

WORTHY ACTIONS

The starting point for considering the worthiness of actions is always going to be the context from which those actions are taken. In the case of this discussion, we are, of course, looking from the context of leadership (i.e., The Philosopher King). Furthermore, we must agree that the choices and actions of this leader are decidedly different than those of the common person.

To provide at least a minimal context of leadership, I'm using the traits that Aristotle advocated in his Nicomachean Ethics. In summary, then, the ideal leader possesses ...

"...a naturally well-proportioned and gracious mind; given to guard and preserve the order beauty, goodness, justice in all things; a true lover of learning; temperate, a complete absence of a cowardly or mean nature; has magnificence of mind; harmoniously constituted."

Furthermore, Aristotle believed that the most empowering kind of existence for people was within a society or state, especially when that state was committed to providing the "best life" for its members. His demanding list of what is required of a leader is a high bar, but it is the bar required of one who would virtuously lead such a society.

From the perspective of that leader, certain actions could very well be appropriate for an individual but are "unworthy" of a leader. For example, the Captain of a ship at sea is first and foremost responsible for his passengers. In the event of a disaster which causes the ship to sink, the Captain's responsibility is to ensure the safe debarkation of all his passengers and crew. While it would be completely appropriate for any of the passengers to take actions which ensured their personal safety before that of others, it would be unworthy, even a dereliction of duty, for the Captain to do so.



For the purposes of our discussion here, we divide people into two categories – the “common” person, who is primarily influenced by actions of self interest; and the “leader”, who is primarily influenced by Aristotle’s traits. Any thinking or actions that arise from the Common Person will ultimately serve to keep the Common Person’s agenda firmly entrenched. The leader cannot stand for that.

Thinking from Aristotle’s leader is the essential starting point. But, *just* thinking from that isn’t sufficient to ensure that the actions taken serve the responsibility of the leader. There is a particular kind of thinking you must do specifically as it relates to taking actions that will honor the leader. You must take *worthy actions*.

The Function of a Leader

If we were talking about a flute player, or a cabinet maker, we could fairly easily say what their *function* is. Furthermore, we would have relatively straightforward ways of measuring if the flute player or the cabinetmaker were fulfilling their functions well. But how do we address this with regards to a leader? What is the function of a leader?

It isn’t enough to simply say that the function of a leader is to lead. We have to give some outline of what that is. As we mentioned in the preface above, at least part of the function of a leader is to oversee, protect and guide a particular type of state, or, in our case, organization. In other words, the primary function of a leader is *to cause the greatness of those being led, including creating an environment where that greatness can be expressed*.

For an action to be considered *worthy* in our model it must meet two tests. It must meet the First Order Test of being an action that honors this definition of “Leader”, and it must also meet the Second Order Test of being an action that transcends the realm of *humanistic* thinking.

The First Order Test: *Actions Worthy of A Leader*

It is possible to observe an existing, or completed, action and see if, in retrospect, it meets this test. However, the preferred action is one that *arises from* the thinking of the Leader in the first place and upon closer examination is deemed to honor the Leader.

Taking actions that validate the thinking of the Common Person cannot be tolerated, no matter how innovative or risky they may be. The *intention* of the action is every bit as important as the action itself. Even though one might conclude after the fact that a particular action could be characterized as worthy, it is not what we are looking for if it arose from the concerns and agenda of the Common Person.

Keep in mind that we are not simply taking actions for the sake of the *action*; we are creating an environment in which the greatness of others can arise. To accomplish this we must have the actions be unquestionably in the service of the Leader. Any action that originates, or is defined by, the Common Person will inevitably corrupt the kingdom.

So the test requires that we objectively examine the proposed action to ensure that it is an action that is *worthy* of the Leader.

The Second Order Test: *Achieving reliable objectivity*

To transcend the realm of humanistic thinking may actually be impossible, but we must try. Because the natural tendency, and therefore the *deeply entrenched* tendency, is to somehow explain or justify our actions and motives inside of our existing point of view. In most cases this is the point of view of the Common Person. Here’s what we mean by that.

To make this easier to grasp, I’m going to borrow a concept from the world of Quantum Physics – something called “the ultimate observer”. In the teachings of quantum physics, the ultimate observer is the simultaneous parts of you that participate in life and simultaneously observe yourself participating from a completely objective perspective. The observer is without opinion or judgment, does not render advice, consent or disagreement and does not value your unique motives or needs above those of the others with whom you are participating. The observer cannot be deceived, manipulated or tricked in any way, because the observer knows the intimate corners of your heart and soul and thus knows what is behind your actions and thoughts. It is a paradoxical relationship that we each have going on between our identity and our observer. And while it may be next to impossible to be 100% the observer at any one time – i.e., to completely separate ourselves from our own agenda – the observer *knows* our attachments and ego and thus can be a very useful ally for us if we have the courage to embrace it.

While it isn’t completely accurate to characterize the observer this way, we are going to suggest that your observer is capable of transcending your human (i.e., “common”) instincts. It can hold you to account to something that is greater than the Common Person inside you. Of

course, that Common Person won't be particularly interested in what your observer has to say, but your Leader will be. And those you lead will be.

We're REALLY Raising the Bar Here

For the purpose of articulating the Second Order Test, we are asserting that your *observer* is capable of holding you accountable to the Leader in those circumstances when your Common Person is not. And here's why that is important. The Second Order Test requires that your actions be such that you *could* (we're not saying that you are going to, but that you could) will these actions for anyone who is confronting a choice and a Current Reality that is similar to yours. In other words, it's not enough that you, in all your objectivity, to honestly believe that the action you are taking is coming from the thinking of the Leader. You must also be able to say that the thinking *itself* is something that you would advocate for ANYONE in a position similar to yours, even if they were your Leader.

Let's say that you are coaching another person, and that person is counting on you to sift through the artfully camouflaged trivial that their Common Person occasionally throws up in the course of trying to manage unpleasant self-imposed demands. They are counting on you to not let them leave loopholes in their plan. And you have promised to do that. In that case, as a rational person who has promised to be an unconditional stand for their remarkable success, you would be compelled to examine, perhaps *over-examine*, any action to insure that it meets the First Order Test. You would not simply be able to agree or disagree based on your own perspective, you would need to be able to impose your willfulness as their coach – that unconditional stand – as the litmus test for accepting or rejecting an action.

Ideally, you would have that caliber of coach on hand for you when you articulate the actions you will take as a Leader. But, whether you do or not, you do have Your Observer. And so, you, as your observer connected to your divine self, must conclude that the action under consideration is an action that you could willfully impose on another in your shoes. To do this you must divorce yourself from your identity, even your reality, and transcend your humanistic self.

Now, this is a high demand. And, like everything else in Aristotle's model of the ideal Leader, perfection may be impossible. But, that is the challenge, and you must take it on if you want to consider yourself as one who is worthy of being followed by others. Consistently holding yourself responsible for The Second Order Test may well be outside of your capacity at the present time. But that is no matter. The point is that you strive to do so, even when you don't know how to do it.

Two things will come of this. First, you will elevate the quality and integrity of any actions you consider as a Leader. That alone is worth the effort. And second, you will develop an amazing clarity as to your own powers of self-deception. Self-deception is the covert enemy of the true Leader. When it is running unchecked there is no honesty, indeed there is no Leader.

However irritating it may be, truing yourself up to allowing only *worthy actions* in your Leadership model will unleash the power of effectiveness in magnitudes that defy your Current Reality. Which is, after all, the point of all this, isn't it?