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# Reflections on Character and Leadership: On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries

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updates and expands here his original 1997 publication, tackling issues that have emerged in the last decade. This revised work retains the extraordinary merits of the earlier. The author brings wonderful clarity of logic and presentation to what, in other hands, is often a confused mess of unconnected arguments, claims, counterarguments, and counterclaims. Graham offers his presentation without disparaging or giving short shrift to anyone, exploring realist, various moralist, and what he terms “Legalist” traditions of international ethics, the assumptions and reasoning built into them, the criticisms that have been leveled against them, and possible responses to these criticisms.

Graham himself is neither, on the one hand, utopian nor, on the other hand, dismissive of ethical concerns. In the “Legalist” tradition, Graham stresses the moral disanalogies between states and individuals (a difference that “Moralist” approaches often regard as unimportant), argues the need to consider both natural law and the law of nations in wrestling with international ethics, and uses the just-war theory as a logical starting place for consideration of other interventions. Graham is candid and thoughtful about the problems of such an approach, as well as about the strengths of alternatives.

While this volume is a tightly integrated whole, it is organized into what are essentially eight separate, carefully organized, and self-contained twenty-five-page lectures. Beginning with the rise of the state system and of the nation-state, Graham investigates the ethical assumptions built into this political framework and the challenges inherent in such an organization of political life. He explores just-war theory and

considers the ethical problems associated with weapons of mass destruction before turning to the issues that have increasingly dominated the international agenda of the post–Cold War period.

Among the joys of this wonderfully erudite but never overwhelming or condescending volume is Graham’s capacity to explain, without going off on tangents, many of the concepts and distinctions—from the differences between power and authority and between force and violence to the logic of the principle of double effect—that, left unexplained, befuddle so many analyses and discussions.

Readers are likely to realize many “aha!” moments as all sorts of nonsensical arguments suddenly make sense. Surprisingly, given the weightiness of the topic, this is a book that is difficult to put down and an important book to pick up.

EDWARD RHODES  
*Rutgers University*



Kets de Vries, Manfred F. R. *Reflections on Character and Leadership: On the Couch with Manfred Kets de Vries*. New York: Wiley, 2009. 332pp. \$29.95

*Reflections on Character and Leadership* is not your typical book on leadership. It delves into aspects that are often neglected in both the classroom and professional press. How often do we focus on the leader who is dysfunctional and on what drives the destructiveness?

This is what Manfred Kets de Vries has set out to do. An engaging writer and scholar with a penchant for practical workplace applications, Kets de Vries

has taught at Harvard and is currently the Clinical Professor of Leadership at INSEAD in Paris, one of the world's leading and largest business schools. His background in economics, psychoanalysis, and organization research gives a holistic perspective to the material, including his recommendations for intervention.

The author opens by describing troubled entrepreneurs and analyzing the psychology of dysfunctional leaders. The examples are vivid and instructive. As individuals gain recognition, authority, and power, eventually they arrive at a fork in the road. One path commits them to serve for the greater good, while the other leads down the dark lane of hubris and malevolence. Kets de Vries then discusses how this choice can affect organizations and proposes possible remedial actions.

One reason the "dark side" of leadership is underrepresented in literature is that the genesis of a pathology is not readily assessable. Research cannot directly validate the developmental or emotional voids that lead to paradoxical behavior in the executive ranks. Unfortunately, organizations often reward personality defects and encourage the wrong role models. For example, while charismatic aggressiveness is often viewed as a positive leadership trait, it can also be compensatory cover for insecurity or paranoia, for which the organization will pay a price.

Kets de Vries draws on his clinical and psychoanalytic research to identify these pathologies and their consequences, which are frequently substantial. Arrogance, power, and a tendency to distort reality can result in oppressive micromanagement, a toxic

workplace, and insidiously faulty decisions. In this day and age, we do not have to look far to find examples.

When confronted with pathological leadership, followers have three options: flight, fight, or dependency. The author discusses the strong symbiotic dynamics between a corrosive leader and dependent followers. Subconscious identification with such a leader gives followers the illusion of control, protection, and purpose. It is a regressive way for followers to cope with anxiety and fear, and it is fertile ground for ideological manipulation.

The book concludes with a discussion of transformational leadership and the challenges confronting global organizations. Here Kets de Vries brings to bear his international leadership-forum experience, stressing the necessity of interpersonal and cultural acumen and of appropriate organizational structures. This section contains an intriguing analysis of how Russian leadership behavior and thinking has been influenced by that nation's unique culture.

*Reflections on Character and Leadership* is the first of a planned three-volume series. It suffers from a few irritants that haunt collected works, such as dated material, repetition, and unevenness. However, the convenience and enjoyment of reading a range of material from this influential and gifted writer more than compensate for any transgressions.

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