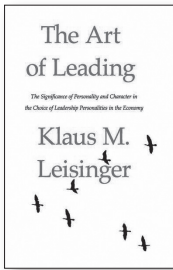


Book review

Klaus M. Leisinger. *The Art of Leading*

by Peter L. Rudnytsky

Klaus M. Leisinger. *The Art of Leading: The Significance of Personality and Character in the Choice of Leadership Positions in the Economy*. Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism Publications, 2020. 240 pp. \$15.00 (pb).



Participants in the Second International Erich Fromm Research Conference, held in June 2018 at the International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin, were privileged to hear an inspiring keynote lecture by Klaus Leisinger, President of the Global Values Alliance and Professor of Sociology at the University of Basel, and formerly Managing Director and Chairman of the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development. To the good fortune of English-language readers, Professor Leisinger's lecture, published as an article (2018)

in this journal, is now available in the expanded form of a book.

In his endorsement on the back cover, Professor Jeffrey Sachs writes, »This is a volume akin to Machiavelli's *The Prince*, as it is a guidebook for leadership, but unlike Machiavelli, Leisinger teaches the leader how to find true purpose and value through leadership.« Indeed, Leisinger is an anti-Machiavelli, and his »guidebook for leadership« might be more fittingly compared to Erasmus's contemporaneous *The Education of a Christian Prince*, which exhorts the ruler not to seek power for its own sake, or to control his subjects through fear, but rather to promote the general welfare and to apply Christ's teachings to himself.

Fromm (1964) himself acknowledged the kinship between Renaissance humanism and his humanistic vision of psychoanalysis, and Leisinger's project is nothing less than to integrate the thought of Fromm, grounded in the ideals of democratic socialism, with his own commitment to the ethos of »moral capitalism.« This might seem not merely paradoxical but impossible, but what Leisinger has in mind is not cutthroat capitalism of the »Manchester« variety, but rather »the ›Rhineland capitalism‹ founded upon Catholic social teaching« that represents »the third way« between a ›state-planned economy« and a ›free-market economy« (pp. 89-90). Although Leisinger states that Fromm »could not warm« even to the middle path of a »social market economy,« this does not seem to me to be incompatible with democratic socialism, and both

Fromm and Leisinger are eloquent advocates for what may be termed the enlightened self-interest of humanity.

Integral to Leisinger's argument is the need for business leaders to possess the ethical values and »biophilia« that will enable them to look beyond a focus on quarterly profits to see what is in the long-term best interest both of their companies and of society as a whole. There is no doubt that it makes a tremendous difference in any organization who is in a decision-making position, and this is especially true when we are talking about a multi-national corporation or a government. Wise leaders can spare their »subordinates« unnecessary stress and aggravation, while authoritarian and obtuse ones can cause untold damage.

But it is a question to be asked of Leisinger whether even the best captain can save a sinking ship. If the system itself is broken, it will take more than a change at the top to put things right. And what if it is beyond repair? When Leisinger states that »there are (...) no good or bad companies, only companies with good or bad leaders« (p. 179), I have to wonder how it is possible to have a »good« tobacco company, or one devoted to any form of »necrophilia.« According to Leisinger, »A fair overall assessment of the economic, technological and social performance of the industrial and developed countries in the last sixty years will come to the conclusion that this period of time is one of the best times in human history,« with »the only stain« being that »it has been achieved at the cost of the global environment and the availability of non-renewable resources« (p. 177). He likewise concedes that »the increased disparity in the distribution of income and wealth during this period also fails to provide a basis for sustainable development and peaceful co-operation.«

I confess that I do not share Leisinger's optimism. What he calls a »stain« seems to me rather to be a catastrophe, with the only variables being its rate of acceleration and ultimate magnitude. Can the polar bears be saved? Authoritarian regimes are resurgent even in »industrial and developed countries,« and the threat of nuclear annihilation looms over the planet, ready to destroy all life without warning, like the recent explosion in Beirut, which was no less lethal for having been an accident.

Fromm, who wrote that »*the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart*« (qtd. p. 72; see Fromm, 1976, p. 8), warned of these perils decades ago, and Klaus Leisinger is fully aware of them today. If humanity, and life as we know it, is to have any chance of survival, we need both their prophetic voices now more than ever. As Leisinger has written, »for Erich Fromm, every single person represents all humanity« (p. 49). To heed their teachings is to have a hope beyond hope. And if, according to the Jewish saying beloved by Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, to redeem one person is to

redeem the world, then the redemption of the world must begin in individual human hearts—not least in those of the rich and powerful.

References

- Fromm, Erich, 1964: »Humanism and Psychoanalysis«, in: *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 1, pp. 69–79.
- Fromm, Erich, 1976: *To Have or To Be?* New York (Bloomsbury) 2016.
- Leisinger, Klaus M., 2018: »The Art of Leading: The Significance of Personality and Character in the Choice of Business Leaders,« in: *Fromm Forum*, Vol. 22 (2018), pp. 75–108.