**Three Styles of Leadership in Light of Karl Popper**

### **Abstract**

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This article examines three leadership styles according to Karl Popper’s structure, which distinguishes between the approaches of Socrates and Plato. These three leadership styles - Maimonides’s flexible leadership (MFL), Spinoza’s affective leadership (SAL), and servant leadership - correspond directly or indirectly with religious thought.

Although these three types of leadership are in dialogue with religious thought, this article’s significance is not only theoretical but practical; it allows us to ascertain the appropriate leadership style for any given organization in accordance with its values and goals. An organization with primarily dogmatic vision will gravitate towards MFL, which calls to mind Popper’s understanding of Plato. When the organization’s vision is dynamic and dialogic in essence, it will adopt SAL or servant leadership, which are closer to Popper’s Socrates. An organization’s attitude towards its vision largely determines its choice of leadership style and may help a specific organization to adapt its leadership style as needed.

# Introduction

The present article examines three different styles of leadership: Maimonides’s Flexible Leadership model (MFL), Spinoza’s Affective Leadership model (SAL), and Servant Leadership. These three leadership styles are analyzed according to the conceptual structure pioneered by Karl Popper (Kessler, 2021; Matthews, 2018; Kidd, 2018; Coope, 2019; Klagge, 2022), which distinguishes between the approaches of Socrates and Plato. The article investigates how the ultimate goal of each leadership style brings it closer to either Socrates or Plato. The three leadership styles exist on a continuum between Socrates and Plato, and serve as a kind of test case of the three elements.

Using the structure learned from Popper, the article will consider: How do each of the three leadership styles posit the relationship between the three primary elements of leadership: the leader, the mission, and the followers? What is the significance of the relationship according to each leadership style?

Although the present article, which expands on Popper’s model, is theoretical in nature, it has considerable practical potential. The proposed theory enables organizations with specific goals to adopt a certain leadership style based on their core values and vision. The range of leadership structures analyzed herein may help organizations to adapt structures to meet their specific needs.

# The Three Leadership Styles

The leadership style exemplified by Maimonides (MFL) has already been examined (Hoch & Bentolila 2021). There, it was posited that MFL involves adapting one’s method of leadership to complex, diverse, and changing situations and contexts. Below are the basic principles of the three leadership styles that we will examine later in the article according to the structure learned from Popper.

A flexible leader is able to influence a wide range of people (Hoch & Bentolila, 2021; Kaiser & Overfield, 2010; Jia et al., 2018).

Maimonides discussed this matter in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, asserting that the primary purpose of the Bible is to cultivate flexibility and delicacy. To this, Maimonides adds that one should not be stubborn and rude; rather, one should be responsive, obedient, comfortable with others, and flexible, repenting of evil deeds and correcting them

(*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3.33). The injunction to “walk in the ways of God” includes the cultivated personality of the individual – their ability to stand as a full human being before themselves, before others, and before their God (Harvey, 2021). According to Maimonides, one must bring one’s whole self to leadership, including one’s moral, intellectual, and religious qualities (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3.54; Altmann, 1972; Malach, 2021).

Near the end of the final chapter of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides provides a clear articulation of his ideal for leadership:

…the knowledge of God, the knowledge of His Providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge, he will then be determined always to seek lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of God. (Moses Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 3.54)

Maimonides’s ideal is the intellectual achievement of God, who is at the top of the hierarchy of reality. According to Maimonides, once one has come to understand God, he must behave towards others in accordance with the qualities attributed to God:

Just as He is called “Gracious,” you shall be gracious; just as He is called

“Merciful,” you shall be merciful; just as He is called “Holy,” you shall be holy (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Human Dispositions 1.6)

The ideal leader must imitate God in his leadership, relating to his followers with kindness, judgment, and charity.

Unlike the hierarchical paradigm, on which Maimonides bases his concept of leadership, the leadership style of Spinoza’s Affective Leadership (SAL) model is based on three distinct elements. SAL is non-hierarchical: It does not require obedience from its followers, and it emphasizes the mutual enjoyment of leaders and followers (Hoch, 2022; Munro & Thanem, 2018; Munro & Thanem, 2020). Contrary to views that emphasize the leader, depicting them as a perfected individual (Aksoy, 2021) who excels as a leader by virtue of their personality, Spinoza highlighted the benefits of shared decisions in a society of free and intelligent people who are capable of establishing their own laws (Steinberg, J. (2009). Spinoza on civil liberation. *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, *47*(1), 35-58. Lærke, M. (2021). *Spinoza and the Freedom of Philosophizing*. Oxford University Press, USA. Kisner, M. J. (2011). *Spinoza on human freedom: Reason, autonomy and the good life*. Cambridge University Press). Individual freedom, of which Spinoza is one of the great proponents, has moral and existential characteristics, but it is no less reflected in the political sphere; freedom in the political sense is based on a general partnership in decision-making (for Spinoza freedom is pursued as a life in accordance with reason, within a society that works for common benefits (see Ethics, 4, sentence 73; Steinberg, J. (2009). Spinoza on civil liberation. Journal of the History of Philosophy, 47(1), 35-58) Dumitrescu, 2018).

Spinoza’s leadership ideal, which is part of a broader metaphysical concept, is found

at the end of the second part of the *Ethics*:

Lastly, this doctrine confers no small advantage on the commonwealth; for it teaches how citizens should be governed and led, not so as to become slaves, but so that they may freely do whatsoever things are best. (Spinoza, *Ethics*, [II.4)](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3800/3800-h/3800-h.htm#chap02)

Spinoza understood effective leadership as occurring not through obedience or coercion, but through human partnership and maximal freedom.

Finally, servant leadership consists of the following attributes: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth, and building community (Spears, 1995). The main aspect that distinguishes servant leadership from other leadership styles is its prioritization of followers (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Servant leadership places the focus first on developing the ability of individuals to succeed and only then on the success of the task. Servant leaders help their followers achieve growth and success. Studies have shown this form of leadership to be effective and efficient (Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011).

The term “servant leadership” was coined by , in an article first published in 1970, “The Servant as Leader” (Jones, 2018; Greenleaf, 2002). The servant leader is first and foremost a servant and only then a leader. In Greenleaf’s words:

The servant-leader is servant first ... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first.

Greenleaf talks about two basic passions: one to serve, the other to lead. The servant leader is unique in that they long first and foremost to serve.

# Time, Place, and Leadership Style

In order to illuminate the approaches examined herein, it is worth considering the personal backgrounds and social contexts in which they were created. Born in Córdoba, Spain, Maimonides’s wanderings took him to Morocco, to the Land of Israel, and ultimately to Egypt. In Egypt he served as physician to Saladin’s deputy, the vizier al-Fadil, and later also to Saladin’s son. The social reality into which Maimonides was born was a hierarchical one in which the ruler exerted coercion upon his people (Kraemer, 2008). Maimonides possessed a rare ability to address a variety of individuals and communities, each with different intellectual abilities and needs, with sensitivity and understanding. Because of this, Maimonides’s Flexible Leadership model is inclusive and flexible, adaptable to the specific person or community under address. However, Maimonides’s world of concepts and his structure of thinking belong to the intellectual and political atmosphere of the Middle Ages. Thus, we must understand his path in light of his time.

Likewise, Spinoza, who was of Jewish origins, must be understood against the backdrop of the tolerance that prevailed in the Netherlands. Unlike Spain and Portugal, which in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries persecuted Jews because of their religion, the Netherlands was a place of refuge for Jews who could live as they wished. To a great extent, the liberal atmosphere of these surroundings constituted the breeding ground for Spinoza’s revolutionary ideas (Laerke, 2021; Spaans, 2021).

Robert K. Greenleaf lived and worked in the United States of America, and appears to have absorbed its values as formulated in the Declaration of Independence (Greenleaf mused about the influence of Thomas Jefferson and the Declaration of Independence in Greenleaf, R. K. (2008). The servant as leader. Greenleaf, R. K. (1997). Futurist lessons from Thomas Jefferson. The Futurist, 31(2), 68). America’s Declaration of Independence articulates the principles that all men are created equal and that a just government leadership derives its powers from the consent of the governed (Nakai, 2006). As such, Greenleaf was born into a relatively balanced atmosphere between leaders and followers, and a constant re-examination of power relations.

# Leadership in Light of Popper

The present article seeks to analyze the three leadership styles above in light of Popper’s distinction between Socratic and Platonic thinking. We will explore Popper’s potential contribution to the study of leadership, and especially the insights his model provides into the three leadership styles. It will be argued that the three leadership styles may be found on the continuum between Socrates and Plato as described by Popper.

An analysis of this kind raises the following questions:

In light of Popper’s characterization of Socrates and Plato, what are the elements of leadership present in, and the fundamental values of, each of the three leadership styles? According to each of the three leadership styles, who should lead and how? How does each leadership style relate to religion? For each leadership style, what is the central guiding value in the leadership triangle – i.e., is this form of leadership aimed towards the leader, the mission, or the followers?

An in-depth exploration of these questions may help to understand each leadership style in turn, and ultimately to build an adapted leadership style reflective of an organization's values, goals, and vision.

# Popper’s Philosophical Roots: Authoritarian Leadership and Liberal Leadership

In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Popper asked profound questions on the subject of leadership (Kamtekar, 2009): Who is the ideal leader? How should institutions be organized to prevent bad or failing leaders from doing too much damage?

Popper drew a distinction between Socrates and Plato. In his opinion, Socratic intellectualism was egalitarian, in the sense that any person – even a slave boy, as in *Meno* – was capable of perceiving abstract matters. Socrates’s intellectualism was anti-authoritarian, claiming that men could be brought gently to the truth, in the manner of a midwife, and need not be coerced. According to Popper, Plato, unlike Socrates, expressed uncompromising authority, encouraging indoctrination and the molding of thoughts, and voiced a fierce opposition to critical thinking. Plato’s ideal was the philosopher-king (Rist, 2022). For Popper, Socrates’s ideal was in sharp contrast to that of Plato.Socrates represented rational and humble individualism, while Plato represented the totalitarian leadership of a philosopher-leader who was a kind of demigod.

Socrates’s greatness was reflected in his honesty and intellectual modesty. He knew what he did not know; in other words, he was well aware of his limitations. By contrast, the philosopher-king, described by Plato as a human ideal and ultimate ruler, would see the world clearly in a bright light, and therefore could not be wrong – as opposed to ordinary people, who make mistakes and can only correct them in hindsight (Popper, 2020; Agundu & Ukange, 2020). Plato’s leaders were connected to the eternal ideas, which are above and beyond time, place, and changing reality.

For Plato, according to Popper’s reading, the perfect rulers should not be trusted to appear by chance and to lead without prior training. Rather, potential rulers should be cultivated through: indoctrination; the prevention or suppression of educational innovation (Saxi, 2018; Kovaci, 2021); legislation; censorship of the ruling class’s intellectual activity; and ongoing propaganda aimed at uniting members of the ruling class and shaping their opinions. Religion also had a function in Plato’s society; although it is only a human invention, it is a noble lie which may be exploited in the education of society.

Popper seems to have understood Socrates’s way as a method, or rather a dialogical method, expressed in a constant examination of arguments and the possibility of improving and correcting them. Plato’s way, however, was characterized as a doctrine – that is, a set of rigid, uncompromising assumptions that are considered perfect and do not need to be changed or improved.

In *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Popper suggested that rather than attempting to impersonate prophets, we should be the designers of our own destiny. We must learn to do things to the best of our ability and observe our mistakes. He concluded with the hope that one day we humans would be able to overcome the importance we attach to power and the exercise of power.

Through Popper’s distinction between the Socratic roots and Platonic roots of different human societal structures, we may identify the fundamental motivations and values of different leadership styles, thus enabling the pursuit of particular leadership styles relative to specific organizations’ own values.

# Who Should Lead, and How? Three Leadership Styles in the Spirit of Karl Popper

Popper’s structure, as described above, provides a framework with which to analyze the three leadership styles. While Popper researched political society on a macro level, the present article will use Popper’s tools to examine a more limited issue, albeit one with extensive implications.

Popper systematically investigated the foundations of political societies. He distinguished between an open and a closed society; he explored the motivations for adopting a radical ideology headed by totalitarian leadership, as well as the motivations underlying a liberal-democratic ideology (Kamtekar, 2009).

Through a careful examination of the complex foundations of human society, including the toxic temptation towards utopian ideas, he warned of the dangers inherent in a society that strove to be perfect and achieve perfection in its leaders. He also addressed the tensions between social ideology and the place of the individual – the individual’s freedom, and his ability to criticize and change himself and his environment.

This section will attempt to address the question of the ideal leader for each of the three leadership styles we have discussed, drawing on Popper’s thought.

Despite its pragmatism and its acceptance of followers’ diversity, MFL represents a hierarchical structure of leadership, in accordance with an overall worldview that maintains a hierarchical reality in which the lower is disciplined by the higher. In contrast, SAL represents a dialogic leadership structure that opposes hierarchy and obedience. In this leadership style, the leaders are the followers and the followers are the leaders; there is an equality between the leaders and the followers .

Servant leadership possesses a hierarchical structure, in the sense that one element is centered and is considered more important than the other element. However, the hierarchy is turned on its head: unusually for a leader-follower relationship, in servant leadership it is the followers and their desires which take center stage, while the leaders are mere instruments. The followers are at the top of the structure, while the leaders are below them. In servant leadership, as in SAL, there is trust and dialogue between the leaders and the followers; thus, this is not an authoritarian concept of leadership. The reverse hierarchy it upholds is a soft hierarchy, with more of a Socratic than Platonic character.

Given the above analysis, there are three structures. The first is a hierarchical structure, in which the leader determines and dictates the behavior of the followers. The second is an egalitarian structure, in which the leaders and followers are essentially one body. The third is hierarchical in that the followers decide how the leaders should behave; however, this hierarchy is expressed in a “soft” way, through dialogue and trust (Jeyaraj & Gandolfi, 2019).

The difference between servant leadership and SAL is that while servant leadership emerges from a hierarchical paradigm of leadership, which is itself derivative of a hierarchical paradigm of reality, SAL avoids a hierarchical concept of leadership entirely; its paradigm is non-hierarchical, maintaining the dismantling of differences between all parties involved. Inevitably, this difference in the basic paradigm affects the nature of the two leadership styles and the relationship between individuals.

It seems that SAL and servant leadership, despite the differences in their paradigmatic foundation, are both closer to Socrates, while MFL is the furthest of the three from Socrates and is most close to Plato.

By examining and characterizing the three leadership styles on the axis between Socrates and Plato, we may discover the prototypes of follower and leader relationships for each style, and apply these relationships to organizational leadership on a practical level.

# Religion and Leadership

Another prominent distinction between the three leadership styles has to do with their attitude toward religion. For each thinker, what role should religion play in the ideal society?

*Maimonides and Religion*

Maimonides decidedly did not hold an anthropocentric worldview, according to which one’s basic obligation is towards the human being, who is at the center of reality. Rather, Maimonides espoused a theocentric worldview, according to which God is at the center and constitutes the supreme importance and foundation of essences. Maimonides saw himself as a mediator between God and the people; however, his primary service was directed towards God, and his service to the people was secondary to this. This was a part of his conviction that any good one does for human beings receives its importance and value from God and His commandments (Diamond, 2006).

There can be little doubt that Maimonides was highly self-aware: He understood that he possessed considerable knowledge, and saw himself as tasked with the responsibility to convey this knowledge to human beings through a variety of media – religious laws and texts, philosophy, medicine, and public leadership. These many and extensive projects were fundamentally motivated by Maimonides’s religious mission. Maimonides’s religious premises, as well as his unique ability to communicate them to the masses, are reflected in his flexible leadership.

*Spinoza and Religion*

Spinoza used the language of religion, but in his case he did not promote a traditional religion; rather he referred to the “religion” of reason. This religion is not a ritual religion, headed by a founder who serves as a connection and bridge to God, but an internal religion related to man’s intellectual attainments (Tamimi, 2022). This religion does not belong to a particular people, but belongs in principle to every human being, wherever he may reside. Practitioners of this religion need not speak a certain language nor share a certain genetic affinity. No one is born into this religion; they have no external hallmarks. What they have in common is intellectual ability and commitment to reason (Sangiacomo, 2019). Spinoza’s unique religious worldview, which some call pantheism, is part of his overall understanding of reality (Mander, 2012; Melamed, 2018; Popejoy, 2019; Gilead, 2021). As such, in the matter of leadership, Spinoza can teach us about the unity and reciprocity between leaders and followers, who together form a single, mutual partnership.

*Between Maimonides and Spinoza*

Maimonides is not characterized by religious tolerance and pluralism, despite his flexibility in communicating with his followers. Accordingly, his view of leadership is authoritarian. By contrast, Spinoza was a pioneering advocate of religious tolerance and religious pluralism, which in his view constitute conditions for a proper social and human life (Green, 2015).

Spinoza’s religious message is universal, in the sense that it is relevant to all human beings. The great mission undertaken by Maimonides was to introduce philosophical reasoning into the life and thought of the Jewish religion, that is, to introduce (putatively) universal reason intoa religion which is *particular* in that it belongs to a specific people (Harvey, 2021). The attitude to religious worship, the fear of faith-philosophical mistakes, and a commitment to a specific target audience distinguish authoritarianism-theocracy as embodied by Maimonides. In contrast to Maimonides, Spinoza, who was among the promoters of universalism and pluralism, thought that society should avoid the interference and coercion of individual beliefs and opinions.

*Servant Leadership and Religion*

It has been argued that Servant Leadership can be found in a variety of religious and philosophical worldviews.

Zentner has pointed out similarities between servant leadership and the dominant values of eleven different religions. He claims that the most significant contributions shared by the religions and servant leadership are listening, stewardship, and empathy, followed by awareness, healing, and conceptualization (Zentner, 2015).

Wallace, however, sees the Judeo-Christian worldview particularly as sustaining servant leadership. For Wallace, servant leadership is not only a tool and a means of use, but a kind of archetype or ideal expressed in everyday interactions – it describes an essence, not merely a function (Wallace, 2007).

Shirin distinguishes between ideas arising from the Christian theology of Augustine and servant leadership in the modern sense, showing the fundamental differences between them. Thus, according to Shirin, unlike the modern business paradigm of servant leadership, an authentic Christian community is a community whose members serve each other not only in the sense of customer-oriented service, but in a comprehensive community commitment, both in and out of the workplace (Shirin, 2014).

*The Three Styles of Leadership and Religion*

One of the things the three leadership styles have in common is their correspondence with religion, in the broadest sense. Maimonides was a religious leader, in the clear sense that he represents religious orthodoxy. Spinoza created a kind of alternative religion to the established religions based on reason, brotherhood, and freedom of thought. Servant leadership, as shown above, is deeply connected to the commitment learned from the religious tradition.

*Popper’s Examination of Religion – Between Socratic and Platonic Foundations*

In *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Popper addresses the subject of religion through the philosophers Socrates and Plato. In Popper’s view, Socrates felt that both his conscience and his religious beliefs required him to reflect on every demand made by an external authority. By contrast, Plato’s attitude towards religion is primarily functional, serving as a source of inspiration for the creation and preservation of a stable society. Popper agrees with the claim that, historically speaking, all ethics are founded in religion. According to Popper, a religion may be founded on the idea of personal responsibility and freedom of conscience, as in Socrates’s understanding; however, it may reject any idea of freedom of conscience and personal responsibility, as in Plato’s understanding (Barzaghi & Corcó, 2016).

# The Three Elements of Leadership – Leaders, Mission, and Followers

The diverse leadership styles include three interlinked elements: the leaders, the mission, and the followers. The difference in each leadership style’s commitment to each of these elements largely gives rise to the significant differences between the leadership styles.

A simpler way to phrase the question is as follows: For each of the three styles, what is considered “holy”? From the answer to this question, it is possible to understand the means and the purpose of each style.

It should be noted that the three leadership styles discussed herein are similar, in that they focus on the mission and followers rather than on worship of the leaders. Even Plato’s philosopher-king also plays a role in social service, and is not merely worshipped.

Of the three leadership styles, MFL seems to represent a leader who knows in advance the direction in which he is going. In this style, the mission is holy. In SAL, there is no clear vision that exists from the beginning. The aim of the leadership takes shape as the followers and the leaders move together. This joint activity and design is holy for SAL. In servant leadership, the vision is not determined by the leader on the basis of a previous vision; rather, the followers shape the vision, and the leader is responsible for its realization.

The mission of leadership always stands within the framework of relations between leaders and followers. In MFL, the leader is dominant, while in SAL, the leader holds a much less dominant position; in servant leadership, the followers are dominant.

An organization that has a primarily dogmatic vision or mission, like MFL, is closer to Popper’s understanding of Plato, while when the vision is dynamic and dialogic in essence, as in SAL and servant leadership, it is closer to Popper’s understanding of Socrates.

The three leadership styles’ relationships to the three elements – leader, followers, and missions – can be applied in different ways in different organizations, according to the goal and vision of each organization.

# Maimonides Between Socrates and Plato

Is Maimonides closer to the way Popper presents Socrates or to the way he presents Plato? In the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides appears to draw on the method of Socrates.

Like Socrates, who taught his students by encouraging them to speak and acting as a

“midwife” for their thoughts, Maimonides instructs the reader to study his book using the “turn the chapters on each other” method – active learning in which the reader cross references information between chapters of the book. Moreover, the study of truth as a Socratic ideal, accompanied by skepticism and perpetual self-criticism, is reflected in the introduction to the third part of the *Guide for the Perplexed*, in which Maimonides states the possibility that his interpretation of the Ma'aseh Merkabah (Work of the Chariot), a mystical episode that constitutes the culmination of philosophical-religious consciousness, is quite different from what it really is.

The Platonic side of Maimonides is expressed in his monumental composition *Mishneh Torah*, a compendium of Jewish law (halacha) that does not permit deviation, including in matters of belief and opinion. This attempt to dictate the reader’s opinions and behavior is similar to Popper’s characterization of Plato.

While in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides exhorts the student to show intellectual activity, flexibility, and open-mindedness, and expresses doubt about his own interpretations, in the *Mishneh Torah* Maimonides demands absolute obedience and commitment. In this, he may be said to resemble Plato.

In general, it may be said that Maimonides has two obligations. One is towards reason, in which respect Maimonides acts as Socrates. The second is the commitment to the Scriptures and the religious establishment, in which respect Maimonides acts as Plato.

# Spinoza Between Socrates and Plato

Spinoza aspired to reach the absolute truth and not a relative truth that changes in the context of time and place. Absolute truth is no longer an opinion; it is binding on one’s consciousness. One might expect a thinker who holds a firm conception of truth to oppose free thought, which is essentially changeable, and to prefer absolute rule in matters of politics and society. Thus, it may come as a surprise that Spinoza upholds liberalism and freedom of thought. In this, he is an appropriate representation of Socrates, as understood by Popper.

Spinoza’s objection to institutional religion wasexpressed as early as the preface of Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*. There, he states that fear of God and religion despise reason and reject rational thinking. Furthermore, since service in the church is considered a great honor and is a ready source of income, many corrupt and greedy people are tempted to serve in the sanctuary.

In the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Spinoza’s aim is to reexamine the Scriptures freely and without prejudice. Like Popper’s Socrates, Spinoza’s commitment is to reason. Spinoza, like Socrates, is anti-authoritarian. He prefers human reason and the freedom of the individual to authority and coercion.

Indeed, Popper himself describes Spinoza with a profoundly Socratic idiom. Popper emphasizes that Spinoza’s main concern was freedom of thought; he taught that no ruler could “rape” the thoughts of human beings, as thoughts are free. Any attempt to overrule free thought is tyranny. He based his support for the power of the secular state on this doctrine (Popper, 2003, p. 718). In this way, Spinoza is close to Popper’s Socrates, not Popper’s Plato.

# Maimonides and Spinoza – Between Human Wholeness, Freedom of Thought, and Worthy Leadership

Maimonides proposed a philosophical method that aimed to instill human beings with the religious and intellectual potential to reach perfection. Spinoza proposes a philosophical method for achieving human perfection and attaining freedom. According to Spinoza, the free person is an active person who lives according to reason and with an awareness of his self-determination and his uniqueness in reality – his “conatus.” This person is able to see the larger picture of reality, which consists of infinite parts (Carriero, 2011; Aksoy, 2021).

In contrast to Maimonides, according to which the perfect person should lead the way for his followers and even determine their beliefs and opinions, Spinoza advocates the freedom of the individual and non-interference in his beliefs and opinions (Hoch, 2022). Maimonides’s leadership is not characterized by religious tolerance or pluralism when it comes to the truth of beliefs and opinions. Spinoza, however, sees the importance of choosing between beliefs and opinions, as well as partnership and reciprocity between leaders and followers.

Maimonides led to far-reaching changes within an existing religion. His ambition was to bring the Jewish religion closer to the religion of pure reason, that is, to philosophical thought. Much of Maimonides’s writing is addressed to the general Jewish public, most of whom are unfamiliar with philosophical thought. Maimonides’s main motivation was to bring about, at least in the first stage, the recognition and adoption of philosophical truths, which he believed to be religious truths. His ambition was that the common people would also embrace philosophical truths, transcending the ritualistic aspects of religion in order to achieve intellectual virtues. By contrast, Spinoza created an alternative to the existing religions, which were based on the revelation of God in history. His ambition was to present a clear intellectual alternative to beliefs that are not based on reason, and, in principle, he appealed to every human being. One of his fundamental philosophical ambitions was to increase freedom and liberal thought.

**Servant Leadership Between Socrates and Plato – Does Servant Leadership Really Serve Followers First and Foremost?**

Servant leadership is dialogic in the Socratic sense. It maintains a channel of communication between the leader and the followers, which alerts the leader to the true needs of the followers. Dialogue is possible when two sides face each other – the side of the leader and the side of the follower. The leader’s side exists by virtue of certain values, some of which are drawn from values found in religious sources.

Does servant leadership really favor the followers over the mission? An argument that reduces servant leadership to the leader’s attempt to respond to his followers eliminates the idea of leadership entirely, making the leader a follower of his followers and not their leader. The thing that may make a servant leader a leader, and not only a follower of his followers, is a higher external validity. The leader has access to a sublime idea or aim, and his role is to mediate it for his followers. A leader leads his followers to a higher goal than they can achieve without him; for this to happen, there must first be a goal. Hence, the goal is the most important thing, while the leader and followers are the tools through which the sublime goal is realized.

If the main and only motivation of a servant leader is to serve his followers, then they will also set the ultimate goals. What if the followers choose their goals badly? Will he still follow them, or will he lead them somewhere else? Is a servant leader led by his followers like a shepherd walking after his flock, or does he lead the flock? If he leads them somewhere else, according to what principles does he lead them? If the leader is guided by external principles, then these principles are a value that precedes the followers. As such, is servant leadership not actually a kind of camouflage for leadership that operates under the auspices of another ideology, in which servant leadership is merely the tool to realize that ideology?

In order to answer these questions, we must go back and refer to the relationship between servant leadership and religion.

As I have shown, there is a connection between servant leadership and religion. However, if the fundamental nature of the religious mission is more important than the followers, then how is it possible that servant leadership puts the followers before the mission? The answer may be that, while servant leadership is religiously oriented and adopts some religious values, it cannot be said that servant leadership is religious leadership. Servant leadership draws on religious elements that correspond to its values; still, religion is a tool to help achieve the desired leadership, and not an end in itself.

The tools derived by servant leadership from religion enable servant leadership to stand up to its followers when necessary. These values delineate the limits and the framework of activity designed to serve the followers.

The religious or pseudo-religious values that accompany servant leadership allow the leader to serve the followers without serving malicious ideas. Servant leadership strives to do good for its followers. The values on which the doing of good is based are directly and indirectly related to religion, and with them comes servant leadership towards the followers.

# Between Maimonides and Servant Leadership

Maimonides acted in accordance with what he saw as a divine mission. He understood himself as a leader who taught his followers the obligatory commandments of God so that they might obey these commandments. It can be argued that Maimonides’s ultimate goal was the service of God – to act as the mediator between God and his followers. While the followers are indeed important, God and His commandments are the supreme power and must be obeyed. A servant leader, on the other hand, does not pretend to determine for his followers what is right for them. At least in principle, he serves strictly as a messenger on behalf of the followers, without attempting to subject them to a higher aim.

# Between Spinoza and Servant Leadership

SAL is based on three elements: non-hierarchical leadership, suspicion of demands for obedience, and joyful encounters. Neither SAL nor servant leadership are based on obedience, and it may be assumed that servant leadership, like SAL, features positive interactions between leaders and followers. SAL leadership has far fewer religious or sublime elements than servant leadership, which, while it is meant to serve its followers, does so intentionally, so to speak, from an external source. SAL stems from the joint decision of leader and followers to work together for mutual benefit. Their action is an expression of the parties’ will, not of a factor outside reality. SAL essentially operates through “secular joyful encounters” – mutual, satisfying encounters between the leader and the followers, performed for their own sake and not for the sake of an external ideal.

# Socrates, Plato, and the Three Leadership Styles

Socrates, in Popper’s view, represents dialogue. Of the three leadership styles, SAL is the more dialogical style, i.e., more Socratic, while MFL is the style most built on hierarchy and obedience and thus closest to Plato.

Servant leadership shows dialogical-Socratic characteristics in the interactions between the leader and the followers. The leader’s constant attempt to clarify the needs and desires of the followers produces a dialogue. In this leadership style, the power of the followers is so great that the followers are seen as the leaders, while the leaders are seen as the followers.

That is, equality is ostensibly discarded in favor of the followers.

The encounter of servant leadership with religion may create a tension of commitments. On the one hand, the leader is committed to the followers and their desires, and on the other hand, the leader’s commitment stems only from the fact that the followers are God’s creations, and therefore the leader must serve them. This tension may become manifest when followers attempt to achieve goals contrary to the laws of religion.

In this way, while servant leadership informed by religion is dialogical-Socratic, it has a Platonic complex in that it has certain external, exalted elements that place limits on leadership and moral activity.

# Conclusions

This article has examined three leadership styles according to the structure learned from Popper, who distinguishes between Socrates and Plato. The three leadership styles correspond directly or indirectly with religion.

I took into account three key elements of leadership – the leader, the mission, and the followers – and examined how each style prioritizes these elements, as well as the significance and consequences of this prioritization.

For Popper, Socrates represents egalitarian intellectualism, in the sense that every person is considered capable of understanding even abstract matters. Socrates is characterized by anti-authoritarianism, modesty, and tolerance, while Plato represents authoritarianism, indoctrination, and opposition to critical thinking.

In accordance with their overall worldviews, MFL represents a distinct hierarchical structure of leadership, while SAL represents an egalitarian and non-hierarchical structure of reality, and accordingly a dialogic leadership that opposes hierarchy and obedience.

Servant leadership has an inverted hierarchical structure; the followers are at the top of the structure, while the leaders are subordinate to them. However, this hierarchical structure is characterized by dialogue, trust, and gentle leadership. It seems that despite their disparate paradigmatic foundations, SAL and servant leadership are closer to

Socrates, while MFL is the furthest of the three from Socrates and largely close to Plato.

Maimonides’s motivation to lead was a product of his religious mission, which was in large part addressed to a particular people. By contrast, the so-called religious motivation of Spinoza was his commitment to reason and his appeal to all of humanity – a distinctly universal concept. The motivation of servant leadership is the commitment to serve one’s followers.

Maimonides was committed to both reason and religious tradition. His commitment to reason, as shown in the *Guide to the Perplexed*, evinces a Socratic attitude of doubt and intellectual humility. In the *Mishneh Torah*, however, Maimonides expresses an unwavering commitment to Scripture and the religious establishment. Here, Maimonides may be said to behave like Plato. Maimonides is also similar to Plato in that he is an esoteric teacher – he believes that deep philosophical knowledge should not be published for the masses of the people, but should rather be reserved for singular, virtuous individuals.

Spinoza is a rationalist and anti-authoritarian. His commitment is to the individual and his freedom and against authority and coercion. In this way, his approach resembles that of Socrates.

Servant leadership is dialogic in the Socratic sense. Unlike SAL, however, the language and paradigm of servant leadership is hierarchical. Although the status of the leader and the followers is inverted in this hierarchy, it still maintains a dichotomy of higher and lower importance between them.

In sum, Maimonides espouses a hierarchical concept of leadership committed to the supreme task; Spinoza has an egalitarian concept of leadership in which leaders and followers are intertwined; servant leadership involves a commitment between leaders and followers, but there is still a hierarchical structure, albeit an inverted hierarchy.

To adapt a leadership style to an organization, we must understand the ultimate goal from which the organization’s actions are derived. Different organizations have different values; therefore, an adapted leadership style must take into account the value prioritized by the organization. Maimonides’s supreme value is the mission, and thus he is similar to Plato as understood by Popper. Spinoza’s supreme value is equality through dialogue, and in that sense he is close to Socrates. The supreme value of servant leadership is the followers. There is a dialogue between the leaders and the followers, although less than in Spinoza’s model of leadership. Likewise, there is a hierarchical order, albeit reversed, in the structure of servant leadership; however, it is less fixed and dominant than that of

Maimonides or Popper’s Plato.

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