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## Plato and Charisma

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### Plato and his life

Ancient Greece (400 B.C.) has been regarded as the home of systematic administrative thinking; it has been seen as the place where the Western administrative thinking was born. The City State (polis) was the administrative unit where the pre-democratical experience was started and matured. It also ruled the whole societal life of the Greeks. Athens, Sparta, and Theba were this kind of city states. But what is important is the intimate relation between the state and the individual citizen. The relation was so close that it is not possible to think a citizen living outside of his state. This close relation leaves its marks on the Grecian leadership thinking, too.

Plato, a Grecian philosopher, was the first thinker who put forth a systematic political and administrative model to arrange the life in an ideal state (polis). The purpose (telos) of this kind of state is to educate people to become "good". So, the state has mainly a moral function in people's life. According to Plato, the state is like a human body the parts of which complete each other and act in harmony. Stating this, Plato represents himself as an early pre-modern functionalist, interpreted in the terms of organizational theory. Plato neglects the organizational conflict; no conflict should exist between the parts in an ideal situation. This neglect of conflict happens in the ideal state too, where refined division of work, communism, equality etc. will prevail.

In Polis (Plato's dialogue: in English, the Republic) Plato states that politicians must act as the rulers of the new ideal state, because they have real knowledge (episteme) of what is "the Form of good", and which the purposes of the state must be.

They have also the skill to rule according to these purposes. But, in later written *Politikos* (Plato's dialogue), he does not any more speak about the Forms according to which the ideal state can be ruled. Instead, he believes that the art of ruling (comp. leadership) can be found and based on scientific principles. This art is like the art of sailing which can be learnt.

Political science which is more than any individual art takes care of law-making "weaving these arts as one unity". But a just politician who knows the political science thoroughly and has moral strength, too, is rare. Because of that, it is better that the law stands above the ruler and the ruler must act according to the law. According to Karl Popper (1972), a very well-known English social philosopher, Plato's utopia was much more institutional than personalistic by its nature. Plato wants to be able to prevent social change by controlling the election process of forthcoming rulers. To my mind, one can also find in this praising of institutional arrangements the regret for static world view; Plato resists change as abnormal state of affairs and sees status quo as normative and natural condition.

Plato and his "student" Aristotle (384 - 322 B.C) were those great figures in Grecian thinking whose influence has been enormous on Western thinking and philosophy. Both Platonism and on the Aristotelism, as philosophies, have been the main trends of thinking in the Western world. The significance of these philosophies lies on behind the fact that they include in a very well formulated form a representation of those questions which have bothered philosophers through decades.

Plato was born in Athens about 427 B.C. He was the son of an aristocratic family which actively took part in the political life of Athens. It is evident that Plato planned to take part in politics, too, but due to violent and cruel social conditions (The Peloponnesian wars were going on) he chose a more contemplative way of life. This decision was dramatic, because never after that Plato managed to take part in day-to-day politics.

Democracy was the main form of government in Greece in those days. Athens, the forerunner of democracy, was the polis which was in leading position among other city states. But, Plato's view of democracy was disapproving. He saw that aristocracy would offer a better alternative to rule, because the hegemony of demos would be a disaster to all parties of society. To Plato's mind Socrates' death could be the final step and which could

release the bad and dysfunctional character of democracy in Plato's mind. After this unfortunate happening, Plato's literal career began. In his books, written in dialogical form, he set forth his political, ethical and epistemological ideas. From the point of view of leadership theme, Plato presented remarkable considerations in the following: Polis (The Republic), Politikos (The Statesman), and Nomoi (Laws) which remained the last work of Plato.

### **The concept of charisma and charismatic action**

Charisma, in terms used by Max Weber, means literally "the gift of grace". It is used by Weber to characterize self-appointed leaders followed by people who are in distress and who need to follow the leader because they believe him to be extraordinarily qualified. Charismatic leaders' movements are enthusiastic, and in such extraordinary enthusiasms, class and status barriers sometimes give way to fraternization and exuberant community sentiments. Charismatic heroes and prophets are thus viewed as truly revolutionary forces in history. Weber emphasizes that the charismatic leader is self-ordained and self-styled. The background for this self-styling is the charismatic leader's "mission". This causes that her/his action is her/his destiny. The role of a follower is to acknowledge this destiny, and the authority of genuine charisma is derived from the duty of the followers to recognize the leader. The very nature of charismatic authority is unstable; this is because the source of charisma is continuously "moving on". It will never be stable and unchanging.

Charismatic leadership usually arises in times of crisis in which the basic values, the institutions, and the legitimacy of the organization are in question. Genuine charisma is the problem of something "new". And in extraordinary situations this "new" calls forth a charismatic authority structure so that charisma, at least temporarily, leads to actions, movements, and events which are extraordinary, not routine, and outside the sphere of everyday life. The evocation of pure charisma and charismatic leadership always leads, at least temporarily, away from the world of everyday life; it rejects or transcends routine life. Just because pure charisma and charismatic leadership conflict with the existing, the self-evident, the established order, they work like catalyst in an organization. But charisma is the specifically creative force in an organization only briefly before being unavoidably transformed in or routinized into some more

stable form.

The legitimacy of charisma and charismatic leadership is sociologically and psychologically an attribute of the belief of the followers and not so much the quality of the leader. The leader is in this respect important because he can "charismatically" evoke this sense of belief and can thereby demand obedience. Weber thought that the unavoidable fate of charisma is routinization and institutionalization. Pure charisma is personal, direct, radical, extraordinary, and the authority of charisma is based on belief, after which the charismatic leadership as movement is successful, charisma becomes ordinary; charismatic leadership becomes routinized, depersonalized, and deradicalized. Therefore, the nature of belief may also be transformed. Considering the features of the Weberian pure charisma it seems that this type of authority structure describes more a pre-modern (like ancient Greece) society and form of organization. Especially pure charisma and charismatic leadership as an anti-economic force, that it is characterized by great pathos; that the followers constitute a genuine discipleship; and that charismatic leadership points in a revolutionary and anti-routine way to something transcendent, hint rather to the pre-modern.

Charisma is foreign to economic and efficiency considerations. Hence, in modern business organizations charisma needs to be kept on a tight reign. Too much reliance on charisma, and the economic survival of the firm may be threatened. More appropriate for the fuzzy organization is the notion that charisma can move from one person to another with different decisions. Charisma can provide a vital driving force to decision making as viewed through the eyes of e.g. the garbage can model of organizational action. In it the participants are leaving and entering the can, carrying their solutions; the impetus for participants, problems, and solutions to come together to make a choice could be the use. But different decisions will bring different individuals together. When end and means relationship are unclear and there are uncertainties over the ends to be reached, inspirational decision-making seems to be the only way in which decision makers can get action. Charisma would offer a resolution to this problem but there is no reason why charisma should continuously reside in the same person.

Plato's view of leadership, as a normative standpoint, was that a leader must be a man of power with the truly truth-seeking glance. This point of view comes close to the Weberian concept

of charisma discussed above. Plato sees that a leader must have charisma, the gift of grace, to be successful in his actions. Without it the leader is not able to do his job, be the head of some organization. And this charisma is something mystical which cannot be obtained by force or by training. It is of divine origin.

### **Modern discourses - symbolism and management of meaning**

Discussions about management's "new " imperatives, like management by objectives, management by results etc., have been evolving. One of them is the discussion called the management of meaning. It has many roots, e.g. Bennis (1984) would suggest a view of strategic management as "the management of meaning". This concept is later elaborated, with more conceptual depth, by Smircich and Morgan (1982) and Smircich and Stubbart(1985).

In the background is the idea that organizations are socially constructed systems of shared meanings. So, the task of management, especially strategic management, is to create symbolic reality and to facilitate action. Smircich and Stubbart refer to recent studies, where " the management of meaning" has been shown to be accomplished through values and their symbolic expressions, dramas and language. Broms and Gahmberg have found some examples of classical myths used in situational applications. Such are, for instance, the myth of rebirth, or the story of the Phoenix bird, in occasions of crisis and turnaround operations, or the myth of the Argonauts in biographies of famous leaders. The key challenge for a leader is to manage meaning in such a way that individuals orient themselves to the achievement of desirable end. In this endeavor the use of language, ritual, drama, stories, myths, and symbolic construction of all kinds play an important role. They constitute important tools for the management of meaning. Through words and images, symbolic actions, and gestures, leaders can structure attention and evoke patterns of meaning which give them considerable control over the situation being managed. Leadership rests as much in these symbolic modes of action as in those instrumental modes of management, direction, and control which define the substance of the leader's formal organizational role.

So, it is said in the modern leadership studies that the task of strategic management is to rule the new and continuously

changing situation by creating and using myths, symbols, metaphors etc. As we have seen previously, Plato sees the myths, metaphors and "stories" as inevitable forces in societal life. In the same way, he considers that it belongs to a leader's normative agenda to develop such means of symbolical leading.

The connections to the charisma-debate are also clear; if a leader wants to be charismatic, he must develop his skill of using symbols, metaphors etc. in his managerial work. So, the management of meaning discussion and the charisma discussion are heavily interwoven.

### **Conclusions**

An excursion has been made in Plato's world of ideas. This consideration consists of many different areas. We have seen that Plato has been one of the most influential organizational thinkers through the ages. He has presented long time ago many themes which have been thought to be "modern", and developed during the 20th century by the leadership theorists of our time. First, Plato has put forth the theory of an organization as harmony seeking entity, and in this way showed a benchmark for modern organization theorists stressing the unitary and equilibrium nature of modern complex organizations. Second, the concept of management of meaning, or leadership as the management of meaning, has been evolved. The focus on the way meaning is created, sustained, and changed in organizational settings provides a powerful means for understanding the fundamental nature of leadership as a social process. This social process includes all those means by which management creates new meanings by rituals, symbolization and "naming". As we have seen all these elements are included in Plato's leadership philosophy. Third, the debate on the attributes of a powerful leader is also in the focus of Plato's thinking. This notion leads us to the modern debate on charisma, and to its role in modern management practices. A leader must have charisma, the gift of grace, to be successful in his actions. Without it the leader is not able to do his job, be the head of some complex organization. Max Weber, the forefather of modern charisma debate, may agree with us: Plato is an ancient, but still fresh and actual developer of leadership theory. And this theory is always needed.

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