

LEADERSHIP AND TRANSFORMATIVE AMBITION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Mark Menaldo (2013, Edward Elgar Publishing Limited)

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Genovese has written over 35 books, including *The Paradoxes of the American Presidency*, (co-authored by Thomas E. Cronin) and *The Presidency and the Challenges of Democracy* (co-edited with Lori Cox Han). His articles and reviews

have appeared in the *American Political Science Review*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, *White House Studies*, and *The Journal of Leadership Studies*.

MICHAEL: Today is March 10, 12:30 p.m. PST. I'm here with Mark Menaldo. Mark is an assistant professor of Political Science at Texas A&M University. His book, *Leadership and Transformative Ambition in International Relations* is our topic today. It's part of the "New Horizons in Leadership Studies" series with senior editor Joanne Ciulla, of the University of Richmond, and is published by Edward Elgar. First of all, Mark, welcome, and it's good to be with you.

MARK: It's good to be here. Thank you for taking the time to interview me.

MICHAEL: It's my pleasure. Tell us a little bit about yourself, your background and your education, please.

MARK: I'll work from the beginning. I am an American citizen, but I was born in South America, specifically Caracas, Venezuela. I grew up in Mexico City until the age of 18 when I went to college in the U.S. I majored in philosophy and sociology at Colorado College in Colorado Springs and then I took some time off to think about what I wanted to do with my life. I actually took up surfing for a few months in San Diego, but quickly realized that it wasn't for me. After two years, I decided to go to grad school to study political science. I felt a bit shackled by my own disciplines as an undergrad and I wanted to investigate new questions, new texts, and new ideas. I decided on political science at Michigan State University

where I studied political theory and international relations, hence the topic of my book. After getting my Ph.D., I landed my first job here at Texas A&M International in Laredo and I've been here since 2009.

MICHAEL: You were at Colorado College! What years were you there?

MARK: 1997 through 2001.

MICHAEL: You probably crossed paths with someone that leadership students would know very well, Tom Cronin.

MARK: Yes, I did. I didn't take a class with him — political science wasn't my field at the time — but everyone pretty much knew every professor at the college, so I knew Tom.

MICHAEL: Very good. In graduate school you did philosophy and international relations. What were your research interests then and as soon as you got out of school?

MARK: Michigan State University is a very interesting program. From the perspective of political philosophy, we studied the history of political thought beginning with the ancients up until the moderns. At the same time, the political science program there is what one would consider a very quantitative, positivist program. In international relations we studied the major theories

in international relations, but the emphasis in studying those theories was to learn how to create research designs that could be implemented so you could find something interesting in the world to analyze and theories to generalize from.

In many ways the fields were not necessarily natural complements, but from the moment I arrived at Michigan State, I utilized my Colorado College mentalities, so to speak. At Colorado College I had been molded by a cross-disciplinary, interdisciplinary education. I wanted to find a way to forge a dissertation that would unite both fields. That was quite difficult because of the different philosophies in the fields. What I discovered was that leadership, or individual leaders, seemed to be the pivot concept on which I could fashion a research program that united both my interest in political philosophy and in international relations.

Grad school is where I began to think about the relationship between individuals, international politics, and political philosophy. Over time I developed what is probably a unique thesis at least as much as no one else seems to have articulated it: The cornerstone idea that unites both political philosophy and international relations is the particular ambitions and motivations and character of individuals and the way these factors influence international relations and domestic politics.

My new project, which is just starting, is similar in approach, but much more regional in focus. I'm interested in how Latin American leaders forged unique identities at the time of post-colonial independence and tried to create republican and liberal governments such as Mexico in 1824 and Bolivia in 1812. So, I've turned my attention to something that is both interesting to me and, I think, right up my alley since I'm fluent in Spanish and have a Latin American background.

MICHAEL: That's a great way to use your background in dealing with some really important questions that have been neglected, for the most part, in leadership studies and even in history and political science.

MARK: I find it fascinating. In Latin America there's this status quo bias in thinking that all of Latin American politics is the work of entrenched political elites or a sort of misappropriation of European culture with an intent to graft it

onto a Latin America where it was a contradiction and doesn't make sense. This usually obviates the fact that there were very thoughtful, skillful individuals working at the time trying to weave a liberal government within the fabric of the society they had. No different, I think, than in the United States. Why the difference in outcomes is an especially important and interesting research question.

MICHAEL: One of the areas that leadership studies and political science has looked at in Latin America is the failure of presidential systems to stick and stay intact. We've done a bit, but it's a great field to explore. At what stage are you in the new project?

MARK: To be honest, it's very recent. I just came back from the wonderful Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas at Austin library where I spent a week checking out as many books as I could carry. [chuckle] I'm currently in the process of reading the works of José María Luis Mora, who was the architect, somewhat, of liberal politics

in the post-colonial era in Mexico. As part of the larger scope, I am also interested in reading the works of Simón Bolívar.

MICHAEL: It's a great project. Good luck with it.

MARK: Yes. I'll just spend the next 10 years, I think.

“ The book is a study of leaders who radically reshape their domestic societies institutionally, and also morally and psychologically. In this sense, they completely enlarge the scope of how they accomplish their goals. ”

MICHAEL: We can't wait 10 years for your next book! You have to accelerate the pace a little.

MARK: Perfection is the enemy of good and done.

MICHAEL: [chuckle] Let's turn to your current book. Am I correct to say that it had its origins in your dissertation?

MARK: Yes, the book is based on my dissertation. In 2011, I was very fortunate to have won the Jablin Dissertation Award, on which ILA partners with the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond. I had a conversation with Joanne Ciulla of Jepson — the editor of this series — and she, along with other Jepson faculty, encouraged me to think about turning the dissertation into a book. Once I received a contract from Edward Elgar, I spent about a year and a half revisiting my chapters, expanding my cases, and adding a new chapter on James MacGregor Burns' theory of transformational leadership,

its contrasts and connections with political philosophy, and what political philosophers might not understand about leadership. I really didn't know much about leadership studies myself until this time. So, yes, the basis of the book is the dissertation, but for the book I went much farther in clarifying my ideas and the critical basis that I discuss.

MICHAEL: If you had 30 seconds to give me the key takeaway points from the book, what would you say?

MARK: The book is a study of leaders who radically reshape their domestic societies institutionally, and also morally and psychologically. The basis on which they do this is through the connection of their foreign policy to domestic policy. In this sense, they completely enlarge the scope of how they accomplish their goals. Theoretically, I do this on the backdrop of political science theories that don't give much credence to the idea that individuals can fashion these sorts of new orders or new political regimes for themselves outside of the constraints that incentivize and de-incentivize their behavior.

MICHAEL: Very good. I think you very capably set the book up in your introduction. Many of our readers — who may not be as well-versed in international relations and international relations theory — will benefit from looking at the introduction and hearing what your thoughts are on some of the topics upon which the two fields converge. In the very beginning of the introduction you talk about statesmanship, the role of statesmanship, and how the study of international relations has moved away from statesmanship. If you would, define for us what you mean by statesmanship and why international relations has moved away from stressing its importance.

MARK: Statesmanship. It can be quite complicated or very simple. I think, perhaps unfortunately so, I've chosen the complicated path to understanding statesmanship. The way I understand statesmanship is a duality between regime politics or domestic politics and the relationship to the leader or the individual. Statesmanship rises out of one's society, one's culture. Context has a heavy influence on the individual that a society will produce. It sets the parameters for the attributes that you have for citizens and leaders. But, for me, statesmanship is not just the production of leaders in this sort of social state, but the relationship between the leader and his or her society. My focus is how to understand statesmanship by looking at ambition. I see two possibilities in statesmanship. First is the leader who turns away from statesmanship, whose self-satisfaction cannot be fulfilled by public service or the common good. Second is the leader who can be satisfied by devotion to the public good.

This is where my view of statesmanship comes into play. There are leaders, statesmen, who devote themselves to the common good, but who have great stores of ambition. As individuals who are constituted of their regimes, not just products of it, they seek to reorder institutions. They establish doctrines. They elevate their own quality of moral imagination by raising them to ideals that haven't been fulfilled. In doing so, they reconcile the tension between their own good and the public good. Then, as I mentioned earlier, in the cases I discuss, leaders connect their foreign and domestic policies and enlarge the scope of what they're doing in order to bring about these changes.

Why has international relations gravitated away from statesmanship? Because it's too noisy, so to speak. It is too complicated to discuss statesmanship because it requires a normative understanding of the individual or the leader. Political science today, driven by the need for positivistic assessment of phenomena, uses much more parsimonious models of individual behavior in an attempt to explain more cases. In other words, it has a greater scope, a greater grasp of how individuals behave by looking at average cases, not exceptional ones. In doing so, the statesman is reduced to being no different than any rational individual who, to put it in a joking manner, buys a soda, choosing between Pepsi and Coke. They see decision making by leaders as no different. They see it as being about how constraints and incentives and disincentives influence behavior. The one difference is the personality scholars. They do pay a lot of attention to individuals, but they are the minority voice amongst international relations scholars, and I find their theories, in some sense, to also be deficient.

MICHAEL: I think any political scientist who is reading this will recognize the argument that you're making. I know the first day that I was in graduate school — and this seems like 100 years ago — the very first class I had was a class in international relations. The very first day, the professor said, "I want to disabuse you of the notion that individuals matter. They don't." We spent the semester arguing that whole question because, as you say, you have to reduce down to generalizable theories. So the goal, in effect, is to jettison the individual, interesting stories for the common and for the average. As you say, that reduces it down to a very different science. In a way, it's the methodology that is driving the research.

MARK: Exactly. That's exactly what has happened from the mid-20th century, on. The methodology matters. I've had professors say, "It's not politics that matters. It's the methodology." Even politics become superfluous in that sense.

MICHAEL: Much of political science has been taken over by rational choice and rational actor notions. Recent studies in

neuroscience have called those into question, but they persist in the field of political science and I can see you bumping heads with that throughout this book.

MARK: Right.

MICHAEL: Let me get to some parts of your book that are very rich in theory and also very rich in theory bashing. You are very heavy on theory and international relations' theory. Let me ask you to explain a few of the things that are in the book so it will help all of the readers understand the theme of the book and the main points. You look at different schools of thought in international relations and find them wanting. The first one you look at — and the one that our readers will probably be most familiar with — is the realist theory. Can you tell us what that is and how it doesn't answer the questions you're trying to ask?

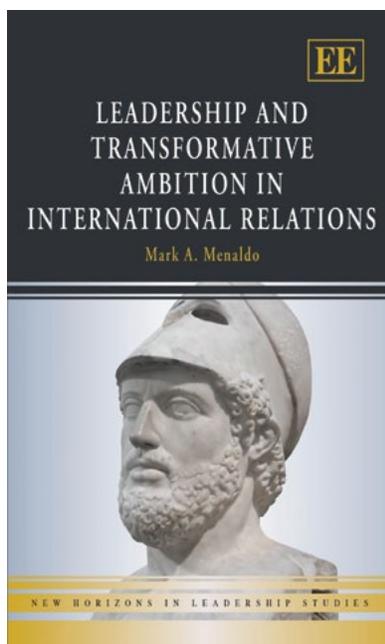
MARK: Realist theory, simply put, looks at the international world from a zoomed-out lens. It takes the international reality in which states exist, which theorists call the anarchic international structure, and theorizes what the realities are of that structure. How is it that states exist within a structure that is anarchic? From this theory, realists deduce that states care first and foremost about their survival. They are rational actors because they live in a competitive environment and have minimal scope of freedom in making choices. At the basis, when you're trying to survive, you can either attack an opponent or you can defend yourself by forming a coalition or an alliance.

What this does is pin down leaders. I'll be more specific. This theory couples leaders to the state's ultimate necessity, which is survival in international relations. Thus, the ambition of the individual or the preferences of the individual leader are no different than those of the state. As such, the realist theory reduces all individuals to the same motivation. Any deviations from the main assumptions of realism are considered to be mistakes. For example, if you have an ambition outside of realist ambitions, you're a fool, according to the realists. In this instance, there is no room for differences or variations.

My critique of realist theory is I think realists have taken rules — which have been constituted over time, both historically, philosophically, and through practice — and inferred from those rules something that they call structure. That thing that is called structure, I think, cannot be divorced from the rules that

were used over time to create it. Doing that gives much more credence to the agent who instituted or constructed a realist political theory, in practice, than the realists do.

MICHAEL: You talk also then about neo-realist theory, rational choice theory, and personality theory, some of which you have touched on already. Your basic critique is that those schools of thought do not answer the key questions and they reduce political reality down to something that takes out what, to you, seems to be the most interesting cases. You seem to be most interested in the outliers and to believe that individual leaders do sometimes make changes, have agency. Those individual leaders tend to be the most interesting and they also tend to be the most important, the ones who really had an impact, the Bismarcks, the Pericleses, and others.



MARK: Yes. Definitely, they are more interesting but they help shed light, I think, not only on the outliers, but on the average cases as well. If political science focuses on the average cases, explaining the outliers no differently than they explain the average, I use the reverse logic and explain the average no differently than I explain the outliers.

MICHAEL: You seem to suggest that the difference between the outlier, the individual who matters, and those who seem to matter less is ambition. To read from your work, “I develop a theory of transformative ambition to describe leaders who, motivated by a particular political and moral understanding, seek to change and redefine the domestic policy and use foreign policy as a means to achieve

domestic ends.” There is a lot in there. Walk me through that a little bit, the role that ambition plays in this transformative leadership.

MARK: It *is* a lot because there are two ways to look at ambition. One, in the first sense, you think about, “Where does ambition come from?” It's a very idiosyncratic thing. It comes from the individuals themselves or what we call their nature. In this sense, ambition can't be derived from anything else. It's a human thing. But we see different degrees and types of ambition. We see people who are ambitious for money, people who are ambitious for political office, people who are ambitious for honors. In that sense, ambition is very much tied to the social, cultural reality that one exists in. You couldn't be ambitious for wealth in ancient Sparta, for example, because

there was no money to go around, so to speak. In this sense, ambition is conditioned by the political regime in which one exists, one is nurtured by, and one develops in. So, there is, in some sense, a conditioning, but at the same time, because I do make a claim that ambition is something I'll call natural or universal, there are not only differences in degrees, but there are also differences in kind.

In the book I use the example of Abraham Lincoln's Lyceum address — which I think is by far one of the most explicit and powerful statements about this — to argue that there are different kinds of ambitions. There are all together different, higher forms of ambition where the notion of what might satisfy that ambition does not exist within the existing realm or the regime that the individual inhabits. In that sense, ambition is transformative in that when these individuals do come to occupy positions of power, and are skillful and can recruit both the resources and the people to follow them, they try to transform the existing order and establish a new order in which their ambition can be realized. But in many senses, if we go back to what Lincoln says, the difficulty lies in what direction that ambition will go. Will it go to something that is for the common weal? Or might it be something that pushes the regime outside of the bounds of its own understanding and the limits of its own laws? So, yes, you're right. It is a lot to think about because there isn't a linear direction in which ambition is headed or directed.

MICHAEL: One thing that I thought of while mulling that over is what role ideology might play? For example, I thought of Ronald Reagan. He was more of a change agent because he was more ideological and knew more clearly where he wanted to go. George H. W. Bush was more of the managerial type of leader who wanted to make things run smoothly and get tasks accomplished, whereas Reagan had a different place he wanted to take people to.

MARK: For the individuals that I concentrate on in the latter half of the book, what we see is their ideology or their vision of where they want to take their regime and their policy far surpassing those around them. You know this better than I do, but President Bush may have found it hard to articulate a new order and a new society because, perhaps, that skill was outside of his wheelhouse. He was very ambitious, in his own sense, but despite that fact his powers of articulation failed him in this regard. That may also be a very important reason for his inability to create the sorts of changes that he thought were needed.

MICHAEL: I think that's a good point. Ambition, absent skill — and you talk about the importance of skill in the book — takes you nowhere, or could be demagogic. You ground ambition and skill together to equal success. Context, of course,

matters as well, and Machiavelli would add Fortuna to that, good and bad luck. The ambitious, skilled leader still could be at the mercy of Fortuna, as Cesare Borgia was. You don't put stock — at least not in this book — in fate or in good luck. You very much focus on individual agency.

MARK: Yeah, but I would say that is something that shadows each and every case. As much as skill matters, one can't control the happenstance events that give rise to the opportunities that make certain possibilities open up for leaders. For example, we may have not been talking about Pericles today if his associate had not been assassinated. It's very interesting because assassinations were very rare in Athens. The fact is, that was happenstance. I think fortune matters at every step of the way, but I don't give the time and the space to elaborate on it. It's probably something I should do when I revisit the topic.

MICHAEL: One of the things you do quite well is talk about the power of and the pure force of ambition. As you say, it comes from the culture, in part, and it can take many different forms. One of the things you mention, almost in passing, but I think it illustrates your point powerfully is the role of the Founding Fathers of the United States. Douglass Adair did a great deal of research on the importance of fame to the framers. To them, glory, honor, fame — however one defines it — became very important. You see it, for example, in George Washington. He was incredibly ambitious, but it was an ambition that was controlled from within and an ambition that was put to the service of an idea. I think the framers are a great example of the role ambition plays in transformative leadership, in this case, not so much in the realm of international relations, but in forging a new state.

MARK: True, although they do say in Federalist One that they're creating — I'm going to butcher the line — “an empire which the likes of history has never seen before.” They make great claims about the project outside of its national context.

MICHAEL: True. They made a lot of universalist claims that Edmund Burke found quite annoying at times!

In the book you also talk about the problem of ambition. Where, and under what conditions, is ambition a problem?

MARK: When is ambition a problem? At all times. It is most likely always a problem because at the end of the day — and you brought up George Washington — there is no reason as to why someone whose stores of ambition are so great, there is no reason why that person wouldn't choose otherwise. That is, why *wouldn't* a Washington become a monarch? It really is a difficult topic, I think, to get our minds around. Today we tend

to think that it is not a possibility. That is, that it is not possible for someone with the blood pulsing of an Alexander the Great to crop up in the United States in 2014. To be very serious, I think Abraham Lincoln could have been. This is always a possibility. So, as to the what and the where — it could always happen.

As to the why, it could occur because the laws or the education of society don't give ambition a proper channel for it to flourish. In a regime where I would say — I don't want to sound Machiavellian but — there is no advantage to living a moral life, you could see the ambitious vault over one another, to claim the first prize that is at their grasp, the power over a whole state. We see this time and time again throughout history and in our contemporary world. As one country changes regime, one group comes into power, they overreach and they fall and a new group comes to power and they overreach and they fall. Where there is a lack of stability and where there is no external self-restraining mechanism — that is, I think, the why — that is where you will see ambition crop up in its worst forms.

MICHAEL: You've got two mechanisms to pull ambition back. One is the individual. George Washington in Newburgh, New York, could have been made king. One could have thought that was the natural evolution of things. You got rid of the old king and, of course, you have to replace him with a new king. But Washington chose to do something different and that was a function of his quest for honor and fame. The leader who wins by force may win the prize, but he doesn't deserve the honor and glory that go with it. Washington wanted that and I don't know if it's apocryphal or not, but the story was that when the King of France found out that Washington had rejected power, he said, "He's ruined it for all of us." In effect, he redefined what greatness and glory and honor were.

MARK: Right. The honorable statesman becomes the greatest honor.

MICHAEL: There are then — and you touched on it — two different mechanisms for controlling ambition. One is the individual, and for thousands of years, that's pretty much what we taught our leaders. From Plato to Erasmus, the thinking was you should teach about justice and practice justice and goodness. That was the story until Machiavelli came along and gummed up the works for everyone. But, the framers weren't willing to be content with just personal checks — the individual checking him or her self. They instituted an institutional check — the separation of powers, checks and balances — to control that ambition that they were so concerned about.

MARK: Right. I'm not a scholar of American politics, but it seems to me it wasn't only instituted at the institutional level.

It was instituted at the social level as well. That's why, when de Tocqueville comes to the United States in the 1830s, he was absolutely amazed. In volume two of *Democracy in America*, he has a chapter titled, "Why So Many Ambitious Men and So Little Lofty Ambition?" Thus, it becomes a socially reproduced mode of restraint within one's population.

MICHAEL: What about the inner demons that plague so many leaders? I'm thinking here of the work that Barbara Kellerman and others have done on the dark side of leadership. I looked at the news this early March morning and Putin has taken over the Crimea. I wonder, how much of ambition is from within, but from the damaged part that's within, the dark side of leadership?

MARK: Earlier you referenced Plato and the ancients and how they wanted us to be good boys and good girls, but even in Plato's view, the fears were that human nature is usually at the sorriest state. We really count very little on human nature because the passions are just so overpowering. Our confusion about what is good, that is, what it is that we want in life, tend to have this powerful way of overtaking our ability to be self-conscious, deliberate, restraining.

In this sense, I don't think that someone like Putin is this rotten apple from the KGB. He is a human being who becomes this person when he finally finds himself in the position where he has everything. He has all the levers of power, but has never, perhaps, contended with the tension between, say, justice and his passion for his own good. In that sense, I think the ancients are very helpful. They don't just tell us to mind our manners and be good. They show us that the powerful tension between justice, the common weal, and our own notion of what we think is good will always be there. It is an implicit aspect of what they discuss and what they wrote about.

In this sense, maybe we've gone off the rails because Machiavelli has released us of all those constraints. If we just paid attention to our very basic passions and did our best to control them, we could have pretty rational policy. But I don't necessarily know if Machiavelli is rationalized — and by Machiavelli, I mean Machiavelli and Hobbes. That's a very long answer, but this is such an interesting topic that you brought up.

MICHAEL: Thank you. Another aspect of your work that I know scholars and researchers in leadership studies will find fascinating is your critique of James MacGregor Burns. Burns has become almost iconic as a figure in the field. His notion of the distinction between transformative and transacting leadership has become, not quite the Holy Grail, but certainly central to the study of leadership. You take that on a little bit.

Tell us why you found his work less than persuasive.

MARK: I'll start with our affinity, which is that leadership can be something intentional. That is a breath of fresh air after reading so many political science theories that just try to bury the individual. I suppose my difficulty in reading and understanding Burns is that I understand that his interest lies in a general theory of leadership and I think that is a very difficult thing to do. Leadership is such a concrete thing and a general theory is such an abstract thing. In an attempt to create an abstract theory, his notion is that leadership is an agreement between followers and leaders. They are in this reciprocal relation and all parties benefit. I find it difficult to see that. It is not a necessary fact that an ambitious leader, who isn't by any means a bad leader, will find his satisfaction in the common weal or in his followers, so to speak.

Burns tries to reconcile this by saying that collectively they self-actualize. I have a problem with that notion. When I turned to Burns, I understood that he took many of his ideas from modern psychology, especially Abraham Maslow. Then, in researching Maslow, I realized that there was a very interesting importation of ideas from Friedrich Nietzsche, who is pretty much the sole originator of the idea of self-realization. In mapping the trajectory of the idea of self-actualization, I saw that Burns took all of — what we as contemporary people would call — the good aspects of the idea without necessarily paying attention to the aspects of the idea that deviate from what we now consider to be good leadership. In that sense, I think that his work is not quite a general theory of leadership so much as a theory that is contextualized to fit within a very modern context. So, while I find Burns convincing, he is not as convincing as I wish he would be.

MICHAEL: When I read your critique of Burns, which I found very powerfully argued, I saw your transformative ambition as almost another sub-category of his transforming leader. The two are linked together in that transforming leadership does, in a way, what you're saying transformative ambition does. They are both change agents. They both reconceptualize reality and they both impose a different kind of order on politics.

MARK: Yes, that's where I think we have agreement. Change depends upon a reworking of the reality of how human beings live and for him, and for me, it's the same thing — structural conditions, or the reality of politics, and the perception and imagination of power. I think what we disagree on is the

attributes that make something a good change and the character attributes that have to exist for a leader to be called a good leader. I might be wrong, but I think what Burns is implying is that transformative leaders are good leaders, but I'm not very convinced by the attributes of good leadership that he insists on. I don't necessarily think that those are, in and of themselves, what make a good leader good.

MICHAEL: Correct me if I'm wrong. You do not argue that the leader with transformative ambition is always a good leader.

MARK: Oh, no, not at all. That's the difficulty, I think, and that's one of my critiques of Burns. One of the theoretical difficulties I have with Burns, which I do reference in the book, is the attributes that he believes make up a good leader. These attributes are something like charisma, intelligence, inspiration — there may be others — and the ability to change the perception

of followers and lead them to self-realization. A leader could do just that in any number of situations that might lead to very dangerous circumstances. Think, for example, of the 20th century and the rise of ethnic nationalism. Because Burns won't commit to standards of justice — which would be the ability to look within a regime and say, "This is not healthy. This is not good. This is not just." — I think it is nearly impossible to ever claim which direction transformative

leadership is leading, good or bad. Although, in my work, I don't make the claim that transformative ambition is good, my approach allows one to see the excesses of transformative ambition arise, even within the example itself. It's a very fine distinction between Burns and I, but I think it's an important one.

MICHAEL: Yes, it is an important one. Let me turn away from Burns and toward someone you spend a lot of time writing about, Otto von Bismarck. Tell me why he was a leader of transformative ambition and how he exercised that power and that authority.

MARK: That's a difficult question. I just reread Bismarck again for this interview and let me start out by saying he baffles me. He baffled me when I was reading about him and writing about him. He's baffling because if we just look at outcomes, we can say he was a transformative leader in probably the most important proportions in the modern era. He absolutely changed the international order. He reordered Europe and he brought into being a diplomatic philosophical system called Realpolitik, which absolutely changed the rules of the day. Not only did he do this on the international level, he did this at the domestic

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level. He practiced Realpolitik internationally and he practiced Realpolitik domestically. The difficulty with Bismarck is it's very hard to get a precise sense of his ambition. It was not wedded to anything in particular.

A lot of authors argue that it was all in the national interests of state formation. But even the national interest is not something that is alive, easily perceived, and always available to our understanding. National interest has to be something defined, something interpreted, something articulated. In Bismarck's case the national interest was Prussia, making Prussia more powerful and more safe and more secure and more able to exert its influence. But, the odd thing about Bismarck is that it seemed that he didn't quite care about Prussia — and think about this in contrast to our discussion of the (U.S.) Founding Fathers. He didn't quite care about Prussia or Germany after he was gone. He left his successor a system that no one could follow. No one could pick up the threads and follow the Bismarckian system. So, Bismarck is this baffling figure in history because he is ambitious. He seems to be a moral relativist and at the same time is absolutely oriented towards action. His relativism doesn't lead him to inaction, but action in and of the greatest proportion.

MICHAEL: When I read your work on Bismarck I kept thinking back to Francis Bacon's essays where he tries to lay out a pyramid of greatness and also to Machiavelli, who has a similar type of assessment where the greatest leader is the one who does this or that. I, too, was baffled. Where would I put Bismarck in that? He seems to be an outlier of the outliers.

MARK: Yes. I absolutely agree with you. If one of these neo-structural realists really sat back and read Bismarck's life, I don't think they would necessarily come to the same conclusions they did when they were applying their realist models to him. He was a Kissinger. In *Diplomacy*, Kissinger touches on this. Kissinger was aware that he was a moral relativist. What is it that motivates someone who is not motivated, really, by the success or the long-term survival or prosperity or flourishing of their own country? It's absolutely baffling. To be honest, if I were to do this again, I would reread all of Bismarck's writings to try to get a glimpse of who he really was.

MICHAEL: Your connection of Bismarck to Kissinger is important, I think. As I was reading about Bismarck and listening to your response here I thought, it is almost as if, for Kissinger and for Bismarck, the motivation was a political version of the thrill of the hunt.

MARK: Yes.

MICHAEL: You do something because you can. There's a showy quality to that. "See, I did it." It was always that way with Kissinger because his ego seemed so intertwined with his public presentation of self, his own view of himself as a man who practiced the hard knock politics of Realpolitik because he could, because he was smarter than everybody else.

MARK: Right. I think that's absolutely correct. If you read Plato's *Republic*, Book I, this is what's behind the motivation of the famous character Thrasymachus. He is the Sophist par excellence who is completely unencumbered and unafraid to say that justice is the advantage of the stronger. What Socrates does in that exchange with Thrasymachus is to show that the real moral instinct behind someone like a Thrasymachus or a Kissinger or even a Bismarck is to show that, "I am, in fact, wiser than everybody else." There is this notion of moral superiority behind what they do and, as you said, their showiness. When looking at the complexity of ambition, you sometimes find that you have to open more doors to try to make sense of these historical figures. Perhaps they need theories unto themselves so that we can make sense of them.

MICHAEL: Let me turn, in the time we have, to another one of the historical figures that you write about and that is Pericles. Like Bismarck, Pericles was one of the monumental figures of his time. In what sense does Pericles model transformative ambition in terms of the change agent that he was for Athens?

MARK: I think he is my quintessential model not only because I've spent so much time with him, but also because I make use of the ideas of ancient thinkers and it was seemly that he was an ancient. He is closer to this notion that a transformative leader has great stores of ambition and seeks their own self-satisfaction in their political life while at the same time being able to reconcile that with public service.

The way that Pericles embodies this is that he was, in fact, a perfect product of his society. Athens was a glory-loving, imperial power. Its politics and cultural and social substance depended upon the rise of great individuals and its politics was not very systematic. They simply had so many competitive individuals that they continually had great individuals rise. The difference between Pericles and any other leader, it seems, was that he had absolute control over himself, probably because he was naturally gifted. He was educated philosophically and the strength of his oratory and persuasive speech over-powered any adversary.

Pericles makes his mark in this world because he understood the reality of this polity and rather than trying to restrain it, he pushed it to its limits. That is, he accelerated the rate of these attributes that made Athens a dynamic imperial power. In the

book, I think the interesting part is where I discuss his funeral oration in which he articulates these new moral attributes of the Athenian people, specifically the attribute called daring. If you read Aristotle's *Ethics*, courage is a virtue, but daring isn't. Pericles heightens this notion of daring to show that this epitomizes the Athenian spirit. At the same time, he wasn't blind. He was very much keen on the fact that there were tensions built into the Athenian culture and political system that in the latter half of the war play out in the worst way for Athens. Athens falls prey to civil discord, which leads them to lose the war against Sparta.

MICHAEL: As we approach the end of our time together, I want to jump ahead. I think you've answered the questions on Pericles carefully and thoroughly. Let's stay with the classics, though, as much of your work is grounded in that. You turn, in chapter five, to Aristotle and his idea of magnanimity. How do you understand magnanimity and its role in transformative ambition? And, why didn't you focus on *phronêsis*?

MARK: That's a good question. I put so much emphasis on magnanimity most specifically because I think it provides the contrast I was looking for in relation to modern theory. Although it is implicit in some theories and explicit in others, all theories in political science try to make a statement about the ambition of individuals. Moreover, when ambition is spoken about in the quotidian, everyday form, it is spoken of pejoratively, negatively. It's looked down upon. It's something that we want to control. For example, we don't want our young people to be too ambitious. The reason I focus on Aristotle and magnanimity is that it shows the possibility of a certain human type, who is both ambitious in the highest sense, and moral in the highest sense. It is this interesting soul, to use the classic sense of the word, that focuses on and shows an attempt, while not necessarily perfect, to reconcile the tension between the self-satisfaction of the most ambitious individual with the benefit to the polity. That's why it's focused on justice.

The problem with prudence plays out in the examples more so than my ability to make the sketch of the relationship between magnanimity, justice, and prudence. There is really no better answer than that, I just didn't have the room in the book. If I would have done just the case of Pericles and Aristotle, I think I would have gone through each virtue and better explained their interrelations. I definitely would have discussed prudence because in Aristotle's *Ethics*, the example of prudence is Pericles and, obviously, that would have been the most perfect connection.

MICHAEL: I find that *phronêsis*, or practical prudence, works well with the notion of transformative ambition because, while

it is not an antidote to it, it is a controlling factor. It sets up a framework in which the leader who practices *phronêsis* achieves the most you can achieve within the restraints of the context towards an admirable or worthy goal. In a way, it binds leaders to stay with reality and not get too far ahead of themselves.

MARK: Right. For the ancients, prudence is always wedded to a good that is outside of the circumstances of the time and thus also beyond the sort of self-referential goods of the individual. That encapsulates everything. I agree.

MICHAEL: In reading through your book, my thoughts kept coming back to William Shakespeare, partly because I'm currently teaching a course on Shakespeare's plays and politics. In some of the plays we're reading, they can be read almost side-by-side with your book. When you read *Julius Caesar*, for example, you see the devastating impact that different forms of ambition can have. All of the characters seemed, in one way or another, to have been destroyed by ambition. Then, you read *Richard III* and his ambition tends to haunt him. Coriolanus was ambitious, but his pride got in the way. Shakespeare seems to think that ambition is rarely controllable and almost always leads to downfall. Does that make sense in the context of your book?

MARK: That's a really good question. I would think that Shakespeare was very much in touch with the notion of how much the ancients placed on the power of the passions. It makes sense because how many Aristotelian leaders are there in any given time? In the 20th century there were maybe two, Charles de Gaulle and Churchill. What about everybody else? So, yeah, it's a volatile phenomenon in our human experience. I think Shakespeare absolutely understood that.

MICHAEL: On page 110, you write, "What is the character of the magnanimous man's ambition? Although he does not openly desire office, he believes that he is owed such things." There's Coriolanus, literally. It's a perfect fit.

MARK: That's right. In the character of the magnanimous man, part of his magnanimity is, to use an Aristotelian term, just contempt of others.

MICHAEL: Yes.

MARK: Even Aristotle doesn't quite make us feel comfortable in thinking that all we need is a magnanimous person to show up in the world and he or she will save us. There are individuals who do combine this odd tension between their own sense of honor and what the world around them looks like, but they may not be very friendly towards that world.

MICHAEL: In your work, you really do stress individual agency. I'm wondering if you don't do it a little too much. Let us consider for a moment the role of social movements. Or what's the role of technological development? What's the role of war in these dramatic changes? How much is individual agency and how much are other factors?

MARK: To give a proper explanation of any of these leaders, you would want to add a subsection on each of those. Specifically, in terms of social movements, I don't think social movements are antithetical to the idea of agency. I think they actually should be considered in their own way as part of the agency structure debate. What is a social movement? Is it structural or is it agency working? Just because it is a larger cooperative endeavor does not necessarily mean it's not agency. Agency doesn't necessarily mean the actions of one.

In some sense, agency can be a mirage, right? All these individuals are embedded in a system of relationships, in expectations and in aspirations of other human beings. There are so many moving parts. If you were to sketch them all out, I think agency would disappear in the very conceptual manner that we're talking about. To some extent, perhaps I'm not exaggerating agency so much as showing that if we don't see agency as an ideal type, to use a Weberian term, we wouldn't understand the way structures work.

I think we need the contrast. I think we need to show that there is a constant dilemma between individual or collective actions and the things that are already sort of predetermined, which we use as the rules that guide our behavior. I'll put it this way. I don't think they are separate concepts so much as ... This is an example I like to use with my students. Think about children's games. Children set the rules to the game. They play the game and then one of them has a fit and decides that he's going to change the rules. Thereafter the participating children simply change the rules of the game as they will. Although it's still the same game, they've absolutely and fundamentally redirected the way the game is played, the goals of the game, and the means towards the ends of the game. To put it very simply, to give credence to agency allows us to become, so to speak, naïve again and look at this common experience of individuals acting in the world in a way that a lot of theories have obfuscated making it difficult for us to see.

MICHAEL: You put a lot of stock in the power of transformative ambition. In the first paragraph of your conclusion, you write, "Leaders are the catalysts for change."

MARK: Yes.

MICHAEL: Let me reframe it a little. Tom Cronin has written very persuasively that change is a three-stage process. In stage one, something percolates up from the average citizens, who agitate, who want to get something done, who start to call attention to a problem. In stage two, certain community leaders start to take an interest in it and a kind of movement forms. Then, in stage three, that's when the leader gets involved. The leader comes in at the end of the process, rather than the beginning. You seem to be saying that the leader comes in at the beginning.

MARK: Yes, that is what I'm saying. I think when the leader gets involved would be highly dependent on the way social action takes place. "Leaders are the catalysts for change" is obviously an overarching statement, but coming at the end of the book I would tether it to my discussion of regime politics and how a particular regime's social action takes place through different forms. I would use Tom Cronin's thesis and I'd say it might perfectly apply to an American form of political action and social action, especially because most individuals associate before they perform an action in the first place. But, I don't think it's out of place to say that there are some individuals in different places and times in history where they make it their own responsibility to bring about a change. They don't respond to the agitation of the average citizen, but instead have to shake the average citizen into reacting in the way they want them to react. That's probably much harder, but I don't think it's impossible.

MICHAEL: You mentioned earlier that you sometimes take these ideas into the classroom. How have your students responded to the notion of transformative ambition? Do they get it? Is there pushback from them?

MARK: I never talk specifically about what I've written. I use it to illustrate either cases or political theorists' treatises to give students. What I've noticed with students is that, believe it or not, they are far more open to the idea that individuals matter than most academics are. I think it's a native understanding of who they are and how they understand themselves as mattering. But what they tend to lack—especially the ones I've come across—is the proper direction. Where should their ambitions be directed?

To use one example, I had pushback from a student who didn't like the moral dimensions of what he was reading in Plato and Aristotle. He liked Machiavelli. He liked Hobbes. It was relatable and he thought it was real. It wasn't until he read Plutarch with me that things shifted. It absolutely astounded me that he did a complete about-face. When we got to the section in which we read the chronicle of Alcibiades' career he came to

me and said, “You know, the thing about Alcibiades is, at the end of the day, you can’t beat him. There was nothing he aimed for that was outside of himself.” I was absolutely shocked. Three years earlier when I first had a conversation with him he had said, “The only thing that is important in life is winning at all costs.” And, not, he had had this realization. I try to allow students to come to their own understanding of what it is that they think is right. Perhaps if I teach my book, we’ll see what they think about my view of transformative ambition.

Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* is a wonderful model because it shows a greater range of human experience than students can imagine on their own. For example, a lot of history students take my classes. But I’ve noticed that even amongst the historians, they don’t get it. They look at historical figures, but they see them only within the confines of the modern everyday man, so to speak. You made this choice because, being utilitarian, you sacrificed A for B. They don’t necessarily stretch out these personalities and see that there’s a fuller depiction than that. Plutarch is helpful in that way. It’s concrete. There’s meat on the bones. I try my hardest not to teach the students to use an academic theory. Instead we use political theory — which I don’t really consider academic — and biographical sketches. Modern biographies also play a wonderful supplemental role when teaching.

MICHAEL: Let me endorse your commentary on Plutarch. I too have used his *Parallel Lives* and loved it as a pedagogical tool. It works magic in the classroom. It generates great discussion. It really forces students to make some choices. It just works. Let me conclude by thanking you for all you’ve contributed here. But let me ask you one final question. Say, I’m going to give this book to ten young scholars. What are the studies that they ought to be doing that are generated from your book? What questions remain that need to be asked? What are the vexing problems that the next generation of scholars can take from your book and really run with?

MARK: I think one thing that is absolutely needful is to just sit down and really think about the moral dimensions of political leadership and the ability to truly discern what constitutes a statesman in the good sense. I’ve been working on this idea for a long time and I still find it elusive. It’s very hard for us, for academics today, to get outside of the vantage point of where we are historically. By historically, I mean philosophically. I don’t necessarily know if we can come up with a generalizable theory of good statesmanship and bad statesmanship. My view is to wed theory to historical research and then, go as far back as possible. When you read Machiavelli, for example, you see the scope of his understanding was very much forged in his understanding of history. I think research theorists today see history as something that they can use to maybe further their

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claims, but that’s it. They don’t use the historical approach to get out of their own vantage point. So, exploring the moral dimensions of leadership.

On top of that, perhaps, we can actually define the set of skills that lead to the outcomes that we want in leadership as opposed to just calling it skill and looking backwards and saying, “Well, that person was very skillful.” This is probably my personal tension, but I want us to try to understand that outcomes — or what happened with the events and what might explain them — are not the only thing that matter in research. Too much time is spent wondering what is the independent variable and what is the dependent variable, or answering the question, “What is the phenomenon that is what you think is causing the change?” Don’t just model it and create an assumption because those tend to be very static and fail to explain anything. Instead, let’s ask, what is the complexity behind it? What are the philosophical, theoretical, and moral intricacies of the phenomenon that you are interested in? I think Aristotle is a guide in his *Ethics*, which is perhaps the most powerful phenomenology ever written. I think that’s just a starting point to your question.

MICHAEL: Mark Menaldo, Texas A&M International University, your book *Leadership and Transformative Ambition in International Relations* is deeply challenging to leadership studies, which is a good thing. It is complex, which is a good thing, and it forces us to reexamine some of our core assumptions about leadership. That is another good thing. Congratulations on your new book and congratulations on being the winner of the Fredric M. Jablin Doctoral Dissertation Award for its contributions to leadership studies back in 2011. Thank you very much for your time and for contributing to our understanding of the complexity of leadership.

MARK: Thank you, Michael, for reading the book with such serious care. The questions were wonderful. They made me think of many things I haven’t actually thought about, so I will definitely take those to heart.