

English 2018 Paper One Section II Q4: Write a discursive essay in which you consider the subjects of leaders and leadership

If I opened this essay by telling you, the reader, to stand up and do a task, you would likely refuse. After all, why should you follow what an anonymous writer somewhere in the country asks you to do? However, if I were a leader, with some vested authority, possibly voted upon by you, would you be more or less likely to follow my request - and why? This essay will look at this, at the concept of leadership and why we have leaders as a society. It will examine the qualities of a good leader, question whether we need leaders in the first place, and finally what exactly the future of leadership looks like. By the end, perhaps you will have a different answer to how you might behave in the face of leadership.

Firstly, we must examine what exactly leadership constitutes. This is a concept which can mean something different to everyone, depending on their background, geographical location, age or a number of other factors. In general, it is taken to refer to someone who coordinates or commands a group of people- at any level. This could extend from a local GAA club leader, to the Taoiseach, to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Leaders are the people who we put our trust in, or who perhaps our trust is vested into on behalf of us. It's difficult to find a single person in society who isn't or hasn't ever been in a structure with a leader, or in a leadership position themselves. In recent times, we've seen a heavy focus on leadership and related programmes particularly for young people. It's becoming an increasingly present phenomenon, and one in which 'leadership skills' are valued in the workplace. Within this context, we can understand the role leaders play in how we come together as human beings, and why they can often be so central to the manner in which we interact with one another.

This understanding of what leadership is, links into the question: why do we have leaders? Why do we give up a certain amount of liberty over our individual lives and choices to someone else? This is a question which many writers and thinkers over the centuries have attempted to answer, and it is one which is central to the discussion of the subject of leadership. There's an argument that perhaps it is natural

instinct. If we look to the Hobbesian model of the 'State of Nature', humans without leaders- particularly strong government- live a life that is 'nasty, brutish and short'. This line of thinking suggests that without leaders our lives would descend into chaos, without regard for one another or any protection for our safety, let alone our liberty. Another possible argument is that leadership aids in coordination, whether that be policy, local projects, international treaties, or anything else we come together as groups to accomplish. Leaders can ensure work is completed, that people have tasks, that work doesn't get left to 'someone else' to accomplish. From my perspective, we often have leaders for that reason, to coordinate us, to offer us a sense of security, and to allow us to coordinate as a society to move away from that 'State of Nature' and towards an advanced and cohesive society.

Within this framework of what leadership is and why we have leaders, what should leaders look like? The first key quality which is essential for an effective leader is the ability to help and uplift those whom they lead. A leader who puts down those in their community, who refuses to share the workload or opportunities, and who dictates rather than consults may find it difficult to be successful in the long-run. Of course, many have tried this style of leadership but history tends not to look fondly on leaders who choose this route. Rather, a successful leader is one who is able to delegate, who provides opportunity and inspiration to their community. A leader must prioritise the wellbeing of those who they lead above their own personal enrichment or success. This can be rare to find in leaders, particularly when one sees the frequent abuses of power across the world at every level. However, leadership in its purest form must possess this trait in order to better the community and fulfill the role of leadership as one which betters the lives of those led by it.

Alongside this, those who lead must be driven by a common vision of the community. They must represent and work for a vision shared by the people for a common good in both the present and future. This is of course not to say they cannot make unpopular decisions, oftentimes leadership requires decisive actions which may be polarising. Despite this, as a whole, leaders must always work with a vision of the community and the future they want their work to achieve, rather than insular, polarising policies that commit only to one sector of society. This may not be always appreciated at the time, but a leader must follow their conscience, rather than bow to pressure groups which may work against the interests of the community at large. A prime example of this can perhaps be found in Jimmy Carter. A US President who is often forgotten, but whose legacy is coming to the forefront in recent years. The only administration

to not drop a single bomb in four years since WWII, his energy policy was revolutionary for its time in relation to climate action. In spite of this, he faced pushback from Congress and interest groups as he stood against corruption and the traditional backroom deals in which the Democratic Party was involved in that period. Carter often came with a vision of the country he wanted to create, looking long-term with people at the forefront rather than the aforementioned lobbyists. This is not to say he was a faultless leader as no one can be, but rather that he worked with that vision that is central to good leadership.

From this, we can gain insight into the meaning of leadership and the desirable traits of a leader. However, when examining these questions, we must also ask: do we need leaders? While leaders may seem a given to us in modern Western society, this hasn't always been the case everywhere in the world. In fact, today, there are many that argue against leadership in its standard form, and instead ask us to challenge how we view and interact with the concept.

There are many arguments in favour of leadership and the hierarchical structure which denotes so many aspects of our society: from workplaces, to schools, to politics. To harken back to Hobbes, without it we may descend into a state of chaos. Many would argue that there is a natural instinct in us to organise into structured communities led by someone chosen by us, or in previous centuries, appointed by Divine Right. It can be said that leadership allows for greater economic efficiency, for example a factory run with a manager, a foreman, and workers will most likely have greater output than everyone producing individually at their own behest. Representative democracy, in which we elect leaders to make our policies, is a cornerstone of our institutions locally, nationally and internationally. For all of these reasons, many would struggle to imagine how society would function without leadership, let alone thrive.

Yet, alongside these arguments, there is also a case presented for a flatter, non-hierarchical structure of society or communities. Those who support this may argue that communities should run themselves, with pure and direct democracy and decision-making. They may point to the fact that many of the first human societies were egalitarian in this respect- although those in the opposing camp may argue that as human society developed this structure fell out of favour. Many organisations are moving to a 'flat' structure, in which there are no appointed leaders and decisions are made as a community by consensus or consent. A key example of this is the youth-led Fridays For Future movement, which has no leader at any level. Many activist groups function in this manner, and while it may be less efficient, it can lead to greater

innovation and collaboration as a community. Those who oppose traditional capitalist structures may argue that our current leadership structures, particularly those in the workplace, perpetuate structures of inequality without true room for meritocracies to emerge. As such, there is also a compelling argument to reevaluate our relationship with leadership, and if it is truly the most effective manner in which to structure our relationships with one another.

All of this leads us to examine what exactly the future of leadership will look like. This, fundamentally, depends on us and the kind of societies in which we wish to live. Do we prefer stricter, more efficient communities? Or would we rather engage directly and work as a communal group? This is different for all of us and every country depending on which perspective we are coming from. To one person, the answer lies in leaders who have minimal power over our lives, looking after only our security and we are free to make individual choices- such as the libertarian model proposed by Robert Nozick. To another, we need strong leaders to deliver opportunities in which we can thrive. At its root, it is up to us to reevaluate how we lead our societies. We must address the faults in our current structures of leadership that leave it open to abuse and corruption, particularly in politics. Leadership will, to some extent, always be a feature of our society. However, it is an aspect which has evolved consistently ever since human society emerged- from tribal leaders, to monarchs, to dictators, to presidents. As we imagine the future of leadership, we must also understand the past, and work to deliver a world in which we and our leaders work to improve opportunities for all.

In conclusion, leadership is a complex concept and one which has dominated human philosophy and society for centuries. It involves coordinating groups of people together, for various purposes at every level. There are many attempted explanations for why we have leaders, ranging from protecting us from harm, to allowing us to develop and coordinate. It is crucial that leaders possess the ability to uplift the community, and work with a vision of a common good. It is also essential that we question the need for leaders, and whether they fit every societal model. We must examine and understand the varying perspectives that come with this question, and decide for ourselves which model fits our community best. The future of leadership is still to be written, and it is within the context that we must take the lead and write it.

