

9-18-1998

Original Sin and the Power of Narrative in Intelligence Operations

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), and the [Other Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor (1998) "Original Sin and the Power of Narrative in Intelligence Operations," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 13 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol5/iss13/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Original Sin and the Power of Narrative in Intelligence Operations

Author: Editor

Volume: 5

Issue: 13

Date: 1998-09-18

Keywords: Evil, Leadership, Plato, Psychodynamic, Sin

Abstract. This article illustrates how the intent of a political community to demand sinless behavior in its leaders can sow the seeds for that community's demise.

A common topic of political philosophy--even renamed as political science and political psychology--is what constitutes the exemplary leader. A common thread of this common topic suggests that the exemplary leader is someone who cannot be. And therein lies the seeds of the community's destruction.

Plato's exemplary leader is a "guardian," a philosopher-king who owns no property and who has no private life. The philosopher-king has intensive training in ethics, philosophy, and mathematics to optimally develop intellectual functioning. What cannot be? The notion of a private life is not merely a legal concept but also must be a psychological one. Even if the philosopher-king is continuously expected to be on the stage of public life, there will ineluctably be a concurrent and epiphenomenal intrapsychic private life as well. The philosopher-king cannot not experience one--possess one--and remain human. Also, the notions that optimal leadership can derive solely from intellectual development and training without personality and motivational development and that training--even with the highest degree of ecological validity and fidelity--can obviate the need for experience beyond that offered by structured education is highly suspect. Even Socrates was a competent warrior in battle against the Persians, yet the philosopher-king is not allowed to have the experience of a soldier. (Perhaps, a salutary consequence is that putative leaders would not have to run on their war records--real or bogus--or explain away with ever-increasing tortuous reasoning a lack of martial experience.)

Psychodynamic theorists of leadership posit that the exemplary leader is one who can be all things to all people. The leader serves as a psychological receptacle--a container that receives and holds the unwanted and projected psychological attributes of the citizenry. These attributes are then transduced within the leader through mechanisms such as denial, reaction formation, rationalization, and sublimation--resulting in the creation of an idealized persona. The leader then serves as the living exemplification of all ideals. Psychodynamic theorists often surmise that the leader on whom the people will turn is guilty less for any specific political miscalculation concerning domestic or international policy than for not being all the leader is supposed to be in the above psychological sense. In essence, the fate of the nation is really the fate of many psychological lives. One does not need to be trained in the psychological sciences--perhaps one has more credibility if one does not have this training--to conclude that the exemplary leader based on psychodynamic premises is only conceivable.

Both Platonic and psychodynamic models of leadership seem to describe someone who cannot be. Both models suggest that any leader cannot but act in violation of leadership standards. As these violations are ultimately against the Gods, God, or Nature, any leader must, therefore, sin. Citizens may suspend belief or disbelief concerning the leader's inevitable sin--a sin whose origins lie in their very social construction of leadership--but this suspension can be subverted at any time with alacrity.

Intelligence operators seeking to destabilize a government, distort a government's professed priorities and decision-making, and/or weaken a political community must merely surface enough information

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

suggesting sin until a crisis ensues. This information must be relevant not so much to legal and policy violations than to those of the psychological compact--at times unspoken and even out of awareness--between the leader and the people. The United States (US) seems to be in the throes of such a crisis now. Even if it was not initiated by intelligence operators, it can certainly be exploited by them. As Philip Shenon reports in *The New York Times*, "intelligence reports showed that leaders of unfriendly nations as far-flung as Libya, Cuba and Myanmar were known to have obtained copies of the full [Starr] report to Congress....they're wondering how they can capitalize on it."

In conclusion, the current US crisis may be the apotheosis of the perfect being the enemy of the good. At least its enemies--with witting and unwitting accomplices--hope this to be the case. Are humans as political animals doomed to bear the taint of original sin for ever more? (See Fried, K.W. (1977). Some effects of the leader's abstinent role on group experience. *Group*, 1, 118-131; Hogan, R., Curphy, G.J., and Hogan, J. (1994). What we know about leadership: Effectiveness and personality. *American Psychologist*, 49, 493-504; Horowitz, M.J., & Arthur, R.J. (1988). Narcissistic rage in leaders: The intersection of individual dynamics and group process. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 34, 135-141; Renshon, S.A. (1975). Psychological analysis and presidential personality: The case of Richard Nixon. *History of Childhood Quarterly: The Journal of Psychohistory*, 2, 415-450; Shenon, P. (September 21, 1998). Troubled nations may look at Clinton at the U.N. and see...trouble. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Spero, M.H. (1996). Original sin, the symbolization of desire, and the development of the mind: A psychoanalytic gloss on the Garden of Eden. *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought*, 19, 499-562.) (Keywords: Evil, Leadership, Plato, Psychodynamic, Sin.)