Reading "Greats" as Education for Leadership

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Two truths are self-evident realities in the world of leadership education: preparation for leadership is an essential component of postsecondary education and there is no theoretical or pragmatic consensus on the nature of leadership, how it should be taught, cultivated, or passed on to succeeding generations. Were it not for the apparently contradictory character of these claims, it would seem that they are so obviously true as to defy the need for argumentation. As to the former, virtually every institution of higher education recognizes the importance of preparing its students for leadership. The first sentence of our own institution's mission statement declares that the university exists "... to educate men and women for worldwide leadership" and a quick survey of peer institutions confirms the same. And yet, if it is true that we are all committed to teaching this subject, how is it that there is such little agreement on the nature, character and function of leadership? Described as "one of the most vexing subjects of human inquiry"[1] by the 1998 Kellogg Leadership Studies Project, Bernard Bass, the author of a popular comprehensive handbook on leadership frankly admits "There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define it."[2]

For many, leadership cannot be described—they simply know it when they see it. Most frustrating of all, perhaps, is the common experience that the deeper one explores the concept, the more obscure it becomes. Robert Birnbaum, a prominent scholar of leadership in the industry of higher education concedes, "My reading of the literature of leadership and my research experiences over the past several years have convinced me that research cannot provide answers to the puzzles of leadership."[3]

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[1] The Burns Academy of Leadership, *Rethinking Leadership: Kellogg Leadership Studies Project 1994-1997* (College Park: The Burns Academy of Leadership Press, 1998), i.

[2] Bernard Bass, *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research and Managerial Applications* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 11.

[3] Robert Birnbaum, *How Academic Leadership Works: Understanding Success and Failure in the College Presidency* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), xix.

If all of this is the case, where should one turn for innovative and successful education for leadership? If one searches "books about leadership" at Amazon.com, more than 170,000 entries are provided for review. From Rudolph Giuliani's *Leadership* to John Maxwell's *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader*, there are literally thousands of models, antidotes, scholarly renditions, formulas, and models for understanding notions of leadership. While this plethora of books may indeed teach us how to manage in a minute, move from good to great, or even discover who moved our cheese, the life span of these books is predictably short, and their readers invariably move on in their search for the Holy Grail of leadership. How then do we teach what we do not know; how do we pass on what we struggle to apprehend?

At Baylor University in Waco, Texas, in the United States, the Honors College and the Academy for Leader Development have begun a collaborative project based on a thorough inquiry into the value and function of *reading Greats* with an eye toward better leadership education. This most promising new venue for leadership education is, of course, one of the very oldest. Some of the texts our students are reading would have been understood as essential reading for generations of great leaders across diverse cultural, geographical, and national boundaries. In this essay we will argue that the reading, study, and discussion of the "great texts" of literature, philosophy, and politics offers a substantial and insightful alternative to the cliché-ridden, short-term utilitarianism of so much contemporary leadership education.

Though sometimes overlooked as obscure, irrelevant, or difficult to understand, these great texts (or "Greats") are anything but obscure or irrelevant; they are exciting, provocative, insightful, and contain a wealth of resources for leadership education. In 1936 Robert Hutchins maintained that the classics are ". . . contemporary in every age"[4] and it remains true today. Steven Sample, President of the University of Southern California and author of *The Contrarians Guide to Leadership*, asserts that these "super texts," not only represent . . . timeless truths about leadership, but rather some timeless truths about human nature. One of the great fallacies of our age is the belief that we are

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[4] Robert Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 1999), 78.

fundamentally different from our ancient forebears, that we have somehow outgrown the barbaric and benighted practices of centuries and millennia past."[5]

The benefits accrued from a leadership education based in Greats are manifold; students benefit both from the *content learned* and from the *manner of study* required. In terms of content, students are confronted with classic models of decision-making, with concrete historical examples of good and bad leadership, with sustained reflection and argumentation on legitimate and illegitimate means and ends of action, with the prevalence of self-deception, naiveté, and overconfidence, and with an astute understanding of the role of habit and character formation. Since the great authors frequently disagree about the most important "matters that matter," these students must also confront difficult choices between (apparently) equally compelling but contradictory options. This is, of course, the world within which real leaders find themselves.

In terms of the manner of study, students are required to read complex, demanding works. This requires perseverance, a willingness to master concepts and look up references which they have not previously mastered. The very reading and study of these texts equips them with essential leadership skills in logic, rhetoric, analysis, interpretation, and imagination. This course of study is also discussion-based, and thus the students must, consequently, come to class prepared to argue for their point of view against competing perspectives.

It is also our belief that effective education for leadership through reading Greats models the very best education in general by overcoming the traditional academic barriers between "liberal" and "professional" education. Great leaders have great minds formed in the crucible of what Matthew Arnold called "the best that has been thought and said." There are few better resources for effective leadership education than the focused examination of Greats. We agree with Chris Anderson that "What every teacher wants is change in the students. We want them to be different going out than they were going in, even if more confused. What every teacher wants is the acceptance of complexity, the awareness that things are more complicated than they first appeared."[6] Reading Greats does not guide students to easy answers and prescriptive antidotes about leadership, yet

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[5] Steven Sample, *The Contrarians Guide to Leadership* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 2002), 59.
[6] Chris Anderson, *Teaching as Believing: Faith in the University* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 200.

the Greats do steer students toward important questions with which they must grapple in order to lead.

Selecting texts to guide discussions about leadership

In *Learning for the Common Good: Liberal Education, Civic Education and Teaching about Philanthropy*, Thomas Jeavon asks, "When people encounter the mass of books and other materials in the library, on what basis are they to choose to read?"[7] The purpose of Jeavon's question is related to how pedagogical approaches can inspire civic and liberal education of students at American colleges and universities. In many ways, we agree with Jeavon that answering this question contributes to our success in developing student capacities for judgment, assessing claims to truth, and ". . . for being able to see the salience and meaning of what is learned in the context of whatever larger issue one is exploring or whatever problem one is solving."[8] Leadership, we argue, is an important potential outcome of a liberal education. Of course, the definition of a liberal education is a topic for another time, but for the sake of argument, this type of education serves as a catalyst for curiosity, critical thinking, and, as the name "liberal" suggests, a genuine liberation of mind and spirit. In our view, understanding the past, interacting in the present, and exhibiting principled behavior in an effort to advance a common good are the ingredients not only of a liberal education, but of effective leadership as well.

In a new course entitled "Great Texts in Leadership," we have selected the following texts: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, selections from Plutarch's *Lives*, Cicero's *De Officiis* [On Duties or Obligations], Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, The Twenty-third Psalm, four Shakespearean plays (*Coriolanus, Macbeth,* and *Henry IV Parts 1 & 2*), and two short stories by Flannery O'Connor ("A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "The Life You Save May Be Your Own"). Of course, this selection of texts only scratches the surface of what one could do. Most obviously, any number of Shakespearean plays would work magnificently in such a setting, and not just the histories and tragedies. We think the comedies, like *Much Ado about Nothing* or *As You Like It,* will stir the imagination and get the students thinking about leadership issues as

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[7] Thomas Jeavon, *Learning for the Common Good: Liberal Education, Civic Education and Teaching about Philanthropy* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991), 12.
[8] Jeavon, 12.

well, but it is hard to do better than *Lear* for absolutely stunning leadership failure. There are a number of Platonic dialogues that would work quite effectively as well (*The Republic, Crito, Gorgias, Apology, Phaedrus,* even the *Phaedo*). Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* is probably a better overall "leadership" text than its infamous companion. Boethius's *On the Consolation of Philosophy* is probably the single greatest leadership text left off of our list. Wonderful books such as Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations,* Seneca's *On Tranquility of Mind*, or (since our goal is not to turn our students into Roman Stoics), even an unlikely text like Athanasius's *Life of Anthony* would be marvelous. At first glance this might seem counter-intuitive. What can future leaders in the twenty-first century learn from a desert monk wandering around Egypt in the third? Quite a lot, frankly, especially when it comes to discipline, self-knowledge, and perseverance.

The point here is that there are many, many great texts which can be read for leadership education. While there is as much disagreement about which books constitute the list of Greats as to what constitutes good leadership, we are *almost* inclined to suggest that every truly great book has the potential to teach students about leadership precisely because the great works confront the human predicament and the question of human nature. Yes of course, one probably should not turn to Kant's first *Critique* or Joyce's *Ulysses* as entrée into reading Greats for leadership education, but even here there is much that students can learn from. (Many a leader might benefit both from Kant's distinction between what can be known and what cannot be known and from Bloom's perseverance in the face of manifold obstacles.)

Many of the texts can be brought into conversation with one another. For instance, we juxtapose Cicero's *De Officiis* with Machiavelli's *Prince.* Machiavelli draws his famous analogy of the fox and the lion directly from Cicero's *De Officiis*. Cicero's text is divided into three books. The first two books address "honorable" and "useful" activity, respectively. Book three turns to the question of what to do when the "useful" (or expedient) thing conflicts with the "honorable" (or excellent) thing. Cicero's answer is that the honorable and the useful can only be *apparently* in conflict. Dishonorable action is never truly useful.[9] Machiavelli, of course, turns this on its head.

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[9] Cicero, *On Obligations,* trans. P.G. Walsh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

He famously notes, "Hence it is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good, and to use this and not use it according to necessity."[10] Which is true? Must the effective leader be prepared to act in ways which are useful and expedient but may be less than honorable? Bringing these two perspectives into conflict with one another generates some exceedingly productive conversation among the students.

In the brief time we have available today, we would like to demonstrate both the usefulness and the excellence of reading Greats for leadership education by examining three very accessible examples. All of these texts can be effectively taught by "non-specialists." One need not be a philosopher to teach Aristotle or an English professor to teach Shakespeare or Jane Austen. One must be a careful and disciplined reader who is eager to initiate reflection and conversation among one's students. After examining these three examples, we will turn to student responses to this curriculum and conclude with a response to three common objections which arise to reading Greats.

Three examples

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.[11] From our perspective, there is simply no better introductory leadership text than Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Written in the fourth century BC, Aristotle was Plato's student and Alexander the Great's teacher. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he spends a great deal of time addressing the nature of the virtues and the habits of mind and thought. Aristotle understood that it was far more important to develop the right sorts of habits than it was merely to convince someone of the right thing to do.

The future leaders of Athenian society were Aristotle's students, and in this text our students are presented with clear, cogent discussions of virtually every major facet of effective leadership through moral and intellectual development. Aristotle's thoroughgoing understanding of the mutual interdependence of habit, vision, and virtue offers a better account of both the purpose-driven life and the necessary habits of highly effective leaders. (There are more than seven.) Here we get distinctions between

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[10] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 2d ed., trans. Harvey c. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 61. [Chapter XV]

[11] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thompson (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).

pleasure and happiness, between deliberation and choice, between action and restraint. We see clearly the differences between types of friendship and the ends toward which those friendships work.

For Aristotle, the goal toward which all human endeavors work is happiness. In Greek, it is literally the *flourishing* of the human being. Virtues are those dispositions of character which enable us to flourish. Moral virtues are understood to approximate the mean between the deficiency and the excess of such a disposition. Take courage, for instance. According to Aristotle, courage is the mean between cowardice and rashness (or foolhardiness). The coward is one who has a deficiency of bravery and the rash individual is one with an unrealistic excess of bravery which becomes foolhardy. The courageous individual is one who properly takes stock of the challenges before her, is resolute and brave in standing up to these challenges, and marshals sufficient resources to address adequately this challenge.

Turning to the intellectual virtues, Aristotle reminds us of the different ways of knowing. In the vernacular of contemporary leadership and management research, Aristotle's intellectual virtues are multiple intelligences. He lists five principle intelligences, or modes of knowing: scientific knowledge of things (*episteme*), the art or skill of knowing how to do something (*techne*), prudence or practical judgment of knowing how to work with people (*phronesis*), knowledge of first principles (*nous*), and wisdom (*sophia*). It is extraordinarily important that we not confuse these intelligences. Sometimes we think just knowing how the world is will tell us what to do. Nothing could be further from the truth. Technical knowledge of how to repair a machine or build a bridge (*techne*) is fundamentally different from the prudential knowledge of motivating and instructing people (*phronesis*). Many leaders today think that they can repair their companies or build their organizations in precisely the same way that one would work with inanimate objects. Aristotle teaches us about the difference.

Coriolanus, as presented by both Plutarch and William Shakespeare.[12] Caius Martius Coriolanus was a Roman general in the fourth century BC. We have historical accounts of the life of Coriolanus in both Livy and Plutarch, and an extraordinary play by

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[12] Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* Vol. I, trans. John Dryden, rev. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: The Modern Library, 1992). William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, ed. Jonathan Crewe (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

Shakespeare based on Plutarch's version. Though often overlooked and rarely performed, T.S. Eliot believed that *The Tragedy of Coriolanus* was "Shakespeare's most assured artistic success."[13] In our course, students read both Plutarch's version and Shakespeare's play.

The plot of *Coriolanus* is both simple and tragic. Caius Martius Coriolanus is a brilliant Roman general who disdains the common people. Though he has had great success on the battlefield, indeed the name "Coriolanus" is given to him after his extraordinary valor in the battle for the Volscian city of Corioli, he is unwilling and unable to accommodate his nature to the domestic demands required of Rome's civic leaders. Scorned by the commons and accused of treason, Coriolanus leaves Rome and commits himself to Tullus Affidius, leader of the Volscians and the arch-enemy of Rome. He marches on Rome at the head of a Volscian army, wreaking destruction along the way and generating fear in the capital. Friends and colleagues from among the Patricians are sent unsuccessfully to dissuade him from his treasonous intentions. Ultimately, his mother Volumnia throws herself in his path, declaring (in Shakespeare) "If I cannot persuade thee / Rather to show a noble grace to both parts / Than to seek the end of one, thou shalt no sooner / March to assault thy country than to tread-- / Trust to't, thou shalt not—on thy mother's womb / That brought thee to this world."[14] Coriolanus relents in the face of his mother's plea, withdraws his troops, and is subsequently murdered by the Volscians for treason to them.

Crucial to the narrative is Coriolanus's attempt to gain the position of Consul in Rome and his refusal to submit himself to the traditional inspection by the public. At this time, it was the tradition for the public to affirm or reject those who stood for Consul. What Coriolanus describes as *integrity* ("Would you have me False to my nature? Rather say I play The man I am." [III.2.15-17]) the reader and the Roman commons see as *arrogance* and *pride*. Even in his ostensible acts of humility (e.g., when he dons the "gown of humility" to show his wounds and service to Rome) he cannot but exhibit his disgust for those he would lead. Sicinius, one of the Tribunes of the people, reminds

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[13] T.S. Eliot, "Hamlet," in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 144.
[14] William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus* V.3. 121-25.

them "forget not With what contempt he wore the humble weed, How in his suit he scorned you." [II.3.220-21]

Reading and discussing *Coriolanus* in the context of leadership opens a variety of avenues for the students' reflection and conversation. Coriolanus is, on the battlefield, a leader par excellence. His courage in the face of danger is unparalleled. However, it is quite clear that the skills and intuitions which made him successful in one sphere of inquiry have become a hindrance in another. Coriolanus also lacks both the insight to see how he is perceived and the will (or courage) to adapt himself to meet the challenge at hand. Would such adaptation be tantamount to deception, to a betrayal of this integrity? Or is his appeal to integrity a mask for pride and contempt? Shakespeare understood "emotional intelligence" long before the current wave of interest.[15]

Coriolanus also demonstrates the Aristotelian and Ciceronian principle of the unity of the virtues. One cannot pick and choose among the virtues. They not only complement one another, in the truest sense, they require one another. One cannot be genuinely courageous while willfully failing to be generous or just. The exercise of generosity requires a kind of courage, and meanness (or miserliness) evinces both cowardice and pusillanimity (or "smallness of soul" which shows the absence of magnanimity). Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that Coriolanus has weak internal resources to withstand the temptation toward betrayal, the abandonment of all that one is; he betrays the patricians who want him to stand for consul through his contempt of the people they represent, he betrays Rome in his flight to the Volscians, and he ultimately betrays the Volscians in his acquiescence to his mother Volumnia. Those students who have done previous work in Great Texts recognize immediately why Dante placed betrayers like Judas, Cassius, and Brutus at the very core and bottom of Hell. *Coriolanus* is a rich text which offers the students a marvelous laboratory for examining how potentially good leaders fail to lead.

Jane Austen's *Emma*. Jane Austen's 1816 classic *Emma* is also a wonderful text to stimulate reflection and discussion on the question of leadership. It is the story of Emma Woodhouse, whom the narrator describes in the opening sentence as "handsome,

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[15] Daniel Goleman, et al., *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2002).

clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition." She "had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her." Moreover, "The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her."[16]

Emma's story is the story of so many able leaders—intelligent, witty, beautiful, gifted by time and circumstance—and through self-deception and self-indulgence, she makes (or almost makes) a colossal mess of it all. *Emma* is particularly useful for demonstrating to students how one's best intentions can not only come to naught but can also actively undermine one's deepest desires. Postsecondary students who take up leadership positions frequently have much in common with Emma and much to learn from her. Like her, many of them are intelligent and perceptive, but proclivities toward self-indulgence, misunderstanding through gross generalization, and a failure to attend either to difficult people or inconvenient truths, blinds them and prohibits them from accomplishing the good they desire. Unlike her, many of them are not sufficiently honest with themselves to recognize their errors and correct matters while there is still time.

The story is familiar to many of us. The younger unmarried daughter of Mr. Woodhouse, Emma lives as the mistress of the finest house in Highbury, the "large and populous village almost amounting to a town" some sixteen miles from London. Emma's life is spent attempting to do good, to "make matches," and to orchestrate the social realities of the town. She takes pride in her "successes," even if she has a rather generous account of her own influence. Much of the novel is devoted to Emma's attempt to find a match for Miss Harriet Smith, a pretty young woman of unfortunate circumstance whom Emma befriends and proposes to "improve." Through the course of the novel, Emma scuttles the advances of Mr. Robert Martin, whom she believes to be Harriet's inferior, while trying to make a match for her with the eligible bachelor parson, Mr. Elton. She is so satisfied with her own strategies and so preoccupied with her own insights that she cannot see that Mr. Elton's obvious affections are directed toward herself. Scenarios such as this one are repeated several times over, until Emma realizes that she has

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[16] Jane Austen, *Emma*, Oxford Worlds Classics (London: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

mistakenly been encouraging a match between Harriet and the one man she herself truly loves, Mr. George Knightley.

Emma's realization, both of her love for Mr. Knightley and of her own vanity and faults, shows her the error of her ways. "With insufferable vanity had she believed herself in the secret of everybody's feelings; with unpardonable arrogance proposed to arrange everybody's destiny; She was proved to have been universally mistaken; and she had not quite done nothing—for she had done mischief."[17] Recognition of one's own mistakes and the capacity to learn from (and in some cases, repent from) one's errors is crucial for long-term, effective leadership. This insight is one of many which the students garner from Jane Austen's *Emma*.

Student Responses

In the course described above, students are asked to apply their learning in the form of two essays, two oral exams, and through rigorous classroom discussion. Student encounters with the readings offer seemingly endless opportunities for observation and insight. The complexity of leadership is explored as students use rich examples from the texts to examine the validity and relevance of long considered categories of leadership theory, even if many are unfamiliar with some of these concepts. Trait theories, power and influence theories, behavior theories, contingency theories, cognitive theories and cultural and symbolic theories all receive attention through the vivid characters and lives portrayed in the great texts. Students make observations such as "As Plutarch describes Coriolanus in *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, his disdain for the common people is so great that he loses all authority." In another response, the student contrasts the shepherd in *Psalm 23* to Coriolanus. He writes, "There is absolutely no possible way that Coriolanus could lead the commoners while completely disassociating himself from them. The concept of intimacy and relationship with the people one leads is at the heart of leading alongside as portrayed by the shepherd."

Do students find valuable insights about leadership from reading great texts? The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. One student's response, indicative of many others, stated "Reading the Great Texts has been fundamental in helping me understand

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[17] Austen, 324.

who I want to be and become. It has helped me contemplate the smaller, more common, acts of leadership in which I frequently, unknowingly participate." Another student, who was simultaneously enrolled in another leadership course (using contemporary leadership literature) put it this way: "the modern theories in our books have not challenged me like the ancient texts. While it [the modern literature] brings up good points, the reading hasn't substantively altered my thinking in the same way." Finally, another student added, "I put myself on the line this week and it was my reading of Aristotle and the problem of courage that pushed me beyond my comfort to make a courageous decision."

Student responses about the usefulness of reading great texts to explore leadership have underscored the complexity of defining leadership and, more importantly, leading in and of itself. Nevertheless, these undergraduates have emphasized that these readings have taken them on a journey wrought with complex issues, unusual personalities, common problems, virtues, evil, ambition, community, and goodness. The end result, according to many, has been a better understanding of themselves and their relationship to those with whom they daily interact.

Response to Objections

There are, of course, a variety of objections which can be raised against reading Greats as education in leadership. We have would like to respond to three such objections.

(1) *The great texts are not practical in their orientation, and students will not receive the necessary "hands on" knowledge they will need for successful leadership education.* After reading hundreds of student evaluations about their learning experience in numerous sections of leadership development, taught by a broad diversity of instructors, one begins to wonder if most existing leadership courses are practical themselves. The majority of student responses suggest that they are not. Somewhat surprisingly, students evaluate the contemporary texts about "the theory and practice" of leadership as impractical while the ancient texts offered "life lessons" and "piercing questions about ethics, behavior and choices" that became immediately useful. While our argument is not to dismiss the value of introducing students to contemporary leadership

theory and practice, it is important to recognize that this objection simply misses the mark.

Practicality is an important dimension of leadership education, and while the pool of students sampled is still quite small, students reading Greats find this curriculum more practical than traditional "leadership development classes." Student responses, on the whole, suggest that the most practical and relevant outcomes are those which result in transferring the lives of personalities to the lives students find themselves living today. Greats are remarkably proficient in this regard. As one student articulated, "reading this stuff has made me think about principles and virtues that have become a template for assessing my leadership and the leadership of others."

In a discussion of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, for instance, students began to discuss "How hard should one try to get the top job?" "Should one want the job?" "What is one willing to do to get there?" in their analysis of human ambition. The room was full of aspiring student leaders with ambitious expectations for their own lives, and *Macbe*th became the departure point for a thoughtful exploration of what they were willing to do (and not do) to fulfill these hopes. The conversation vacillated between reading quotations from *Macbeth* and an analysis of events in their lives as student restaurant managers, football team players, and those hoping one day to win political office. Agreements, disagreements, questions, and concessions were once again common as students bantered about notions of deception, pursuing the common good, and virtue. This conversation was one about the practical.

A corollary to the objection that the great texts are not practical in their orientation might argue that even great authors like Machiavelli preferred practical studies to imaginative and theoretical ones. Machiavelli famously asserts (presumably against Plato) that it is "more fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it. . . . he who lets go of what is done for what should be done learns his ruin rather than his preservation." The correlative rejoinder exemplifies precisely the sort of argumentation which an education in Greats seeks to cultivate.

(2) *A great texts based leadership education is ill-suited to the contemporary period because it ignores the concerns of socially, ethnically, and gendered disenfranchised communities. Contemporary leadership must be inclusive and education*

in Greats represents a regressive attempt to undermine multiculturalism and diversity in higher education. On this argument, the texts selected are almost entirely Western and, with few exceptions, written by "dead, white, European males." On this argument, these books, and the perspectives from which they were written, exclude in the insights of women and other minorities, and tomorrow's leaders especially need to be formed by a broader base of knowledge and experience.

It seems to us that there are three important responses to make to this objection. First, if the selected texts are exclusionary or fail adequately to meet the needs of the students, one should acknowledge this failing and choose better books. Properly understood, this is a material, rather than a formal, objection to this curriculum. (It concerns the particular content rather than the structure of the course of study.) In the ancient period especially, there are indeed substantially fewer writings by women because women held so few positions of leadership. When teaching Greats, we must always be conscious of this important objection, but the concern here can be met. There are many extraordinary authors which the students can and should be reading. Among contemporary women, for instance, one finds Edith Wharton, Simone de Beauvoir, Iris Murdoch, Toni Morrison, Simone Weil, Virginia Woolf—the list goes on and on. The same is true with racial diversity. One of us regularly teaches W.E.B. DuBois's *Souls of Black Folk,* and the text never fails to inspire and instruct students of all races. The canon of great texts which can be read for leadership education is broad and diverse.

Second, even the traditional lists of texts represent a greater diversity than is sometimes supposed. It is misleading to suggest that the Hellenic and Semitic authors of the classical works and scripture were "white Europeans." St. Augustine's African identity was an important dimension of his own self-understanding as *The Confessions* aptly shows. Maimonides and Cervantes contribute an important ethnic and a religious diversity. In reading these texts carefully, they always challenge our preconceived notions and our most convenient truths. There is greater diversity here than is often thought.

Third, multiculturalism and diversity exists, as it rightly should, throughout the existing university curriculum. It is found within the basic requirements and within the specialized requirements of the various disciplines. An education in Greats contributes

to, rather than distracts from, multiculturalism in the curriculum. The great texts were written from and to cultures exceedingly different and diverse from our own. Understanding those cultures through these texts contributes substantively to the education of our students. Moreover, even if one rejects the argument that great texts are intrinsically multicultural (or assumes that they exemplify a single cultural tradition), it should be clear that courses like great texts in leadership contribute to the overall diversity of the curriculum taken as a whole. The debate arising out of these "thinking exercises" in fact encourages discussion about cultural differences, diversity of thought, and historical changes in societies.

(3) *Leadership professors do not have the expertise and leadership students are not adequately prepared for this course of study.* In our experience, this objection produces the most heat but the least light against actually implementing such a course of study. To put it another way, when students and faculty overcome the initial anxiety of reading and teaching these texts, they almost invariably have positive experiences like those cited above. Yes, today these texts have become the province of specialized scholars who spend their lives studying and understanding the minute particulars of the texts. We can and should learn from their important insights. But it is also the case that these texts have been read (in some instances) for more than two thousand years. They have typically been read by individuals with far less education and life experience than our students have. They can read these texts, and we do them a disservice by substituting summaries, overviews, and "snippets" in their place. C.S. Lewis famously wrote,

> There is a strange idea abroad that in every subject the ancient books should
> be read only by the professionals, and that the amateur should content himself
> with the modern books. . . . if the average student wants to find out something
> about Platonism, the very last thing he thinks of doing is to take a translation
> of Plato off the library self and read the *Symposium*. He would rather read
> some dreary modern book ten times as long, all about 'isms' and influences …
> The error is an amiable one, for it springs from humility. The student is half
> afraid to meet one of the great philosophers face to face. He feels himself
> inadequate and thinks he will not understand him. But if he only knew, the
> great man, just because of his greatness, is much more intelligible than his

> modern commentator. The simplest student will be able to understand, if not all, yet a very great deal of what Plato said. … It has always therefore been one of my main endeavors as a teacher to persuade the young that first-hand knowledge is not only more worth acquiring than second-hand knowledge, but is usually much easier and more delightful to acquire.[18]

What Lewis says about students is also true of professionals in the modern world. We know our own fields and we dare not tread on that of another. But the great texts belong to all of us. The are part of the "public domain" in more ways than one.

More importantly, we must not underestimate what our students can do. Particularly given that we are educating future leaders, we must set the bar high and then equip them with the necessary skills to meet these high expectations. Our students, even our students with marginal preparation, can read these texts, and having done so, their confidence and sense of achievement increases substantially. Reading and studying these texts not only increases their *knowledge* of leadership, it helps them *become* better leaders through accomplishing a difficult task.

Implementation

The third objection leads us to the question of implementation. If one were to want to implement reading great texts for leadership education, it would most likely occur in either an experimental or an expansive way. One might experiment with adding a single great text to an existing course. As already noted, being an expert in philosophy, literature or history is not a requirement for effective use of a great text for exploring the topic of leadership with students.

One potential benefit of such an approach, however, is the interest it may garner from other faculty at the institution. Participating in a general undergraduate leadership course using a "leadership book" is usually immensely unappealing to faculty from traditional disciplines. Using Shakespeare, Plato, or Machiavelli, on the other hand, will perhaps elicit interest from a broader constituency of academics who also value teaching students to lead. The approach may be the first step at creating an interdisciplinary

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[18] C.S. Lewis, "Introduction," *On the Incarnation* by St. Athanasius (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 3.

community, as recommended by the Kellogg Leadership Studies Project, of collaborative scholars and practitioners who identify with the study of leadership.

A more expansive approach may also be of interest to some institutions. In such a case, creating a broad and interdisciplinary steering committee of interested community members may be the first action required. In the best cases, you will have faculty from the humanities, management, and student life collaborating about the creation and implementation of a new leadership course or courses. At our university, interested faculty have met together to discuss the common texts and share strategies for teaching and using these texts in a leadership context.

Conclusion

In a famous letter to Francesco Vettori (December 10, 1513), Niccolò Machiavelli casually mentions that he has just finished writing *The Prince*, and he explains how he has learned about leadership. He writes, "When evening is come . . . I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them lovingly, I feed on the food that alone is mine and that I was born for. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity reply to me. And for the space of four hours I feel no boredom, I forget every pain, I do not fear poverty, death does not frighten me. I deliver myself entirely to them."[19]

These words echo the claim that Machiavelli explicitly makes within *The Prince* that "as to the exercise of the mind, a prince should read histories and consider in them the actions of excellent men, should see how they conducted themselves in wars, should examine the causes of their victories and losses, so as to be able to avoid the latter and imitate the former."[20] We pose to our students the question, "Did Machiavelli learn his lessons correctly?" Did he learn from Cicero or is he guilty precisely of failing to learn from him? Having read Cicero and Machiavelli, how does one then interpret the actions of Macbeth or Prince Hal? One of the tasks for our students is to answer these and many other questions.

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[19] Machiavelli, 109-110.
[20] Ibid., 60.

On any account, our students, like Machiavelli, converse with the ancients in an attempt to "learn the reasons for their actions." Such knowledge not only has the salutary effect of enabling them not to fear poverty, pain, or death, but also of instructing them in the ways of some of the greatest of minds, the most able of leaders, and the most enchanting of fictional characters. We see their strengths and their weaknesses. We learn from their mistakes. We learn how to cultivate their virtues and avoid their vices. Reading Greats will not give us a new and better definition of leadership, but it will equip us with some of the "best that has been thought and said," and this has always been the true province of great leaders.