

***Models of Leadership in Plato and Beyond*, by Dominic Scott and R. Edward Freeman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 225 pp.**

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Plato is considered the founder of Western philosophy. In recent years, the interest for his work seems stronger than ever. In addition to more general theoretical and interpretive considerations, such as Allen (2013) and Thakkar (2018), his ideas are also often used for *applied* theories, such as on business ethics and ethical leadership (see also Mejia 2022; Zyglidopoulos 2021). The book which is here under review falls into the category of applied theories.

The book is the result of a collaboration between an expert on ancient Greek political philosophy and an author with a long track record in business ethics. It deals with Plato's intellectual legacy through nine "models" of leadership drawn from excerpts from several of his dialogues. In the first place, these are three dialogues dealing specifically with the most desirable organization of society, the *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Laws*; these three are supplemented with fragments from the *Statesman* and *Phaedrus*.

In this way, seven basic models of leadership are discussed, each in a separate chapter. These are the doctor, the navigator/captain, the artist, the teacher, the shepherd, the weaver, and the sower. These basic models are then summarized (with the exception of the shepherd, about which more later) in terms of a number of key principles, which are numbered with the letter of the relevant model. For example, the teacher model is characterized in terms of four principles. T1 then specifies that "the leader as teacher is confronted with followers who are prisoners of their own comfort zone," whereas T4 warns that "leaders who try to move people out of their comfort zone can expect to encounter hostility and resistance" (84). In addition to these seven, there are also two separate chapters on two specific combinations of those basic models: these are the doctor/teacher and the teacher/sower.

Contemporary examples from the world of politics and business are then elaborated for each of these nine models. Roy Vagelos, CEO of the pharmaceutical company Merck, who became famous for providing a drug for river blindness free of charge, is a leader-doctor par excellence, but the founder of the European community, Jean Monnet, is also identified as a typical leader-doctor; the antislavery activist Frederick Douglass is a typical navigator; Michael Gorbachev and Indra Nooyi, a CEO at the soft drink company Pepsi-Cola, are quintessential teachers; and Nelson Mandela is a typical weaver. The categorization of the individual examples is further substantiated and clarified by means of the principles numbered per model.

The shepherd model occupies a special place in the series because it is the only model presented, not by Socrates himself, but by the sophist Thrasymachus, his vociferous interlocutor from *Republic* I. The shepherd only acts in the interest of the flock in the short run and eventually only furthers her own interest. So this is

effectively a self-interested and not an ethical model of leadership. Hence no key principles are derived for this model.

The book also devotes a separate chapter to four modern theories of leadership that are linked to the Plato-inspired models, which are again interpreted in terms of the principles discussed in the models. In this way, Burns's (1978) *Transformational Leadership* can be categorized by a composite of elements from Plato's artist and navigator models; Collins's (2005) idea of level 5 leadership fits seamlessly with the weaver's model; Greenleaf's (1977) *Servant Leadership* project bears all the hallmarks of the doctor-teacher model; while Gardner's (2011) *Leading Minds* is a typical instance of a sower model of leadership. The assignments of the models are substantiated here also using the principles numbered per model. In this way, Scott and Freeman interrelate four of today's most influential leadership theories in a surprising way. One of the things that hinders the existing state of the art is the implicit need for an overarching definition of leadership. This is one of two "modern problems Plato did not have" (165–68). Scott and Freeman argue that the phenomenon of leadership is far too complex to be contained in one umbrella definition. Although that may seem a natural and logical starting point for the field of leadership studies, it may also be the reason why the current state of leadership theories remains so fragmented.

In the conclusion, Scott and Freeman emphasize that the nine models are not so much intended to show how useful and influential Plato has been. Rather, the goal is to arrive at a "family resemblance approach to leadership, eschewing a single definition and instead separating out the different strands that make up the rope" (186).

Scott and Freeman's book is a very welcome addition to the existing Plato-oriented applied literature on leadership, as well as to the body of leadership literature as a whole. Some models, such as the leader-as-doctor, may have been mentioned by other authors before, but other models, such as the artist, teacher, weaver, and sower, are truly highly original forms of leadership models. They are listed here for the first time and, moreover, anchored particularly thoroughly in the context of individual dialogues by Plato. Just as Plato is considered the founder of philosophy, we can use the leadership models borrowed from him as universal ingredients in all later leadership literature.

Two critical comments can be made about this project. First, on one hand, the current setup in which the nine separate models is each illustrated by modern examples seems attractive. On the other hand, there is a risk that the project will be boarded up much too far. Ideally, you should want to use the models borrowed from Plato mainly to encourage readers to come up with their own interpretations. That incentive is now somewhat counteracted by the fully worked-out examples. It is true that the authors hope that the examples will in turn lead to inspiration and new examples (5), but here the chosen examples are presented too much on a silver platter, and that may well destroy a reader's own inspiration.

A more important objection is that the very title "models of leadership" is misleading in a number of cases. The labels doctor, shepherd, and teacher easily give the impression that these are stand-alone models, which you could use as

complete leadership styles accordingly, as the situation requires. But for a number of the “models,” the deepest insight is not so much in terms of a possible “leadership style” as in the *framing* that the model entails. It is a question not only of characteristic features of the leader herself but also of the leader’s relationship with the political community. Thus the image of the leader-doctor implies the image of the patient, or possibly the health of the “body politic”; to the model of the leader-shepherd belongs the image of a flock; the leader-teacher refers to a learning situation with students; and the leader-artist implies the idea of a canvas that needs to be wiped clean before one can begin.

In the majority of cases, this framing method also reveals a predominant danger of the model. In the case of the leader-doctor, for example, this is the temptation of the demagogue. In his dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato sets the leader-doctor next to the figure of the pastry chef. Both figures vie for the favor of citizens, portrayed as a jury of children. With that thought experiment, Plato draws our attention to the fact that for the average citizen, the expertise of the specialist will predictably lose out to the lure of the demagogue, who simply promises the people what they want to hear. Similarly, the leader-teacher model should make us aware of the expected mismatch of the philosopher, who, after looking around in the outside world, returns to the cave and must convey her new insights to the prisoners left behind. But these folks don’t even understand how the shadows on the wall are created, let alone that there is a world outside the cave. This is the central focus of the leader-teacher model, and it constitutes a universal insight when introducing new policies.

All things considered, those negative sides of the “models” appear to be more important than the labels themselves. And if this is correct, perhaps the book could be better organized according to those points of attention or downsides, and the relationship between the way of framing and the images of the leader and the political community, rather than according to the “models” themselves. Scott and Freeman seem to be aware of this, as is apparent from the explanation of the leader-weaver model (112), but in the present setup, this insight is obscured by the natural connotation of leadership “traits” or “styles” that the title “models of leadership” evokes.

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