of action, and the consequences of his trickery are less than desirable, almost foiling his entire plan. Odysseus and Neoptolemus alike come to realize the consequences of trust violated and the necessity of reconciliation and reconstruction. Neoptolemus is forced to decide whether his morals or his end-goal take priority – whether he cares more about his ends or his means. Though Neoptolemus initially chooses his ends, he ultimately recants the means he enacts to get there. Human beings make mistakes – it’s part of why things inevitably fall apart.Neoptolemus’ sense of morality overrides his ambitions in the end.

Perhaps Sophocles was too intimidated to broach ending his brief play without the device of *deus ex machina*. It would have involved tackling one of the most complex questions of human nature: how to address wrongdoing and tackle reconciliation and reconstruction with grace, in a manner that both appeases each party at play and addresses ultimate goals often in opposition. Sophocles sets up the circumstances, then doesn’t offer conditions for resolution outside divinity, conditions accessible to the everyman. When viewpoints are at a standstill, when forgiveness doesn’t seem possible, what happens then? Sophocles gives no answer. Perhaps that is the ongoing struggle, the question without an answer, humanity’s problem with no solution for now. The only answer I can offer stems back to human nature and the world we wish to constitute. To be a good leader and person, you have to do good things. Values are relatively insignificant if your actions do not correspond with them. Our morals must guide not only our intentions and mindsets, but our actions. In the actions we choose, we set a precedent for the world we want to live in. As people inevitably make mistakes, they should attempt to put them right. This practice is the only way to make a difference in the world.

**Conclusions**

Leadership is not a simple subject. Leaders may be some of the most interdisciplinary thinkers of our time, contending with politics, economics, psychology, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, morality, and education on the regular, not to mention specializations within their field. But all leaders, regardless of their sphere, contend with elements of human nature. All leaders have visions of end-goals, societies they wish to help create through their work. All leaders also must choose the means they employ to get there, the ethicality and effectiveness of these methods. And all leaders must consider how to sustain things over time, and how to recover and reconstitute when things fall apart. When examined through this large, theoretical lens, these tasks may appear impossible. How do we possibly teach a vast and complex public to consider these ideas? As Soder suggests in *The Language of Leadership* and *Developing Democratic Character in the Young,* we can look for answers through a system already established within wider society, with room for growth, change, and improvement: our public schools.

I am a fierce advocate of public education, and have maintained for years that the key to the success of society is the education of our youth. Schools are the places within our society in which future leaders are already taught to question, to explore facets of our world and examine their own values and the world they wish to create – or if this is not so currently, they are the place with potential to foster this. There are numerous examples throughout history of public education as a tool to enact large-scale change; first to come to mind are the institutions of Sparta and the Nazi infiltration of German schooling alongside establishments like Hitler’s Youth. (Though these are both arguably examples of education systems with harsh and violent impacts on wider society, they do prove the viability of schools as a system for change and thus as systems with the potential to promote good.)

The problems lie, as always, in the gap between the theoretical and the actual. The first issue lies in, as Soder puts it, the ‘allocation of the goods.’ How do we possibly persuade those in power, the politicians and businessmen, that this endeavor is worthwhile, then find the funding and resources required for systemic improvement in our schools? And by some miracle if the former is achieved, how do we determine what would make for ethical and effective change? It is nearly impossible to regulate school systems to the degree necessary, the impossible range of day-to-day happenings, especially in a country as large and diverse as the United States. How do we possibly imbue all that we wish to, all our theories and conditions, ethics and persuasive strategies, on the young minds before us who also squirm and squabble and ask questions, and need bathroom breaks and playtime and friends? How do we write curriculum that impart these ideals for our broad range of teachers and circumstances across diverse cities, states, or even countries? Do we provide new pencils? More training for teachers? More staff on school sites in general?

The improvements necessary for systematic and widespread change seem an insurmountable mountain. But most tasks of leadership do, at the beginning. All the grand ends, the goals we establish, the utopias we idealize, begin with a vision for the future, a leader with motivation and strategies and the persuasive ability to get others to fall behind them. In my mind, the quest towards ‘good’ leadership on a large scale begins with an assumption about human nature, a worldview we imagine: that children can be taught to become great leaders, that public education is the means towards this end. It begins with information-seeking and strategies for persuasion that are ethical and effective. And it begins with people motivated towards change, towards action, towards taking the first step.