

POLITICAL CHARISMA AND LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

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To the extent that it still exists, the study of political charisma suffers from two major problems: the conceptual ambiguity and vagueness surrounding the concept, and the uneasy relationship between charismatic leadership and liberal democracy.

The scale of the first problem becomes evident from the indiscriminate use of the term in everyday parlance. Ever since “charisma” entered through journalism into public discourse, it became loaded with countless unnecessary and misleading connotations.¹ It is no wonder then that, in the face of growing conceptual confusion, and while many authors have at various times tried to elucidate the notion of charisma, others have proposed to drop it from our epistemological vocabulary. For instance, if accepting, as Schweitzer (1974: 150) does, that the concept is “either overextended or useless for empirical research,” one may also concur with the remark that “it is by no means clear that ‘charismatic leader’ is a meaningful analytical distinction” (Ake 1966: 4). Why, then, not altogether dispose with the concept as a fuzzy and useless one? Friedrich (1961: 23) has already declared that in our modern world “charismatic leadership is of minor importance simply because the faith in a transcendent being is not sufficiently strong or general to provide an adequate basis for legitimizing any political leadership.” He, in fact, went so far as to claim that “Weber’s typology [of legitimate authority] is basically unsound and should be discarded” (Friedrich 1961: 16). Even more conclusive is Spinrad (1991: 310): “Perhaps the total elimination of the charisma concept in serious discussions would be salutary. In any case, its disappearance in analyses of large-scale political phenomena would seem to be beneficial.” Daniel Bell, obviously feeling guilty for popularizing the term, also recommends dropping it for, as he explains, “[p]eople don’t know what it means. Sociologists don’t know what it means. Even the Greeks don’t use it any more; and it was their word” (cited in Lingeman 1968).

The second major problem with charisma concerns its uneasy, and suspicious, coexistence with democratic politics. In our contemporary thinking, liberal mass democracy and charismatic leadership are odd bedfellows. For this reason, when not altogether dismissed as a pre-democratic phenomenon, political charisma is reproached as a pathological one that complicates democracy and jeopardizes its

¹ Rather ironically, “charisma” was introduced into journalism as early as 1947 by Columbia sociology professor Daniel Bell. In an anecdote related by himself, Bell was at that time working for *Fortune* as an anonymous staff writer and used the word, despite his executive editor’s wish, in an article about John L. Lewis. “The great scavenger, of course, [was] Time magazine. Nobody there knew the meaning of the word, but one of their editors spotted it in *Fortune* and since Time, at that time, had a guidebook rule that one esoteric word a week had to be introduced into the magazine to annoy the reader, they chose charisma and rode it to a fare-thee-well” (Bell in Lingeman 1968).

function. The dismissive view has been characteristically expressed by Karl Loewenstein (1966: 86) proclaiming that charisma “in politics is a phenomenon of the pre-Cartesian world.” In that traditional world, where life “is permeated by charismatic manifestations” (Shils 1958: 3), “[t]he nexus between leader and followers is assumed to be essentially nonrational” (Spinrad 1991: 296; similarly, Bensman and Givant 1975: 610). The reproachful view points to the “antinomic balance of charismatic movements (leaders and ideas) with rational routinization (enduring institutions and material interests)” (Gerth and Mills 1946: 55), and associates political charisma with plebiscitary and caesarism-inclined leaders who are likely to lead democracy to an authoritarian and populist direction.² Here is why, at least to the reckoning of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., “we ought not to apply the notion of charisma to leaders in a democracy” (cited in Willner 1984: 12).

Most of the blame for both the conceptual morass surrounding charisma and the persistence of views emphasizing its dubious coexistence with democracy must, no doubt, be attributed to Max Weber himself for not having treated charisma (and its relationship with democracy) in a consistent and conceptually unequivocal way. “Weber’s writings on charisma,” an author remarks, “are typically Weberian. They are suggestive, elusive, brilliant, and fragmentary” (Smith 2000: 42). Despite an early infatuation with charisma in his writings on the sociology of religion and law (Weber 1993), he later systematically refrained from exploring the relationship between charismatic leadership and democratic institutions.³ In his more mature political writings, Weber became skeptical about charisma, stressed its irrational character, and practically reduced charismatic leadership to the plebiscitary power of democratically elected demagogues. He also became a firm believer of the idea that “the ‘decline of charisma’ was a major historical tendency” (Bendix 1977: 326).

Yet, as this paper is going to contend, charisma is neither to be dismissed as a non-rational oddity of the past nor to be reproached as a force inimical to democracy. Rather than being eclipsed by normal politics, political charisma is still alive and well.⁴ To some, it is even desired (e.g., *The Economist* 2005; 2006). This realization calls for revisiting charisma, and attempting a fresh theoretical understanding the several paradoxes it involves: its radical and, at times, even revolutionary nature; the inherent contradiction between its pre-modern nature and its persisting and recurrent character in contemporary democracy; the centrality of individual actors in mobilizing great masses of people, shaping new identities in society, and radically transforming established institutional orders; the emergence of charismatic leaders in some countries, or certain eras, but not in others.

Motivated by such puzzles, this still ongoing paper serves two aims. The first is to reinstate charisma as a political power term, also purifying it from the psychological or sociological connotations it has long been associated with. The second aim is to explore the possible ways of charismatic emergence in liberal democracy. It will be shown that charisma may appear in crisis as well as in non-crisis situations; in addition, that it may endanger democracy as well as help institute a new and solid

² It was probably such sinister associations that Bertold Brecht had in mind when putting in the mouth of his *Galileo* the famous aphorism “Unlucky is the country that needs a hero.”

³ For an analysis of the possible explanations behind this omission, see Andreas Kalyvas (2002: esp. 90-8).

⁴ What is in fact surprising is the absence of political charisma and charismatic leadership as key analytical categories in the study of a variety of “extraordinary” phenomena that occur in modern democracies such as (neo)populism, social movements development and mass contention, the emergence of radicalism and insurgent politics, et cetera.

one. This way, we not only are expected to understand the mechanics of charismatic leadership but also, at a more normative level, dispel the notion of charisma as a necessarily malign symptom in democracy.

The paper proceeds as follows: the next section analyzes the two main approaches that have been used to explain charismatic emergence and which involve either individual reductionism or structural reductionism. Both approaches result in theoretical and explanatory anomalies that are pointed at and disproved. The third section attempts to reconstruct the concept of political charisma on the basis of its two basic components, personal authority and political radicalism. The fourth section focuses on the micro-mechanisms of charismatic leadership emergence and attempts a preliminary typology of such instances. To couple theoretical analysis with empirics, I utilize four cases of charismatic emergence in different democratic settings. The paper ends with conclusions and also proposes some new directions for further research.

PREVIOUS METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO POLITICAL CHARISMA

The literature of political charisma has proposed two causal explanations about the emergence of charismatic leadership, each rooted in Weber's classical treatment of the subject. The first explanation, which is more common in cognitive psychology and modern organization science, views charisma as the outcome of the appearance in society of some "extraordinary" leader who, thanks precisely to his or her extraordinariness, is in a position to transform politics. A second explanation, which is more widespread in sociology, puts emphasis on the role of contextual (that is to say, structural) factors that create in large social sectors a need for charismatic leadership. Despite their obvious differences, these approaches involve either individual reductionism or structuralist reductionism and lead into logical problems, methodological impasses, and theoretical anomalies.

1. Individual reductionism

In this approach, charisma simply refers to some set of personal or psychological characteristics possessed by certain individual leaders. The classic statement is in Max Weber who famously defined charisma as "a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (Weber 1978: 241, 1113). Since Weber, many authors have tried to identify the individual qualities that are considered necessary, if not sufficient as well, for charisma to emerge (Marcus 1961; Shils 1965; Bandura 1982). Most of those attempts are in the areas of experimental social and organizational psychology, and usually entail the construction of lists of "presumed charismatic effects" and then testing whether selected leaders have such effects in subsequent samples.⁵

⁵ This approach, which is founded on the works of social psychologist Robert House (1977) and, almost simultaneously, sociologist James MacGregor Burns (1978), has produced numerous lists of individual traits that constitute a charismatic personality and which range from simple physical traits (e.g., composure and physical stature, oratorical skill, penetrating eyesight) to qualities of character and mind (e.g., decisiveness, intellect, experience, assertiveness, courage, stamina) to pure psychological characteristics (e.g., self-confidence or strong conviction in the moral righteousness of one's beliefs). Besides single individual personality traits, emphasis has also been placed on concrete behaviors

Besides their unavoidable reductionism, theories of charisma that are based on individual traits suffer from three major problems: obsolescence, psychologism, and vagueness. They are first of all obsolete in that they echo old-fashioned ideas such as the early theological perception of charisma as a “gift of personal grace,” or Carlyle’s (1907) “great men” theory of history according to which historical motion depends chiefly on the existence of heroic individuals. A second problem is that of psychologism, that is, the excessive reliance on human behavior to the detriment of other mechanisms that may be necessary for charisma to emerge. After many decades of research, all attempts to delineate a universal “charismatic personality” type have failed to produce conclusive results (Dow 1969; Willner 1984; Conger 1989; Madsen and Snow 1991: 3). A third and related problem, vagueness, stems from the unspecified relation between the meaning of the term “charisma” and its empirical referents. This results, on one hand, in what an author has termed “trait atomism” (Schweitzer 1974: 151) while, on the other hand, blurs the distinction between charismatic and non-charismatic leaders (Tucker 1970: 71-2; Willner 1984: 18).

II. Structural reductionism

The second general approach to explain charismatic leadership puts emphasis on the structural preconditions of its emergence. Here, charisma is the outcome of social distress and the accumulation of popular grievances in times of emergency and crisis. Again following Weber’s scripture, charismatic leadership is in this view presented as resulting from collective “anxiety and enthusiasm” amidst “unusual, especially political or economic situations, or from extraordinary psychic, particularly religious states, or from both together” (Weber 1978: 1117, 1121). Charisma arises “in moments of distress—whether psychic, physical, economic, ethical, religious, or political” (Weber 1978: 1111-12). In such crisis situations, political leaders naturally come to the rescue promising salvation and the masses succumb to their spell almost unconditionally.

Although analytically superior to the previous approach, crisis-based interpretations of charismatic leadership also suffer from several problems, of which the major are conceptual ambiguity and triviality, determinism and, often, lack of empirical validity, and the exogenization of politics. Conceptual ambiguity, first, concerns “crisis,” which is an omnibus term (Starn 1971; O’Connor 1987: 16-7). Crisis, notes Knight (1998: 227), “is a vague, promiscuously used, under-theorised concept which defies measurement” (similarly, Hay 1999). Although crisis always refers to “a decisive event or turning-point, [m]any of the economic and political troubles wrongly described as crises are really persistent difficulties, sagas or affairs” (*The Economist Style* 1993: 23-4). Lacking conceptual precision, the concept is eventually trivialized and rendered useless for political analysis. The related problems of determinism and inconsistent empirical proof stem from the assumption that crisis is a necessary and sufficient condition for charismatic leadership to emerge. This assumption, alas, is not always empirically validated. As it will be shown below, charismatic emergence often occurs in non-crisis situations, while, on the other side, even unambiguous crisis situations may not cause charismatic leadership (as it most

which, when combined in a certain person, are thought to produce charismatic leadership. Bass (1985), for instance, has identified four such behaviors – idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Subsequent authors (Sashkin 1988; Conger and Kanungo 1987; Conger 1989; Bass and Avolio 1990, 1993; Avolio, Bass and Jung 1999) have proposed an almost endless number of additional behaviors.

famously happened in post-1989 Eastern Europe⁶). Finally, crisis-based theories of charisma tend to exogenize politics, and especially such critical aspects of it as the role played by institutions, conflict and competition, the waging of ideological battles, the tensions between personal authority and collective organizations, social radicalization and mass mobilization, etc. But charisma is an endogenously-generated phenomenon and as such it must be accounted for.

All in all, whether individual or structural, reductionist approaches to the charismatic phenomenon point to certain associations but fail to explain its emergence and political dynamics. Charisma can not be understood as the direct, almost automatic outcome of personal attributes or exogenous structures. To emerge and develop, besides discretionary leaders and external crises, charisma presupposes an intense interplay between agencies and structures involving personal incentives and strategic choices of individual and collective subjects, such as political elites, mobilized masses, organized political movements, or parties, and, crucially, electoral contests; the formation of new political identities through symbolic narratives, conflicting worldviews, and hegemonic struggles for new legitimacy; and, above all, a fair amount of creative and extraordinary politics aiming at genuine institutional alteration and, inevitably, radical historical change. To unpack political charisma, therefore, we need to focus on the specific mechanisms that make it possible. This way, besides being able to provide better explanations of charismatic leadership emergence, we are also certain to reclaim charisma for political science and rekindle its theoretical significance. Charisma is primarily a political, not a social, let alone psychological, phenomenon. Therefore, to follow an old advice by Bendix and Lipset (1957: 87), instead of starting analysis with personal attributes or sociological states of affairs and examining how they affect charismatic politics, we should rather start with clearly defining charisma and then examining how *it* affects society.

RECONSTRUCTING CHARISMA (AND RECLAIMING IT FOR POLITICAL SCIENCE)

The earliest use of the word charisma, or charism, is to be found in theology and denotes a free gift or favor given by God (*New Testament*, esp. “Romans” 1, 12 and “Corinthians” 12). Prophecy, for instance, was the charism that enabled its possessor to foretell the future and utter divinely inspired warnings. This idea persisted until Max Weber finally rid charisma from its theological undertones and gave it a distinctly political tint. For Weber, charisma was above all a power term; it was meant to denote, and describe, a legitimate authority type that was distinct from either the traditional or the legal-rational ones. Whereas traditional authority had always existed and legal-rational authority is being enacted by such agencies as the modern prince or state bureaucracies, charismatic authority is “emergent” and arises “from collective excitement produced by extraordinary events” (Weber 1978: 1121). But who is a charismatic leader? And how does charisma emerge? I address the first question in this section and the second in the following one.

To determine who is charismatic, one has first of all to extract the core characteristics, or properties, of the term charisma (Sartori 1984). This, in turn, depends on the researcher’s intention: why is term *x* important and what can we learn by using it?

⁶ With the obvious exception, of course, of Slobodan Milošević’s rise in Yugoslavia; cf. Pappas 2005.

With respect to political charisma the answer seems fairly simple. As Weber already knew it, charisma *is* important because it constitutes a distinct type of leadership about which we still have limited knowledge. This is, I think, a good starting point from where to begin reconstructing the concept of political charisma. As depicted in *Table 1*, charismatic leadership differs from the two other types of leadership described by Max Weber on two grounds: its personal character of rule and its radical nature. Legal-rational leadership, on the first hand, is impersonal and procedural. It involves an organization of offices which are hierarchically organized; each and all of these offices are regulated by common rules, norms, and procedures. In such a rule-bound system of bureaucratic domination there becomes established in society “a spirit of formalistic impersonality [operating] *sine ira et studio*” (Weber 1978: 225). The same is true with regard to traditional leadership, which rests on “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions” (Weber 1978: 215). Traditional leadership, on the other hand, is, similarly to charismatic, mostly personal, but, as Bendix notes, the differences between tradition and charisma are more important than the similarities: “The patriarchal master possesses authority because he represents the inviolable sanctity of tradition, whereas the charismatic leader dominates others because through his person a mission has become manifest, which very often revolutionizes the established order” (Bendix 1977: 300-301). Put otherwise, whereas traditional leadership is moderate and conforming to tradition, charismatic one is radical and transformative.

Table 1: The three types of legitimate leadership and their characteristics

	<i>Traditional</i>	<i>Legal-rational</i>	<i>Charismatic</i>
<i>Authority</i>	Personal (individual or collective)	Impersonal (always collective)	Personal (always individual)
<i>Rule aims</i>	Traditional/moderate	Procedural/moderate	Radical

In contrast to other leadership types, I define political charisma as *a distinct type of leadership which is personal and aims at the radical transformation of an established institutional order*. However minimal, this definition tells us precisely which are the core characteristics of charismatic leadership but remains open about its causes, means, and outcomes. Even so, as these characteristics are to a large extent intuitive, they still have to be defined with precision.

The personal aspect of charismatic leadership becomes manifest in at least three (observable) respects: its direct and unmediated form; the great emotional passion that accompanies it; and the lack of institutional controls upon the charismatic leader. In its purest form “charismatic leadership involves a degree of commitment on the part of the disciples that has no parallel in the other types of domination” (Bendix 1977: 300; Weber 1978: 242). In Bourdieu’s language, charisma is described as a situation of delegation that involves a social group bestowing power on its authorized representative in order for the latter to set the rules of the political game and ‘make’ the group (Bourdieu 1985). Charismatic leadership is characterized above all by the direct allegiance and loyalty of followers to the leader; when informal networks or formal structures (such as a party) exist, they are built by the leader himself and rely

on his continuing sponsoring. Great emotional passion, secondly, means “intense devotion to and extraordinary reverence for the leader” (Madsen and Snow 1991: 5) and is perhaps the most readily observed feature of charismatic power. Charismatic leaders not only accomplish “the emotional seizure” of the masses (Schweitzer 1974: 157) but also rule by that. Finally, political charisma is inimical to any institutional controls upon the charismatic leader. This involves both external and internal controls. “External controls” refers to impersonal rules and regulations, bureaucratic procedures, and a clear division of labor. None of them can constrain the charismatic leader. When, for instance, there is a party, “the division of labor is constantly redefined at the leader’s discretion, career uncertainties are considerable, no accepted procedures exist, and improvisation is the only real organization ‘rule’” (Panebianco 1988: 146). “Internal controls” implies obligations, mutual commitments, or game rules agreed upon among political peers and strategic allies. Far from being subjected to such internal controls, political charisma is moreover adverse to collective leadership. In sum, the distinctly personal character of charismatic leadership points to a potentially authoritarian type of rule which, however, develops in democratic institutional settings.

The radical aspect of political charisma is harder to grasp. Charismatic leaders emerge in society as a true radical force seeking to destroy traditional patterns and disturb legal-rational and procedural ones: “It has been written . . . but *I* say unto you.” Whereas both legal and traditional authorities mean to preserve the established institutional order, charismatic rule militates against it.⁷ In this sense, the charismatic leader “is always a radical who challenges the established practice by going to the ‘root of the matter’” (Bendix 1977: 300) and sets himself “in conscious opposition to some established aspects of the society in which he works” (Parsons 1964: 64). What does charismatic radicalism consist of? Given that it always turns out within democracy’s confines, such radicalism can be neither about the complete overthrow of the political system (that would amount to a revolution) nor about the simple substitution of some set of policies with another (which would classify as political reformism). In the continuum from reformism to revolution, radicalism thus occupies an intermediate position and entails the legal, normally non-violent, subversion of an established institutional order in order to replace it with a new – allegedly, better – one. Radical politics, therefore, entails a two-pronged strategy: the dismantling of some previous institutional and legal-constitutional framework, and the institution of an entirely novel one. The first prong of the strategy, institutional dismantling, may be facilitated by the fact that the previous system has proven unworkable or deficient (e.g., the French Fourth Republic or the Greek postwar quasi-democratic system), or may require the intentional, systematic subversion of already solid and legitimated structures of authority (e.g., various populist movements). The second prong of charismatic radicalism, re-institution of democratic politics, involves no less than the imposition of a novel hegemonic order in the classical Gramscian sense (Gramsci 1971) from which new democratic legitimacy will be sought by the leader. One last point is in order: for “incipient charismatics” (the term belongs to Friedland 1964: 25), radical politics is a powerful mobilizing resource with polarizing and divisive effects. As it seeks to mobilize one part of society (those pursuing a new order) against another (the upholders of the old order), charismatic leadership thus destroys old allegiances and creates in society new cleavages, which are often superimposed

⁷ “Both of the first two types of authority are, for Weber, modes of organization appropriate to a settled permanent system. Though subject, like all human arrangements, to change, they are of specifically ‘routine’ character. The charismatic type differs in precisely this respect” (Parsons 1964: 64).

upon the older ones. Phenomena as the recent upsurge of populism in Latin America or the extreme Right in Europe are good examples of such workings.

CHARISMATIC LEADERSHIP UNRAVELED: THE MECHANICS OF CHARISMA

How does charismatic leadership emerge? The question is, obviously, about the micro-mechanisms that facilitate political charisma and make it possible. But the search for such mechanisms is an old predicament. As Shils (1965: 200) explains, “Weber’s problem was to describe the mechanisms and to state the conditions of the emergence of charismatic leadership and its subsidence into a routine and occasionally dynamic coexistence with . . . bureaucratic authority.” The same quest for mechanisms is today still open. Melucci (1996: 338), for instance, asserts that “to simply state that great individuals are the engine of collective processes in non satisfactory. . . . For theory to develop further, it is necessary to undertake more systematic analysis of the mechanisms that link individual action and collective action together.” It is through the search for mechanisms at both the individual and the aggregate levels that we can specify the social “nuts and bolts, cogs and wheels” (Elster 1989: 3) that bring the charismatic (i.e., personal *and* radical) politics into existence; otherwise, we are left with the same baggage as before: a black box of systemic covariation between variables and events (Hedström and Swedberg 1998: 7).

In what follows in this section, I present a preliminary analysis of two models of charismatic emergence in liberal democracy (condensed in *Table 2*) placing special emphasis on their micro-mechanisms. The first – and simpler – model refers to charismatic emergence in crisis situations and involves the formal invitation by the population-in-crisis to some leader for assuming power and providing salvation. This is illustrated by the cases of Charles de Gaulle in 1958 and Constantine Karamanlis in 1974. The second model presupposes no crisis; here, charisma emerges in conditions of solid democratic institutions and relative political normalcy, and involves a symbolic struggle for the radical re-institution of politics. This model is exemplified by the emergence to charismatic prominence (and then to state power) of Andreas Papandreu in the mid- and late-1970s and Hugo Chávez in the 1990s.

Table 2: Two models of charismatic politics in democracy

A	General crisis	▶	Leader invitation to (unobstructed) power	▶	Creation of novel legitimacy structure
B	Political entrepreneur	▶	Symbolic frame process	▶	Personally-controlled radical mass movement

I. Charisma in times of crisis

In 458 BC, the Aequian tribe assumed an offensive against Rome. A consular army that was sent against them soon became effectively surrounded by the Aequi on Mount Algidus. Rome was then thrown into a state of crisis and turmoil which

historian Livy has described in the following way: “Nothing could have happened so unlooked for, so undreamed of; the panic and confusion were as great as if it had been the City [itself] . . . that was invested” (Livy, *History of Rome*, Book III, 3.26). Faced with such a great danger, the Roman Senate put all hopes for survival upon a retired general, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus. A delegation of senators found him tending his garden alongside the Tiber, and promptly invited him to return to Rome as military dictator in order to save the country. The common people, however concerned with his excessive powers, also welcomed him as their savior. According to the legend, after he defeated the Aequi in a single day, Cincinnatus turned back the powers of dictatorship and returned to his garden.

This story plainly illustrates both the characteristics of crises that seem to be a necessary precondition for charismatic leadership and the mechanism of charismatic emergence. Crises with a potential of causing charisma to emerge share three characteristics: They are generalized; already existent, or at least imminent; and producing tangible and substantial damage to the affected population. More specifically: (i) Generalized crises are those jeopardizing entire populations, such as a people or a nation, and not only some individuals or disparate groups such as the unemployed or the youth. This signifies a danger that is pervasive and broadly perceived as –what social anthropologists call– a “total social fact.” (ii) The crisis must moreover have already broken out, or at least appear as impending or imminent; the probability of some crisis lurking in a distant future is not a sufficient cause for the emergence of charismatic leadership. (iii) Lastly, the (actual or expected) damage from the crisis must be substantial, let alone tangible. No such damage may be said to exist during, say, sporadic warfare across a border, negative business cycles and economic slowdown in the market, the so-called “democratic deficit” in the EU, or the continuing environmental degradation around the globe.

Which crises, then, do share the foregoing characteristics? In anticipation of more detailed empirical research, such crises, I submit, may occur in three cases: Regular war, abrupt regime change following the breakdown of a previous political order, and general economic collapse. Any war which is either underway or very probable to erupt puts at risk the sovereignty of the nations being involved and their citizens’ individual lives. Abrupt and disorderly political changes, such as regime breakdown and the ensuing reinstitution of a new institutional order may result in political chaos, severe economic calamities or civil war. Lastly, general economic collapse, as it most famously happened with the American stock-market crash which caused the Depression (often referred to as *the crisis*) of the 1930s, may also trigger the emergence of charismatic leadership. All three of the foregoing cases represent mighty threats against the general economic welfare and fundamental social and political liberties of entire populations; what is more, in some cases, as in war, those threats also extend to what is most vital to all people, their lives themselves.

Coming now to the mechanism through which charismatic leadership may arise in emergency situations, the case of Cincinnatus is, indeed, paradigmatic. Total crises cause the destruction of old institutions and bring uncertainty and fear about the future. In such institutional vacuums, deprived as they now are of past legitimacy and social support bases, old leaders in particular are unable to provide solutions and cope with crisis. Thus found at an impasse, they may then choose to invite into power some individual whose personal credentials and past political achievements or other deeds make him seem as best qualified to resolve the crisis. Although the invitation is usually made by crumbling old leaders, it is accompanied by the approval, whether explicit or tacit, of the population in crisis. What needs stressing, however, is that the

acceptance of such an invitation by the invited leader is only offered under two nonnegotiable conditions.⁸ The first condition is that the invited leader will be able to exercise personal power unobstructed by old political elites, unworkable political compromises, and defunct institutions. The second condition concerns the incoming leader's endorsement to impose a wholly novel political program consisting in nothing less than the radical substitution of the old institutional system with an entirely new one. The successful establishment of the new political order proves the charisma while also providing fresh claims to legitimate authority. And politics once more returns to normalcy.

To illustrate the points already made by example, let us consider the almost identical cases of Charles de Gaulle and Constantine Karamanlis.⁹ Both leaders were invited to office in order to exercise charismatic authority when a major crisis broke out in their respective countries. In France, the crisis "had its origins in the instabilities of the Fourth Republic, but the final conflagration came in Algeria" (Williams 1993:364-5). By May 1958, the traditional political elites were in no position to control the French army in Algeria who, determined not to give up the rebellious colony, were planning a military coup in Paris. Amidst rumors of the impending coup and fears for civil war, President René Coty appealed to "the most illustrious of Frenchmen" to assume the nation's leadership and save the country and the republic. In Greece, the crisis of July 1974 was even more serious. The invasion of Cyprus by Turkish armed forces caused the instantaneous crumbling of the Greek military dictatorship. In the absolute vacuum of power that was created, and while the country had been brought to the brink of war, the army leaders and some formerly prominent politicians who had hastily been assembled to face the crisis decided to ask Karamanlis to return from his self-imposed exile and come to the rescue.

In either case, the leaders invited into power had long and successful political records. De Gaulle had been the leader of resistance during World War II, the liberator of France, the head of the opposition party, and was internationally recognized and respected; Karamanlis had also won broad domestic and international reputation as the energetic and successful Prime Minister of Greece for eight consecutive years (1955-1963). After withdrawing from active politics for the first time, both leaders had gone through their "periods of the desert" – De Gaulle in the solitude of Colombey-les-deux-Églises and Karamanlis in self-imposed exile in Paris – determined never to return to active politics. But once they accepted the invitation of their compatriots in the face of crisis, none did it without imposing his own rules.

De Gaulle, first, accepted the post of Prime Minister on two conditions: The right to govern by decree for a period of six months, which gave him a free hand for dealing alone with the situation in Algeria, and the delegation of extra powers to devise a new constitution. On the basis of such an extraordinarily personal power de Gaulle succeeded to pass by referendum a new constitution which gave excessive powers to the President, thus inaugurating the Fifth French Republic. In the ensuing national

⁸ "The holder of charisma," write Gerth and Mills (1946: 246), "seizes the task that is adequate for him and demands obedience and a following by virtue of his mission."

⁹ While in exile in Paris, Karamanlis had acquainted with de Gaulle, and subsequently used the latter's political career as a role model. For comparisons between the two men, see Druon (1974) and Sulzberger (1974). It is worth mentioning that, in both France and Greece, there have been during the twentieth century several instances of crisis in which a leader was invited to power to exercise charismatic rule. In France, most typical were the cases of Clemenceau in 1917, Poincaré in 1926 and Pétain in 1940; in Greece, the classical cases of charismatic emergence in crisis were those of Eleftherios Venizelos in 1909 and, once more, in 1916.

elections of November 1958 his newly-founded party won a comfortable majority in parliament, which in turn elected de Gaulle President of the Republic with an ample 78 percent of the vote. Similarly to the French statesman he admired, upon his arrival in Greece, Karamanlis only agreed to take over on two conditions: That the armed forces would return to their barracks intending no further involvement in the exercise of politics, and that the country's political forces would support his endeavors to reinstitute democracy. Assurances received, Karamanlis then proceeded by demolishing the old exclusionary political system and building instead a new one. He also proposed a referendum to decide about the future of monarchy and a new constitution that would reinforce the executive at the expense of the legislature. In the general elections of November 1974, under the spell of Karamanlis' charismatic authority, the Greek people gave his newly-created party a massive 54.4 percent of the total national vote.

The stories of de Gaulle and Karamanlis are also interesting in one last aspect. Both leaders, after the successful institution of new political orders in their respective countries, and already enjoying enormous popular mandates, chose, almost Cincinnatus-like, to refrain from exercising discretionary power. Instead, they strove to "routinize" their charisma through the creation of political parties (which, in both countries, survived their founders), the moderation of public life, and the normalization and institutional solidification of national politics.

II. Charisma in times of normalcy

Charismatic leadership, to be sure, is not only a diffuse product of crisis; it may also rise in pluralist democratic systems in times of political normalcy and relative institutional stability. Since, according to our original definitional requirements, political charisma is characterized by strong personal authority and a radical political program typically seeking to "invert all value hierarchies and overthrow custom, law and tradition" (Weber 1978: 1117), we have to look for charismatic leadership in the areas of radical political action and mass social movements. As Ake (1966: 6) remarks, charisma is "a critical instrument of social mobilization." "To speak of charismatic leaders," Tucker (1970: 80) adds, "is to speak of charismatic movements; the two are indispensable." Stated as a hypothesis, therefore, our prediction is that radical mobilization in democracy should be a direct function of charismatic leadership initiatives. In this case, the underlying causal mechanisms between charisma and political radicalism must be identified and explicated.

In what follows in this section, I attempt to explain how political radicalism is linked to charismatic leadership through the mechanism of symbolic framing.¹⁰ Following Erving Goffman's (1974: 21) original lead, *frames* are interpretative schemata that enable people to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" realities within their proximate or broader world. They consist of symbolic narratives that offer people new meaning in a perplexing world, present novel identities and social roles, enlarge the political agenda, project the ideal of good and just society, and challenge existing authority relationships. Of course, frames are more than simple belief formation mechanisms.

¹⁰ The point is methodologically significant. While most theoretical approaches to political radicalism and mass mobilization point to pre-existing exogenous factors (e.g., old political cleavage lines, social grievances, appropriate political opportunity structures, et cetera), my charisma-based interpretation of mass radicalism points to endogenous mechanisms which help mobilize people and create new identities and allegiances.

They are radical “action oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns” (Snow and Benford 1992).

Two questions immediately arise: How are frames produced, and which specific frames lead to radical political action? Unlike common cultural meanings, which are deposited in cultural subsystems such as religion or kinship and form the basis of primordial ties in society (Geertz 1973), symbolic frames are deliberate ideological constructs intended to mold new political identities. Frames, in other words, rather than being found ready-made in a society’s cultural depository, are produced by creative political entrepreneurs¹¹ eager to use them as resources for political engineering (Tucker 1977: 385-6; Laitin 1986; Joas 1996). The point to be stressed is that such frames are not the products of collective subjects but of individual leaders alone. Symbolic politics, writes Brysk (1995: 570), “is based on a meaning-seeking, frame-producing actor.” “There is thus a great deal of the creative artist in the political leader who, through his rhetoric, slogans and tactics, manipulates existing symbols and creates new ones” (Cohen 1974: 30). Especially in times of social strain and political change, continues the same author, “[s]ome individuals may prove to be more perceptive, more creative, and more articulate than others, and their formulations may appeal more than those of others to a wide collectivity of people who are in the throes of the same problem” (Cohen 1974: 59).

Which symbolic frames are more appropriate for mobilizing societies in the direction of radical political action? A first clue is provided by McAdam (1982: 51) who argues that “before collective action can get underway, people must collectively define their situations as unjust.” Injustice frames cause political radicalism as they focus “on the righteous anger that puts fire in the belly and iron in the soul. . . . [They are] a hot cognition, not merely an abstract intellectual judgment about what is equitable” (Gamson 1992: 32; Moore 1978). This explains why ambitious political entrepreneurs may find it more effective, let alone cheaper, to attract a mass following on the basis of social injustice rather than on the basis of pre-existing political loyalties (such as those formed by class or other cleavages). By speaking to the heart, inequality frames appeal to widely held mentalities, fears, and expectations in societies; they develop into “master narratives” that incorporate and simplify a great variety of individual grievances, social tensions, and political demands within an established authority framework. Combined with the fact that they are typically based on simple binary oppositions distinguishing friend from foe, injustice frames thus have an enormous capacity to enhance in-group solidarity and out-group hostility.

Symbolic politics based on injustice frames may lead to the formation of mass political movements of a distinctly radical nature. Once formed, these movements try “to disseminate a new worldview able to de-legitimize the established authority by condemning its injustices and abuses according to some novel higher normative principles” (Kalyvas 2002: 83). Eventually, the largest part of such movements either persists as political minorities or dies away. For those few that come to power, the possibilities that remain open to their leaders are limited. Either they will follow a course of routinization of their charismatic authority, or they may opt to preserve it at the cost of damaging the democratic institutions. The first option is similar to the one described earlier and, by and large, is based on the introduction and solidification of

¹¹ In different terminology, Bourdieu (1985: 735) refers to such political entrepreneurs as “professional practitioners of representation.”

new institutional structures.¹² The second option involves the preservation of the charismatic leader's personal authority at the expense of institutions, a situation that leads to demagoguery and plebiscitarian democracy. (...)

Like previously, let us exemplify the foregoing analysis by concrete empirical example, this time drawing from recent historical experiences in Greece and Venezuela, where Andreas Papandreou and Hugo Chávez Frias respectively emerged as charismatic leaders by pursuing extraordinary politics in times of relative political normalcy. In either case, and despite dispersed and inarticulate feelings of discontent, chiefly because of rising social expectations amidst deteriorating economic conditions,¹³ no profound or general crisis preceded the rise of those leaders in power. Greece, soon after her transition to democracy in 1974, had become a consolidated and well-functioning democracy under the firm leadership of Constantine Karamanlis. Venezuela had enjoyed for decades a working pluralist system based on political pacts between two dominant parties regularly alternating in power. It was in such settings of relatively stable democratic institutions and hegemonic political frameworks that the new leaders arose by de-legitimizing established orders and proposing their replacement with counter-hegemonic ones.

After 1974, Andreas Papandreou, the maverick son of a postwar Greek prime minister, called for radical change (“allaghi”) that would be “inescapably linked with the socialist transformation of the Greek society . . . [and whose] basic and permanent aim should remain the change of the political system and not its conservation” (Papandreou 1976: 231-2). To this purpose, he founded the *Panhellenic Socialist Movement* (PASOK), initially of a radical Marxist inspiration, meant to represent all those citizens who were dissatisfied – or, in PASOK verbiage, the entire “underprivileged” class, which was thus set against an undifferentiated “establishment.” By promising to redress the social and economic inequalities, and establish a new political order based on higher moral and normative principles, Papandreou, never loosening his personal grip on PASOK, succeeded to mobilize broad social sectors and, finally, after winning the 1981 national elections, impose his hegemonic political project upon Greek society.

Hugo Chávez, a former colonel who had already attempted a coup that failed, propagated what he termed a “Bolivarian revolution,” that is, a complete re-institution of the established political and party system through such radical changes as a new constitution reinforcing the executive, extensive nationalization of the economy, and comprehensive redistribution of wealth. Similarly to Papandreou, Chávez founded in 1997 the Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento Quinta República*, MVR) to organize the repressed people (*el pueblo*) and wage a moral and ethical struggle against the oligarchic elite. “El pueblo,” Carlos de la Torre (2000: 15) explains, “[has been] positively defined as all that is not oligarquía . . . [i.e.,] the incarnation of the authentic, the good, the just, and the moral. It confronts the *antipueblo*, or oligarquía, representing the unauthentic, the foreign, the evil, the unjust, and the immoral.” Similarly to what happened with Papandreou in Greece in the late 1970s, in Venezuela “the arrival of Hugo Chávez on the scene was greeted as though it were the

¹² “Charisma,” Weber wrote, “is a phenomenon typical of . . . expansive political movements in their early stages. But as soon as domination is well established, and above all as control over large masses of people exists, it gives way to the forces of every day routine” (Weber 1978: 252).

¹³ As a country experiencing at the time a major regime transition, Greece was hit particularly hard by the two oil crises of the 1970s. In Venezuela, economic decline was also associated with the plummeting of the international oil prices. By 1989, inflation in this country had peaked at 84.5 percent (Crisp 1999).

Second Coming” (Gott 2000: 19). And, in the elections of 1998, the charismatic Chávez was brought to state power by an impressive 56.2 percent of the national vote.

CONCLUSIONS

Currently available theories of political charisma are based incorrectly on either society’s psychological predispositions towards some leader with exceptional personal qualities or on mass social responses to some external crisis. Other problems specific to each of these approaches notwithstanding, they in common make two interrelated mistakes: first, they view charismatic leadership as a final – and unmediated – result of individual attributes or social structures, and, second, they deprive charisma, a pure power term, from its distinctly political implications. Although part of the blame for such erroneous perceptions has been attributed to Weber, this paper has remained loyal to Weber’s spirit in considering charisma a distinct legitimate authority type, which often arises in liberal democracy. Accordingly, charisma has been reinstated as a central concept for political analysis and defined in a simple, clear, and unambiguous way based on two easily observable (and measurable) features: personal authority and radical politics. Having clarified the concept, and placing particular emphasis on the micro-mechanisms of charismatic leadership emergence, which also helps unravel the nexus between agency and structure, the paper has proposed two distinct models of charismatic politics in democracy: one requiring some previous crisis and another that develops in conditions of relative political normalcy. Although the first model is the easiest to detect in reality and make theoretical sense of, it is the second model that promises rich analytical and comparative rewards as it relates directly to such modern phenomena as contentious politics, mass radicalization and neo-populism.

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