Sociology of Leadership – Self-Leadership Debate

By Dr. Larry F. Ross

June 18, 2017

Can self-leadership be the driving factor to uplift people out of the ills of society? I am sure that we can learn a lot from the great sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers of the past. Let's first agree with them on one main point which is that one should recognize that we are social animals with wants and needs that drive us to do certain things to secure those needs. We must also realize that there are social control mechanisms in place to keep us on the right track when we take the wrong route. Therefore, under the heading of the sociology of leadership, we need to go about our business by learning the importance of self-leadership to facilitate a guide to those endeavors.

Plato discussed in the *Republic* that society arises out of the wants of man. The man first seeks food, then a house, and moves on to secure a coat. I must admit that this sounds like the basic needs of a person. He went on to say that the beginning of the state materialize when men attempt to satisfy these needs, thereby, drawing people together. Plato then goes on to describe the real inventor of a city and claims it takes four or five citizens to make this city, setting the stage for a division of labor in society. At some point, the division of labor turns into individuals holding different types of employment across various sectors in society.

What is so unique about Plato's writings is that he recognize people as being social beings who can only rise to a level in a society which is best suited to him. Even Aristotle made this very clear:

> "Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to and therefore, does not partake of society, is either a beast or god."

Now that's pretty deep for the great Aristotle. For me, it is the social being who influence self and others to accomplish various tasks in society. However, before one can get into a position to

do this, one must develop his or her social identity. Social identity begins with the process of socialization; starting with the family. When one begins to attempt to influence others to accomplish tasks, we find the beginning stages of leadership development. Some might argue that this sets the tone for self-enhancing behavior. I recognize that the social situation plays a significant role in this process. It is also the power of the social situation that tends to push people to do certain things in society. These things may end up being good or bad. Sociology of leadership and the subcategory of self-leadership comes into play here because it teaches one to control his or her behavior regardless of the social situation. Social psychologists have long advocated that this is about control; what people do and what they get in society. In others words, this is about one's behavior and outcomes. I couldn't agree more. Sometimes it takes more than an individual to lead this process; it may take a group.

Emile Durkheim, for the most part, looks at leadership from a group perspective. According to Durkheim, a leader is one who is afforded certain sacred rights as he is the person who is in charge of the group. Emile compares political leaders like that of the doctor working to cure a patient. The doctor is working to help maintain the proper functioning of the organism, which by the way includes what he calls the necessary deviance in society. Durkheim states that an ideal political leader of a state is driven by a huge ambition and a realist intelligence that immunize him against quaint moralizing. The role that one plays as a political leader is to dominate fellow citizens and foreign states. Could it be that the reason why we don't see a changeover of leaders is that they make a concerted effort to hold on to power? They want to remain in charge of others. Even Socrates, Plato, had something to say about leadership. There is also more comments from Aristotle.

The great philosophers often talked about leadership. Aristotle used animals to illustrate his points about a leader. On the other hand, Socrates spoke of using experienced veterans to serve as leaders. There were even some who called for would be leaders to study philosophy to be leaders in the state. They went on to say that if you were not born to be a philosopher, then you must be meant to follow. This sound like some aspects of Great Man Theory which essentially state that it is a great man who is born into the roles they play as leaders in society. However, we have since learned from some great scholars that leadership can be taught. Nevertheless, there is also discussion from Plato who classified leaders as courageous while followers are timid, asking the question why not share the wealth. In other words, why not deprive the rich of their estates and distribute them among the people in society? Plato argues that they can still take care to reserve the larger part for themselves. However, again we must not forget that it was the great Karl Marx who claims that the rich were the leaders of society. The one who own the means of production (bourgeoisie) while the workers (proletariat) struggle to secure resources for themselves and their family.

Sociology of leadership posts that people need to first think of themselves operating in a self-leadership environment. Therefore, this author agrees with Kresl (2005) self-leadership environment when he states we need to entertain the four imperatives of awareness: know what you're doing, know why you're doing it, find out when to do it, and know how to make it happen. Recognizing that not everyone can be a leader, society seems to be obsessed with the concept. It is important that we teach people how to think for themselves, spot trouble and do something about it. In this age of scarce resources for those who are poor or deprived, this is part of the 21st Century society and why self-leadership is more important than ever before. I might add and agree with his position on something else in that failing to lead self, sends a message that our society only ascribes value to those in leadership positions with people below or behind them (2005). Sociology of leadership should center on advancing critical thinking skills to the point that individuals discover for themselves what is not yet known about oneself; thereby, enhancing one's knowledge to lead self. One thing that is clear from the great philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists as a whole which is that in all societies there must be leaders. This self-leader must not only have courage but must be devoid of fear. In other words, the leader must be a brave individual. One of the big examples I can offer that can support this sub-field of self-leadership centers on our problems in the inner cities like Chicago and Baltimore where every day, several people are dying on the street at the hands of others who just don't have a sense of self-worth.

Like myself, criminologists are concerned with the ways and means of dealing with crime. However, we still have no effective reform measures to stop this carnage. For the most part, we have failed to stop the underlying causes which create and condition it. Sociology of leadership promotes an argument to produce men and women of high caliber through their interactions with others and having a deeper understanding of self and life they lead in society. I feel that it is time to search for new laws underlying social phenomena and the various changes in the 21st Century society. Drugs and lack of jobs seem to be driving this behavior in the inner cities, and this is one of the most significant sociological problems of our day. The result of where society is headed is not only difficult to determine but at present, unpredictable.

References

Aristotle (1946). *The politics of Aristotle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Avineri, S. (999). The social & political thought of Karl Marx. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Kalberg, S. E. (2017). *The social thought of Max Weber*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kresl, E. (2015). *Self-leadership: The art and science of control*. Kindle Edition.

Maxwell, J. C. (2011). The 360-degree leader: Developing your influence from anywhere in the organization. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

McGiboney, G. (2017). *The psychology of leadership principles, practices, and priorities*. UK: Cambridge Channel Press.

Mooney, L. A., Knox, D., & Schacht, C. (2017). *Understanding social problems*. (10th Ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.

Plato. (2000). *The Republic*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc.

Riley, A. T. (2014). *The social thought of Emile Durkheim*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

https://www.sociologyofleadership.net/

Sociologyofleadership@gmail.com

Picture created by Presenter Media