Political Leadership, Judgement, and The Sense of Reality

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1. Introduction

Political leadership has been a neglected topic in contemporary political theory and political philosophy especially in its dominant liberal democratic mode. The egalitarian bias of this kind of theorising has probably had some influence here with a resulting general distrust of any claims made for the unavoidable reality of political leadership in the modern state. Ideas of, for example, the centrality of charismatic leaders in modern democratic states would, presumably, appear to be too much of a surrender to a view of the political domain as being under the influence of irrational and, even worse, dark and unpredictable forces. The idea that political leaders are able to shape the course of events in an unpredictable manner can be taken as an example of the irreducible freedom of action that defies explanation in political scientific terms. The fact of political leadership can be taken to imply the high degree of contingency that eludes the conceptual net of much political science and philosophy.

It is also often argued that leadership in a democratic society must have something anti-democratic about it or that leadership is a necessary evil. In addition, ideas of leadership come into conflict with the idea that the liberal democratic state aims to replace the rule of men with the rule of law. Perhaps the continuing existence of political leadership in modern democratic states and the high visibility of political leaders are some of those ‘uncomfortable facts’ that confront both political philosophers and political scientists. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that intimations of the significance of political leadership appear even in what would appear to be the most unlikely places. For example, it is more than a little surprising to find that John Rawls’s version of political liberalism contains an implicit recognition of the central role of political leaders at critical moments in political history. It is quite clear that Rawls, despite his central claim to steer by the star of public reason alone in order to avoid the charge that his own theory is itself no more than another ‘comprehensive doctrine’, has his own view of which particular leaders are his
political heroes. Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln are two of the political heroes who clearly complement the contribution of his philosophical hero Kant to his own intellectual development.

What is it that Rawls finds admirable in Lincoln and King? One relevant fact is that they both stood up during periods of deep moral and political conflict for the values and ideals that Rawls himself believes are, or ought to be, the outcome of the free use of public reason. Lincoln’s condemnation of slavery was, Rawls implies, an act of real political leadership in its refusal to accept the conventional ‘communitarian’ justification of that institution that was on offer at the time. Lincoln’s achievement was, in Rawlsian terms, to set in motion a reconsideration of our considered convictions and principles on this controversial topic.

Similarly, Rawls takes his cue for the correct understanding of constitutional government from Lincoln. The significance of Abraham Lincoln among Rawls’s political heroes is clear. One might almost say that this is an example of uncritical hero worship. Lincoln, it seems, can do no wrong. Even his Proclamation of a National Fast Day in 1861, Two Proclamations of Thanksgiving in 1863 and 1864, as well as the prophetic Second Inaugural interpretation of the civil war as a sign of divine retribution are, Rawls argues, not to be considered as violations of public reason ‘correctly understood’. Martin Luther King appears in the text of ‘Political Liberalism’ in a similar way as a political leader whose Civil Rights campaigns Rawls enthusiastically endorses. However, in doing so Rawls gets himself into a convoluted argument the intention of which is to show that a controversial political leader such as King is acceptable because, after all things are considered, he did not really ‘go against the ideal of public reason’ that Rawls himself endorses. Whatever the merits of Rawls’s account of the role of public reason in political life it is clear that the recognition of the significance of political leaders such as Lincoln and King within a text which in other respects aims for a high level of philosophical abstraction reveals something about the implicit intellectual and moral commitments that underpin his theory as well as the convenient silences that persist within it.
It is not only Liberal political philosophers who have failed to attend to the problem of leadership. This fact is also true of most of their critics and especially for those on the left or what counts as the left in a post-Marxian age. Curiously influenced by Carl Schmitt many leftist critics of Liberal political philosophy have made the activity of politics and the work of politicians of secondary importance in their search for an essence of ‘the political’. The elevation of ‘the political’ over mere ‘politics’ reinforces the tendency to pay little if any attention to the activity of politics, which must include the consideration of the performance of political leaders.

Earlier Liberal political thinkers were not so averse to a direct consideration of the nature of political leadership. The examples of Max Weber and Isaiah Berlin are indicative of the fact that recognition of the role of political leadership in modern states is not necessarily incompatible with a liberal outlook. Furthermore, examination of their work, it is argued here, shows a remarkable mutation of the Platonic ideal of the philosopher ruler. In both Berlin and Weber we can observe a shared view that if politics takes place in ‘the right way’ there ought to be a marked similarity between the virtues that we ought to expect of the good or successful political leader and the virtues of the enlightened political theorist or philosopher.

1. Max Weber

(1) Politics and Leadership

In sharp contrast with most contemporary Anglo-American political theory Max Weber offers an account of politics in which the idea of leadership occupies a central place. In so doing Weber was more in tune with the central tradition of political theory from Plato to Marx which had placed the question of who should rule and what the qualities of the good ruler ought to be at the heart of its inquiries than much of modern political
philosophy with its central concern with the attempt to justify items of public policy. Weber’s approach to concept-formation was cautious and pragmatic. For example, he appreciated that defining the meaning of ‘politics’ is a difficult and in some ways pointless task. To begin with Weber points out that it is an extremely broad term due, in part, to the fact that it embraces ‘every kind of independent leadership activity’vi. In fact Weber, following his generally nominalistic approach refers to at least four distinct ways of thinking about politics that resemble more recent attempts to distinguish between ‘politics’ and ‘the political. The incorporation of Weber into a canon of sociological theory has led to a concentration upon the structural features of his account of forms of rule at the expense of an almost total neglect of what he thought was of central importance. The key to understanding the nature of politics is to recognise that it is an activity. It is a marked feature of Weber’s writings that he constantly describes politics as an activity and, in particular, uses verbs such as that of ‘striving’ for power. What is of interest to him is primarily an explication of what political agents are doing when they act politically. Given his intellectual commitments it ought to come as no surprise that Weber was concerned with the meaning of the activity of leading from both the standpoint of the leader and the external observer. Therefore it is the activity of political leaders that is central for an understanding of politics. In other words, the interest, or lack of it, in leadership expressed by political theorists is a reflection of a deeper theoretical attitude towards politicsvii.

Politics can refer to rule and leadership as well as to the act of politicking. Weber points out that it can also refer, for example, to policy making. The policy of a bank on foreign exchange, the policy of a trade union during a strike, or the efforts of a wife to guide her husband could all be described as being political in some sense. However, Weber focuses his concept of politics upon political leadership in a more specific sense. He was convinced that an understanding of modern politics must focus upon the practice of leadership. This is not to be conceived in narrow terms as being simply focussed upon particular individuals. The activity of leaders is inseparable from the struggle for power a major part of which is the struggle to exercise influence on leaders. The most important context for the exercise of modern political leadership is in the activity of the
state. This is taken to be the most significant form of modern political association. The political leaders who count in Weber’s eyes are those bound up in the struggle for power in the modern state. This includes, for example, the leaders of governments, the leaders of political parties, the leaders of trade unions, and the leaders of states.

The matter would be fairly straightforward and relatively uncontroversial if Weber stopped there. As far as Weber was concerned the reason why it was not helpful to use the concept of politics in too broad a sense was that to do so would mean avoiding its specifically dangerous and unpleasant aspects. To put it very simply Weber reminds us over and over again that there are certain ‘facts’ that have to be appreciated in order to understand the nature of modern politics. The first is that ‘politics is struggle’. The topoi of struggle, conflict, and selection as well as those of leadership and policymaking are central guiding ideas that structure Weber’s vision of political and social reality.

In addition, there are two other ‘facts’ of modern political reality that must be recognised. One is ‘the fact’ of the coercive power of the state and the other is the fact of plural and conflicting values. Both are, of course, also the two central ‘facts’ that shape the central concerns of contemporary political liberalism. While Weber and contemporary political liberals share a remarkably similar view of the political predicament their diagnoses are quite different. It is here that the marked difference in the attention paid to questions of leadership becomes most apparent. Quite simply, political leadership as a problem and a fact is largely absent in the work of modern liberal political theory while clearly it is of central concern for Weber. As far as Weber was concerned, any attempt at serious thought about politics that does not take account of the reality of political leadership is bound to produce, to misquote John Rawls, an ‘unrealistic utopia’. It seems that it would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that what is revealed in the contrasting amount of attention paid to questions of leadership is a deep philosophical disagreement about the nature of politics.
Political leadership is of central importance for Weber as a consequence of his recognition of the unprecedented concentration of power in the form of the modern western state. The state, as is well known, is in Weber’s formulation that ‘human community which (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a certain territory’. Furthermore, politics means ‘the striving for a share power or influence on the distribution of power, whether it be between states or between groups of people contained within a single state’. In addition, ‘anyone engaged in politics is striving for power, either power as a means to attain other goals (which may be ideal or selfish), or power ‘for its own sake’, which is to say, in order to enjoy the feeling of prestige given by power’. It is in the way in which violence is bound up with the operation of political power that problems that are peculiar to political leadership arise. The state is ultimately to be understood as a relationship of rule (Herrschaft) of men over men.

Although he has not generally been considered, at least in the Anglo-American world, to be a central member of the canon of political theory Weber is, curiously, in tune with the traditional concern of political philosophy with the question of who ought to rule and why. However, he introduces an additional element that makes a clean break with that tradition. This is the argument that the modern condition is best characterised in terms of its ‘disenchantment’. As with much contemporary liberal theory Weber saw the modern political predicament as a fateful combination of two other factors; the eclipse of commitment to formerly held beliefs and ideas that had provided grounds for the legitimation of claims to lead and to rule. This, in turn, deepened the conflict of plural values, the ‘war of the gods’. At the same time, ‘the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life’. The interesting contrast with contemporary liberal and deliberative democratic theory is that Weber's response to the ‘facts of coercion’ and disenchanted value pluralism was not to search for some ground, hypothetical or real, for agreement between citizens. Such agreement, if it could be found, would only be a temporary truce in the constant struggle of values and interests and, hence, could only have a very thin character. The modern state is not the ancient polis (not the real polis, of course, but the imagined one).
This interpretation of the modern political condition is one in which questions of political leadership become of immense importance. In effect, Weber seems to be claiming that it is the quality of political leadership that can make a crucial contribution to the construction of social stability, if anything can. Effective political leadership offers the best, possibly the only, way of coping with the realities of modern political life. But, given his account of disenchantment how is it possible for such leadership to be able to make any successful claims for its legitimacy? Furthermore, does not this stress on the importance of leadership devalue the claims of democracy and the liberal value of liberty that Weber also wanted to defend?

Although he failed to arrive at a satisfactory resolution for these dilemmas the case of Max Weber is interesting and informative for the problems that it raises. The centrality of leadership and especially of charismatic leadership in Weber’s work has produced accusations of ‘decisionism’. This is often a veiled way of implying a link with Carl Schmitt and preparation of the ground for the Nazi regime. These charges have been subsequently withdrawn or modified. However, they do point to a difficult question. What are the normative implications of taking Weber’s advice seriously and putting leadership back into the centre of our reflections on modern politics?

(2). Caesarism, Demagogues, and Democracy

The concept of Caesarism occupies a central place in Max Weber’s writings on politics. The term was in common usage in Weber’s time in, for example, the debate about the status as statesmen of such figures as Bismarck and Napoleon. In order to appreciate Weber’s use of the term it is necessary to recognise the way in which he modified the conventional terms of the contemporary debate and introduced a new and challenging way of thinking about the relationship and tension between forms of political leadership and parliamentary democratic government. His theoretical innovation was to argue that the most politically responsible way in which a modern mass democracy could function would have to be through the harnessing of Caesarism with parliamentary government.
The novelty of this approach is clear when it is remembered that Caesarism had usually, and still often is, thought of as the enemy of representative or parliamentary government\textsuperscript{xii}. Weber’s innovation was to think of Caesarism in terms that distinguished it from its Bonapartist and Bismarckian forms. It was normal in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to think of Caesarism as a repressive outcome of the collapse of democracy and as a form of military dictatorship. In Weber’s usage the term now referred to a more normal form of rule that is not necessarily the outcome of a crisis. Nor is Caesarism necessarily tied to the restriction of civil liberties and, indeed, when allied with a strong parliament that can defend them.

The radical nature of Weber’s conceptual innovation is easily overlooked. However, comparison with the sources upon which he relied shows that although much of what he says about, for example, the nature of mass political parties and parliamentary government is no more than a summary of their conclusions he does depart from them on this crucial point. It was generally assumed by most of his contemporaries that the new form of mass democracy and mass political party with its Caesarist leader was seriously undermining the autonomy of parliaments. Weber, on the contrary put forward a more complex and, from a modern liberal standpoint, more troubling argument.

In a series of newspaper articles written in 1917 that offer a diagnosis of the political situation in Germany Weber puts forward an account of modern political reality that has implications that go far beyond the immediate context. The claim that the religious prophet and the political demagogue are the two figures who play a central role in Weber’s political and social thought contains a great deal of truth\textsuperscript{xiii}. It is clear that for Weber the widespread influence of the political demagogue is an inevitable consequence of democratisation. However, Weber’s idea of the demagogue is not the popular and dismissive one. Weber does not deny that demagogy in ‘the bad sense’ exists but what interests him more is the way in which the successful political leader in a modern democracy has to be a demagogue.

The genuine political leader is selected not by bureaucratic means but through political struggle because, as has been stressed, ‘all politics is essentially struggle’\textsuperscript{xiv}. The struggle
that Weber is referring to is one that is carried on through the ‘craft of demagogy’ rather than, for example, the control and manipulation of the means of administration. Weber’s formula is that ‘democracy and demagogy belong together’. The modern situation is such that ‘active democratisation of the masses means that the political leader is no longer declared a candidate because a circle of notables has recognised his proven ability, and then becomes leader because he comes to the fore in parliament, but rather because he uses the means of mass demagogy to gain the confidence of the masses and their belief in his person, and thereby gains power. Essentially this means that the selection of the leader has shifted in the direction of Caesarism. Indeed every democracy has this tendency’xv.

The problem, however, is that the plebiscitary selection of leaders exists in a state of tension with the parliamentary principle. Again Weber points out that ‘every kind of direct election by the people of the bearer of supreme power, and beyond this every kind of position of political power which in fact rests on the trust of the masses rather than that of parliaments ....lies on the road towards these ‘pure’ form of Caesarist acclamation’xvi. Weber gives the American presidency as an example of what he has in mind.

Central to Weber’s understanding of the predicament of modern democratic government is the idea that there is a deep tension between the Caesarist and the parliamentary method of selecting political leaders. However, Weber did not lend his support to the contemporary opposition to the institution of parliament in either its Leftist or Rightist versions. Weber did not achieve a final and satisfactory resolution in his struggle with this problem. Nevertheless, he resolutely held on to the idea that a parliament was an ideal counterweight to the necessary and unavoidable role of the Caesarist principle. A parliament can function to maintain stability, and control the power of a Caesarist leader. It can preserve legal safeguards against such a leader. Parliament, as is often pointed out, was not valued for its own sake by Weber or for its possession of any particular qualities as such other than these and in particular its role as a an arena in which leaders could prove their political abilities and, in the last instance, act as peaceful way of ‘eliminating the Caesarist dictator when he has lost the trust of the masses’. Nevertheless, in his last
published work on this topic Weber did opt for granting more power to a directly elected head of state than we would have been led to expect from his earlier statements. In an article published in 1919 Weber advocated the introduction of a directly elected President. Among the reasons that he gives are the following: such a figure would signify the unity of the state at a time of political breakdown; the directly elected head of state would not be hampered by the shifting coalitions and alliances in parliament; and, above all, ‘a popularly elected president ....as the possessor of a delaying veto and the power to dissolve parliament and to consult the people, is a palladium of genuine democracy, which does not mean impotent self-abandonment to cliques but subordination to leaders one has chosen for oneself’xvii.

There is one other important factor that ought not to be lost sight of when trying to make sense of Weber’s account of political leadership. Weber, unlike most modern liberal theorists attributed a positive value to political leadership as such. Political and especially Caesarist leadership is valued because of its dynamic and innovatory character. The alternative form of political regime would be a form of ‘passive democratisation’, which would lead to a form of ‘uncontrolled bureaucratic rule’. This is, of course, one of the arguments that Weber put forward against socialism that also applies to its modern surrogate, radical democracy.

The problem of leadership is central for Weber’s diagnosis of the political crisis confronting modern democratic societies. Leadership is an unavoidable feature of modern politics. This is made clear, as much as anything, by the fact that Weber defines politics in terms of leadership. But what is leadership? And what are the qualities that a leader ought to possess? Weber spent a great amount of energy trying to work out the best institutional form for the relationship between political leaders, democratic arrangements, and legitimacy. However, the most important and innovatory part of his account is his consideration of the nature of political leadership under the conditions of a disenchanted modernity and the necessary personal characteristics that are required to make a successful political leader.
In his discussion of the foundations of the different types of legitimate rule Weber makes it clear that what most interests him is that form of rule that functions ‘by virtue of devotion to the purely personal “charisma” of the “leader” on the part of those who obey him’\textsuperscript{xviii}. It is noticeable that in his writing that is primarily addressed to an academic audience Weber subsumes the concept of the Caesarist leader under the general heading of charismatic rule. The idea of charisma is closely connected by Weber to the concept of a calling or vocation (Beruf). Devotion to a charismatic political leader ‘means that the leader is personally regarded as someone who is inwardly “called” to the task of leading men, and that the led submit to him, not because of custom or statute, but because they believe in him’. Although leadership has existed at all times and places Weber insists that the figure of the political leader has specifically Western origins. Political leadership is traced back to the ‘free “demagogue”, who grew from the soil of the city-state, a unique creation of the West and the Mediterranean culture in particular, and then in the figure of the parliamentary “party leader” who also sprang from the soil of the constitutional state, another institution indigenous only to the West\textsuperscript{xix}.

The transformation of politics in Western states brought about by, among other factors, the development of the modern political party ‘machine’ has produced a form of plebiscitarian democracy. Followers of a party expect that the personality of the party leader will have a demagogic effect in the struggle for votes. Indeed, Weber argues that there is a clear distinction to be made between the satisfaction to be gained by party workers who out of conviction are devoted to a party leader, ‘the dictator of the electoral battlefield’, who possesses charisma rather than to ‘the abstract programme of a party composed of mediocrities’. There is, however, a problem here. The dominance of the plebiscitarian form of democracy implies the ‘spiritual proletarianisation’ of the party following. This is the price that has to be paid for the emergence of this kind of state and party. The stark choice is between ‘a leadership democracy with a “machine” and democracy without a leader, which means rule by the “professional politician” who has no vocation, the type of man who lacks precisely those inner, charismatic qualities which make a leader\textsuperscript{xx}. 
It is clear that Weber’s diagnosis of the fate of politics in the modern Western state puts an enormous weight of responsibility upon the shoulders of political leaders. It follows from his account of disenchantment and value pluralism that the sources for the necessary strength of character would have to be found from within. A genuine political leader would have to be someone who ‘lived for’ rather than ‘off’ politics. He (or she) would have to have an inner calling or vocation (Beruf). This, as Weber, allows must lead to the consideration of ethical questions. The political leader under modern conditions with its unprecedented and vast concentration of power has a special responsibility imposed upon him.

Weber’s account of leadership is particularly interesting and controversial because he does not fall into the trap of offering no more than a description of the formal properties of the institutions of leadership. Instead, he explores the question of the meaning of leadership. It is at this point that Weber enters into a discussion that oversteps the boundaries of any appearance of offering a morally neutral account. It is here that, perhaps more explicitly than elsewhere in his work, Weber is implicitly referring to an older tradition of practical philosophy and in this particular context, what he has to say clearly has echoes of the Platonic idea of the ‘Philosopher Ruler’. I am not suggesting that Weber wanted rule by philosophers. That would be absurd. However, what Weber does suggest is that the political leader ought to possess certain virtues. He argues that the political leader ought to be guided by a passion, a sense of responsibility, and judgement. The problem, of course, is as in the case of Plato’s just man, to strike the necessary balance in his soul. Weberian political leaders must have a sense of moral purpose and the ability to take responsibility for their actions. However, the most important virtue for the political leader is to have a sense of judgement. An adequate sense of judgement requires an understanding of the nature of political reality, of what can and cannot be achieved under given circumstances. Judgement is a craft or skill that is essential for the practice of political leadership and government. But because ‘the decisive means of politics is the use of violence’ the practice of judgement is of crucial importance. Although the political leader is operating in a distinct reality it is striking that the virtues that Weber ascribes to him are similar to those that he ascribes to the scholar or scientist.
To put it briefly, the most important virtue of scholarship and science (Wissenschaft) is to produce clarity of thought. In helping us to understand the meaning of our actions and ideas it clarifies our sense of reality. The political leader in Weber’s view must have the commitment, clarity of vision, and sense of judgement that also characterises the scholar who has a genuine calling or vocation.

2. Isaiah Berlin

(1) Two Concepts of Leadership

Although the problem of leadership is almost completely absent from the work of contemporary political liberalism there seems to be no reason why liberals who are not committed to the current obsession with the search for agreement over principles of justice acceptable in principle to all are prevented from paying some attention to this topic. Isaiah Berlin is an interesting example of a liberal thinker who did reflect upon the nature of political leadership in modern politics. In fact consideration of the quality of political leadership is extremely important for Berlin for two reasons. The first is that a consideration of the nature of political leadership plays a central role in his struggle against what he sees as the deficiencies of a deterministic social scientific view of history. The second is that an understanding of leadership can act as an antidote to the widespread failure to appreciate what he understands as the ‘sense of reality’ appropriate for successful political conduct.

Berlin proposes a distinction between two types of leadership. He argues that ‘there are two kinds of political greatness, incompatible with, and indeed sometimes opposed to, each other’\textsuperscript{xxi}. Clearly, reflecting his famous use of his distinction between intellectual hedgehogs and foxes Berlin argues that we can observe those political leaders who combine a simplicity of vision with an intense and even fanatical idealism and, in contrast, those leaders who are aware of the ‘infinite complexity of the life which
surrounds them’ but, nevertheless, are able to see some kind of intelligible coherent pattern.\textsuperscript{xxii}

Leaders of the first type are ‘larger than life’. They see life in terms of simple contrasts between good and evil, their own cause and the evil misguided opposition to it. They resemble Weber’s charismatic leaders insofar as they ‘attract their followers by the intensity and purity of their mind, by their fearless and unbending character, by the simplicity and nobility of the central principle to which they dedicate all that they have, by the very fact that they impose some pattern so clear, so uncomplicated, upon the manifold diversity of life, that other men, smaller, more troubled and more fearful, weaker, at times subtler and more intelligent than the leaders, feel liberated and vastly strengthened by the very directness and sincerity with which the unadorned central doctrine is presented to them.xxiii. Needless to say such doctrines are described by Berlin as often being utopian in character. Examples of such leaders are Garibaldi, Napoleon, de Gaulle, Trotsky, and, at the extreme, Hitler and Stalin. Often leaders of this type, who are prone to offer utopian solutions, tend to stand apart from the people with whose destinies they are engaged. They are guilty of creating a myth and, if not completely believing it themselves, do identify with it.

The second type of leader is one who is characterised by an awareness of ‘the smallest oscillations, the infinite variety of the social and political elements in which they live’. Such individuals are able to create an integrated and coherent picture from the variety of instances but, at the same time, to be flexible and responsive to the contingency of social and political life. As examples of such individuals Berlin mentions Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt, and Chaim Weizmann.

Berlin’s attention to the role of political leaders is also a reflection of his philosophy of history and his view of the nature of political knowledge. The idea that political leaders can shape and change the course of history is a clear example of Berlin’s opposition to all forms of determinism in history and politics. Berlin’s examples of the most impressive and successful political leadership of the twentieth century are to be found in essays on
Chaim Weizmann, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Each of these statesmen represents a form of political greatness. Berlin’s argument is that a true understanding of their careers defies the conventions of normal political science. It has been suggested as well that it offers a corrective to some versions of the received view of Berlin’s work. Berlin’s ideas on value pluralism and his contribution to the Liberal tradition have received most recent attention. What has escaped notice by most commentators on Berlin is his account of the way in which the survival of liberal institutions and values requires at crucial moments the intervention of political leaders whose conduct and virtues step outside the boundaries of liberal society\[34\].

Berlin was not prepared to accept that political theorists ought to be embarrassed by their recognition of the greatness of political leaders. Indeed, the acceptance of the causal power of political greatness in history was one aspect of Berlin’s assault upon determinism and positivism in social science. He rejected the idea put forward by ‘social theorists of various schools’ that ‘greatness is a romantic illusion- a vulgar notion exploited by politicians or propagandists, and one which a deeper study of the facts will always dispel’\[35\]. This ‘deflationist’ attitude can only be refuted, Berlin argues, by experiencing at first hand an example of true greatness. What does Berlin mean by political greatness? He tells us that it is not a specifically moral attribute nor is it a private virtue.

‘A great man need not be morally good, or upright, or kind, or sensitive, or delightful, or possess artistic or scientific talent. To call someone a great man is to claim that he has intentionally taken (or perhaps could have taken) a large step, one far beyond the normal capacities of men, in satisfying, or materially affecting, central human interests\[36\].

Political leaders of this type must seem able to have dramatic transformative powers. This, of course, runs deliberately counter to any more structuralist account of history in which the role of great individuals is devalued. In Berlin’s view, whatever the historical truth may turn out to be, the decisive importance of political leadership is one fact that is given powerful support by the history of our own time. In elaborating this account there
are two examples of political leaders who, in Berlin’s view, stand out in the twentieth century and each represents one side of this distinction. Winston Churchill is his example of a political hedgehog and Chaim Weizmann is the example of a political fox.

Winston Churchill represents the type of political leader who is possessed by a ‘single, central, organising principle’ and a ‘historical imagination so strong, so comprehensive, as to encase the whole of the present and the whole of the future in framework of a rich and multicoloured past’. Churchill is presented as a kind of historicist. His wartime speeches possessed an archaism that produced the required degree of solemnity. Similarly Churchill’s idea of history was to regard it as an epic in which heroes and villains ‘acquired their stature not merely—or indeed at all—from the importance of the events in which they are involved, but from their own intrinsic human size upon the stage of human history’. Churchill, in Berlin’s account, is a fascinating example of a leader perceived as a political hedgehog. His strength, of being guided by an all-embracing vision during the war years, was to become a weakness during more normal times because of its inability to sense the complexity of changing circumstances.

If Berlin contrasts Churchill the political hedgehog with Weizmann the political fox there are other contrasts in Berlin’s essays, such as with Franklin D. Roosevelt, but it is the discussion of these two figures that stands out in an intensity that is based to a large degree on personal contact. Apart from the comparison with Churchill Berlin draws out the distinctiveness of Weizmann’s claim to greatness by comparing him with another leader of the Zionist movement and political hedgehog, Theodor Herzl.

If there are political leaders who can be categorised as being either hedgehogs or foxes then Berlin believed that both were necessary. However, it is the fox with whom he is most sympathetic. For example, Berlin’s contrast between Herzl and Weizmann is meant to bear this out. Herzl according to Berlin belongs to the class of political leaders who ‘stand, in a sense, outside the the movements which idolise them; they are felt to be embodiments of greater virtues-and more mysterious ones-than their followers can emulate: they lead their armies to glory or to destruction, not by taking account of the
obstacles in their path but by ignoring them...such leaders tend to be somewhat inhuman—
because instead of understanding the details of the lives and characters of their own and 
other peoples, they oversimplify, they create a radiant myth with which they identify 
themselves, and which their followers bear in their hearts”\textsuperscript{xxviii}. Herzl’s achievement was 
made possible because he constructed an ideal which bore only a remote connection with 
the facts of the situation but it enabled him to dramatise his task so that he had all of the 
necessary appearance of a man of destiny. Weizmann appears to Berlin as the complete 
opposite to this type of leader. He ‘indulged in no fantasies, he was not a fanatic or a 
romantic or a national leader of fable’. Weizmann maintained ‘a sense of proportion, 
understood things as they were, was never deluded by forms or words or ideals into 
forgetting the social and economic and human realities which he desired to create, and 
which could easily be lost, or at any rate damaged and compromised, by fanatical 
emphasis upon the outer framework to which Herzl, for instance, paid such passionate 
attention\textsuperscript{xxix}.

\textbf{(2) The Sense of Reality}

Berlin’s account of the relative merits of the two types of political leader rests upon a 
vision of the nature of political reality. In brief, Berlin’s argument is that it is those 
statesmen or political leaders who understand that reality who succeed while those who 
do not are bound to fail. Indeed, ‘there is a sense, seldom denied even by the most biased 
historians, in which the difference between practical and Utopian statesmen is that the 
first are said to “understand”, while the second are said not to “understand”, the nature of 
the human material with which they deal’\textsuperscript{xxx}.

Clearly, for Berlin, a correct understanding of the theory and practice of political 
leadership is inseparable from an appreciation of the limits, or, indeed, the failure of any 
kind of claim made for an understanding of political or social reality that is modelled on 
the example of the natural sciences. For example, Lenin is an example of a political 
leader who was guided by a belief in a science of history analogous to natural science and
applied his understanding of the situation with a single-minded purpose. The result of such policies is always to fail to achieve the desired end and to become a victim of the law of unintended consequences. In contrast political leaders such as Bismarck, Lincoln, and Roosevelt were much more successful in achieving something close to their intended objective.

Successful statesmen and political leaders are to be understood as artists rather than as scientists. They understand the medium in which they are working rather than trying to impose an inappropriate and external standard. Berlin is insistent that successful political leadership defies easy explanation by both themselves and by external observers and analysts. We seem to have no alternative to the use of such terms as ‘imagination’, ‘political genius’, ‘sense of history’, and ‘unerring judgement’ which are, of course, terms that are completely outside of the range of social scientific discourse.

One unifying theme that runs throughout Berlin’s reflections on the nature of political leadership is the fear of the harm that is most likely to result from bold, often revolutionary, schemes of change. Berlin names the Puritans, Robespierre, Lenin, Hitler, and Stalin as leading examples of political leaders who ‘in a literal sense’ knew not what they did, nor did they care. On the other hand he argues that we are bound to have more trust in leaders such as Napoleon, Cavour, Lincoln, Lloyd George, and Franklin Roosevelt. They exhibit an understanding of the nature of the material that they are working with. Although the bias seems to be against the bold reformer or revolutionary Berlin claims that this is not meant to be a contrast between radicalism and conservatism. The basic point is that the conditions for the existence of successful political leadership are conditioned by the limits of our knowledge of social and political reality. The unavailability of predictive political knowledge means that those who place excessive faith in laws and methods derived from the alien field of natural science and attempt to apply them in a mechanical fashion are bound to create utopian failures.

At a deeper level Berlin’s ideas about the nature of leadership were fashioned by his reflections upon the political crises of the twentieth century. The target that he was
aiming at was totalitarianism in all of its forms. The experience of totalitarianism in the twentieth century represents a complete reversal of the governing political philosophical ideas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The idea that ‘human society grew in a discoverable direction, governed by laws; that the borderline that divides science from Utopia, effectiveness from ineffectiveness in every sphere of life, was discoverable by reason and observation and could be plotted less or more precisely; that, in short, there was a clock, its movement followed discoverable rules, and it could not be put back’. All of this was undermined by three examples of a new type of leader; Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler. Berlin, using a phrase that is reminiscent of Hannah Arendt, asserts that the ‘banisters upon which the system-builders of the nineteenth century have taught us to lean have proved unequal to the pressure that was put upon them’\textsuperscript{xxxii}. Berlin sees the difficulty of modern political leadership to be derived to a large degree, in a manner similar to Weber, from the ‘disenchanted’ character of the modern world. Political leaders operating under such novel conditions must somehow constantly struggle to justify themselves in the face of scepticism about the claims of legitimating myths. For Berlin there is ‘no substitute for the sense of reality’\textsuperscript{xxxiii}.

**Conclusion**

Weber and Berlin are two examples of political thinkers who were both Liberal in their philosophical inclinations and able to recognise the importance of political leadership. One possible reason for this is that both were, at various times in their lives, deeply involved in the political events of their own time. Both reached similar conclusions. Political leaders are essential and unavoidable features of the modern democratic state. Political leaders, if they are to be successful, must have an insight or understanding of reality that, unsurprisingly perhaps, corresponds to their own view of the limits of political knowledge.

There are, however, two problems here. The first is that the emphasis upon the creative power of leadership tends to have the effect of devaluing the role of followers. Obviously there can only be leaders if there are also followers. Both Weber and Berlin tend to relegate followers to a secondary or passive role. The second problem is that, in their accounts of the difficult and at times tragic character of leadership, they both fail to
explore its normative implications. At times, for example, we are given the impression that any kind of leadership is acceptable as long as it works. There is no particular good that the leader ought to seek. As long as the leader has his/her own vision to steer by that is enough. Of course, this may well be a consequence of accepting the ideas of disenchantment and value pluralism. Nevertheless, if we ask what the legitimate aims of political leadership ought to be we are inevitably led back to those questions that have been the traditional concerns of political thinkers, including those moderns who have not shown much interest in leadership. That is to say, with questions of justice.

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i For example, there is no entry for ‘leadership’ in the index of „John S. Dryzek et al eds The Oxford Handbook for Political Theory, (Oxford University Press, 2006)
ii András Kőrösenyi, ‘Political Representation in Leader Democracy’, Government and Opposition, 2005
iv See, for example, Chantal Mouffe, On the Political, (Routledge, London, 2005)
v I do not want to enter here into the question of whether Weber can be truly called a ‘Liberal’. I think for the moment that it is best to say that, as with Toqueville, he was a ‘liberal of a strange kind’.
vi Max Weber, Political Writings, p 309
vii Kari Palonen, The Struggle with Time, (Lit, Hamburg, 2006)
viii John Rawls, Political Liberalism
ix Weber, Political Writings, p 310-311
x Weber, Wissenschaft als Beruf, p 22
 xv Weber, Political Writings, pp 220-221
xvi Weber, Political Writings, p 221
xvii Weber, Political Writings, p 308
xviii Weber, Political Writings, p 312
xix Weber, Political Writings, p 313
xx Weber, Political Writings, p 351
Berlin, op cit, p 186
Berlin, *Personal Impressions*, p 32
Berlin, *The Power of Ideas*, p 190
Berlin, *The Sense of Reality*, p 51
Berlin, *The Sense of Reality*, p 11