

## Irresponsibility in the Exercise of Political Power: A Marxist Analysis of *Animal Farm*



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**ABSTRACT:** Irresponsibility is the quality of not being trustworthy or dependable. In political arena, it has more to do with the traits of a leader who lacks a sense of responsibility and does not feel accountable for their actions. Indeed, irresponsibility in politics leads mostly to the abuse of power, that is, the misuse of a position of power to take unjust advantage of individuals, organizations, or governments. What is irresponsibility and how is it depicted in *Animal Farm*? Who are the characters involved in the misuse of political power in *Animal Farm*? How is this power used abusively and what are the consequences of it? These are the questions that this paper analyses through the lenses of the Marxist criticism and proposes clues of good conduct for the benefit of society.

**KEYWORDS:** Irresponsibility, exercise, political, power, Marxist aesthetics.

### I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of irresponsibility in the exercise of political power has been of great interest to many writers for a long time. Being defined as the quality of “not thinking enough about the effects of what you do’ or the quality of ‘not showing a feeling of responsibility” (A. S. Hornby, 2010: 796), irresponsibility is mostly shown up in individuals who hold a top position in society and are supposed to serve others. As M. Riera and M. Iborra argue, “Behind the irresponsible behaviour can be perceived an absence of values and ethical principles among the top executives of companies” (M. Riera & M. Iborra, 2017: 147). As a result, irresponsibility implies the “carrying out of acts that violate certain perceived standards of social responsibility and which are judged by external observers, interest groups and voters” (Ibid.: 151).

It must, therefore, be noted that, the higher a leader’s position in society, the heaviest their responsibility and the more visible their irresponsibility with regard to the tasks they would perform toward those who benefit from their services. In this regard, Lange and Washburn think that irresponsible behaviour emanates from a “psychological and subjective perspective’, as it is ‘based on the perceptions of observers” (D. Lange & N.T. Washburn, 2012: 312). So, it can be seen that, the more a leader fulfils their duties through the performance of their tasks to honour their commitments toward the population they serve, the more responsible they become thanks to the positive feedbacks of these external observers.

Yet, when a leader fails to meet their commitments and cares less for the welfare of their people, they lose these people’s trust and become irresponsible. This is the case in *Animal Farm*, where Mr. Jones and Napoleon fail in their responsibilities. What is then irresponsibility and how is it depicted in *Animal Farm*? Who are the characters involved in the misuse of political power in *Animal Farm*? How this power used abusively and what is are the consequences of it? These are the questions that this paper analyses and proposes clues of good conduct for the benefit of society.

The analysis in this paper is carried out through the Marxist literary criticism. Advocating that individuals’ “social existence determines their consciousness” (K. Marx, 1970: 21), the Marxist criticism “seeks to expose the dominant class, show how its ideology controls and oppresses all actions of the working class, and finally highlight those elements of society most affected by such oppression” (C. E. Bressler, 1994: 122). So, this approach, will help expose how the irresponsible bourgeois class “not only oppress those who live in misery but appear to be determined to eliminate them” (R. Williams, 2006: 115-116). In addition, as “an open theory which continually transforms itself” (J. Derrida, 1982: xv), the Marxist criticism will help have a close “understanding of the nature of reality” (Op. Cit.: 115), the environment in which characters live and how these characters function in *Animal Farm*. In sum, while making “a historical survey of it from Marx and Engels to the present day” (E. Terry 1976: vii), the Marxist

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approach is, therefore, of paramount importance to analyse typical characters – whose “innermost being is determined by objective forces at work in society” (L. Georg, 1972: 122).

The paper is divided into two sections. The first section explores the concept of irresponsibility through the analysis of Mr. Jones and Napoleon and shows how their irresponsibility has led them to misuse power. The second section discusses the issue of power abuse and its consequences and proposes clues of good conduct for the benefit of society.

### **II. IRRESPONSIBILITY IN ANIMAL FARM**

“Good governance requires that the development of state administration be preceded by the establishment of state administrative law” (A. Asmuni, 2024: 119). As opposed to this view, “irresponsibility includes lawless behavior that is unprotected by rights and often violative of the rights of others” (L. C. McClain, 1994: 1016). Though Mr. Jones has managed the farm without any rule as such, Napoleon has violated all the seven commandments that make up Animalism to completely deprive other animals of their rights. Irresponsibility can be defined in the context of this paper as the quality of a leader who does not worry enough about the living conditions of their people and cares less about the possible consequences that their actions can have on them.

In *Animal Farm*, Mr. Jones and Napoleon are characters who, many a time, fail to assume their responsibilities; the first toward animals in the Manor Farm and the second toward other animals after the revolution in Animal Farm. Mr. Jones’ loss of credibility leads to the abuse of his power which provoked the rebellion that drives him off the Manor Farm. Napoleon’s irresponsibility rather causes small upheavals which are vehemently quelled to make him a great dictator.

#### **1. The Depiction of Mr. Jones’ Irresponsibility**

George Orwell opens his novel by depicting Mr. Jones’ irresponsibility toward animals in a harsh and cruel manner:

MR. JONES, of the Manor Farm, had locked the hen-houses for the night, but was too drunk to remember to shut the popholes. With the ring of light from his lantern dancing from side to side, he lurched across the yard, kicked off his boots at the back door, drew himself a last glass of beer from the barrel in the scullery, and made his way up to bed, where Mrs. Jones was already snoring. (G. Orwell, 1945: 1)

The drunken state in which Orwell presents Mr. Jones in the very first lines of his novel, shows the higher degree of his irresponsibility. As an irresponsible leader, Mr. Jones not only fails to shut correctly the popholes but also displays his carelessness toward the hens. If the popholes are closed, this means that the chickens are exposed to any kind of danger, be it natural like cold or beyond their control like theft or death. This also shows that Mr. Jones has no interest as far as the well-being of his chickens is concerned.

As if this is not enough to expose the degree of his irresponsibility, Orwell continues his description of Mr. Jones with the images of dancing from side to side lantern and the kicking of boots at the back door to inform us about the disorder of the owner of the Manor Farm. Though Mr. Jones was already drunk, we further get to know that he draws himself an additional but last glass of beer before going to bed. From this additional glass, it can be understood that Mr. Jones becomes almost a dead drunk who is no more exposing only hens but also the whole farm to potential enemies.

Orwell does not take the risk to describe too much Mrs. Jones, neither does he give her a responsibility in the novel, but with the expression “already snoring”, we can understand that she too is an irresponsible woman like her husband. The word “already” shows that she has slept earlier than expected, in short, she has slept before the right time. The snore that comes from her sleep shows that she might have drunk enough and, therefore, also fails to wake up and see her husband coming or even better to help him protect hens by closing the popholes correctly.

Mr. Jones, the owner of the Manor Farm, not only neglects the animals, but he spends most of his time drinking as well. Instead of caring for his animals, he would rather spend his time reading the newspaper and forget to feed them. George Orwell describes Mr. Jones’ irresponsible manners as follows:

June came and the hay was almost ready for cutting. On Midsummer’s Eve, which was a Saturday, Mr. Jones went into Willingdon and got so drunk at the Red Lion that he did not come back till midday on Sunday. The men had milked the cows in the early morning and then had gone out rabbiting, without bothering to feed the animals. When Mr. Jones got back he immediately went to sleep on the drawing-room sofa with the News of the World over his face, so that when evening came, the animals were still unfed. At last they could stand it no longer. One of the cows broke in the door of the store-shed with her horn and all the animals began to help themselves from the bins. It was just then that Mr. Jones woke up. (Ibid.: 12-13)

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The above quotation depicts Mr. Jones' carelessness towards animals. The fact that he has waited for the animals to break in the door before he wakes up, confirms his drunken state. This irresponsible attitude shows how some political leaders neglect their people when they are on power.

The fact that Mr. Jones drinks too much of alcohol has worsened his carelessness so much so that the more alcoholic he gets, the more irresponsible he becomes. As "more irresponsibility entails less responsibility" (Op. Cit.: 154), Mr. Jones' nearly killed his own animals out of ignorance. The drunken state in which he goes to bed has prevented him from noticing that it is his own farm animals that have assembled in the yard. This can be read from this passage:

Unfortunately, the uproar awoke Mr. Jones, who sprang out of bed, making sure that there was a fox in the yard. He seized the gun which always stood in a corner of his bedroom, and let fly a charge of number 6 shot into the darkness. The pellets buried themselves in the wall of the barn and the meeting broke up hurriedly. Everyone fled to his own sleeping-place. The birds jumped on to their perches, the animals settled down in the straw, and the whole farm was asleep in a moment. (G. Orwell, 1945: 9)

The quotation serves as an evidence of Mr. Jones' irresponsible attitude. If Jones were responsible enough, his own animals would not hold a meeting in his yard without his knowledge. The way Orwell puts it, Mr. Jones' springing out of bed shows us that, he is surprised by the singing uproar of animals.

The fact that Mr. Jones has waited for a moment to be awoken by animals' singing in his own yard is not sleep but irresponsibility. Mr. Jones has even betrayed himself while talking about "making sure", how can a person who springs out of his sleep, make sure of a situation immediately? He is just surprised by events and this has been confirmed when we are informed that he has let fly a targetless shot into the darkness. It is paradoxical to see a drunken person, who makes sure of a situation, be releasing a gunshot into the darkness. A gun is normally used for self-defense and in nowhere in the above quotation has Orwell mentioned that Mr. Jones has been attacked before. Mr. Jones is not attacked yet, what is the use of firing a gun if it is not irresponsibility. Mr. Jones has rather exposed his irresponsibility to animals because a responsible person who has a situation under their control does not need to go so far as to fire a gun in the air to frighten animals.

Even though Mr. Jones has succeeded in breaking up so quickly the animals' meeting, this attitude is not worth of a leader of his type. He exposes his shortcomings before animals who are already aware of his dishonesty and bad treatments. Due to his irresponsibility, animals seize the opportunity to organise themselves for his overthrowal. Animals have also understood that only when Mr. Jones is drunk that they can meet secretly for a rebellion. Indeed, Mr. Jones fails in his duties to properly look after the animals. As a result, he is paid in his own coin when the animals fight back against him and his men, so much so that he is thrown off the farm. His two but failed attempts to take back the farm show us that he has not digested the bitter pills that animals force him to swallow. Orwell does not make Mr. Jones the only character responsible for the downfall of Animal Farm as Napoleon is also to blame for his irresponsible and bloodthirsty actions.

### **2. The Depiction of Napoleon's Irresponsibility**

Napoleon is another character who is held responsible for the downfall of Animal Farm. His irresponsibility varies from his abolishment of Sunday morning meetings and the public execution of animals to the drinking of alcohol. In fact, Napoleon is one of the three pigs that take Old Major's ideas and turn them into "Animalism" – a system of thought that encourages the animals to rebel. His irresponsibility begins when he becomes power-hungry, chases Snowball from the farm and starts dictating his own principles. These Napoleonic tricks are against animalism – the well-being of all animals. As a matter of fact, he indirectly cancels the freedom of speech when he forbids the Sunday meetings that all of them have fought for:

He announced that from now on the Sunday-morning Meetings would come to an end. They were unnecessary, he said, and wasted time. In future all questions relating to the working of the farm would be settled by a special committee of pigs, presided over by himself. These would meet in private and afterwards communicate their decisions to the others. (Ibid.: 37)

The second act which exposes Napoleon's irresponsibility is the breaking of the sixth commandment which stipulates that "No animal shall kill any other animal" (Ibid.: 17). Napoleon's public executions of other animals displays his wickedness toward other animals who are now considered as inferior to him. The hens who decide to thwart Napoleon's wishes have died of hunger and are "buried in the orchard, and it was given out that they had died of coccidiosis" (Ibid.: 52). Next, when the four pigs "had finished their confession, the dogs promptly tore their throats out, and in a terrible voice Napoleon demanded whether any other animal had anything to confess" (Ibid.: 57). A goose confesses, and after a sheep until all those who confess are slain on the spot; "And so the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones" (Ibid.: 58).

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When Napoleon brings back the old habits of Mr. Jones by drinking alcohol, it becomes clear that only an irresponsible leader would combat a situation and feel the pleasure to indulge themselves into it again. Fallen in his own traps, Napoleon changes the fifth commandment which now reads: "No animal shall drink alcohol *to excess*" (Ibid.: 75) to allow pigs to drink alcohol. It can be underscored here that the drunken state crowns Napoleon's irresponsibility and opens the door to his iron-fist-ruling.

### III. POLITICAL POWER ABUSE IN *ANIMAL FARM*

For R. A. Dahl, power is "the capacity for one person to influence another, i.e., to make another person do (or not do) what [they] would not do (or would do) otherwise" (R. A. Dahl 1963: 40). In this perspective of power as the exercise of influence or control, L. M. Imbeau (2007: 3), corroborates that "positions of authority (or force), wealth, and knowledge", are three sources of power that the powerful can use to influence other people. As a result, once the "influencer [uses] all [these] three types of resource to pursue his objectives, then the potential for power abuse is at its apex" (Ibid.: 21). In the context of this paper, political power abuse concerns the use of force, wealth and sometimes knowledge by characters of a higher position of authority, to achieve their goal regardless of the less powerful. Indeed, the abuse of power is all about "exceeding authority, combining authorities, and behaving arbitrarily" (A. Asmuni, 2024: 124).

So, whenever a person in position of power, fails to fulfil their duty toward others, they, most of the time, lose control and end up misusing their power. This failure in accounting for their actions leads to power abuse which, in turn, makes them lose their trustworthiness and, therefore, become less dependable. So, once a leader fails to meet their commitments and neglects the welfare of their people, they lose these people's trust and become irresponsible. Once irresponsibility is established in their habits, then arise irresponsible actions in their daily management of affairs and they have no other alternative than using force to settle certain matters, whence power abuse.

In *Animal Farm*, both Mr. Jones and Napoleon have failed in their responsibilities. As a result of this irresponsibility, they have abusively used their political power through the exercise of violence on other animals. This unbearable situation has created misunderstandings, forcing some animals to indulge themselves into betrayals in order to save their skin. This section answers the questions of the characters who are involved in the misuse of political power in *Animal Farm* and discusses how this power is abusively used, the consequences of it and proposes clues of good conduct for more responsible leaders in more balanced political regimes for the benefit of society.

#### 1. The Analysis of Mr. Jones' Power Abuse

Mr. Jones' cruelty in the exercise of his power is firstly noticed during Old Major's revolutionary speech to other animals. During Mr. Jones' reign, all the animals have been kept in a deadly injustice and starvation. Though food was available for all of them, Mr. Jones and his men who are presented as loafers, have chosen to keep animals hungry all day long. Men are not working, but are rather the ones enjoying all the profit of the farm. Animals, the real workers, are unfortunately kept hungry and neglected. This misuse of one's power creates a kind of injustice, pointed out by Old Major in the following rebellious terms:

Man is the only creature that consumes without producing. He does not give milk, he does not lay eggs, he is too weak to pull the plough, he cannot run fast enough to catch rabbits. Yet he is lord of all the animals. He sets them to work, he gives back to them the bare minimum that will prevent them from starving, and the rest he keeps for himself. Our labour tills the soil, our dung fertilises it, and yet there is not one of us that owns more than his bare skin. (G. Orwell, 1945: 4)

Indeed, Old Major, who is acting as an eye opener for other animals, has come to realise that their exploitation is not part of the natural order but simply man-created. This awareness starts with a retrospective question about their misery, a clear description of this miserable life, pointing out man as the cause of this situation and ends with a firm resolution which galvanizes other animals to remove Man from the Farm. This is how Orwell depicts it:

Now, comrades, what is the nature of this life of ours? Let us face it: our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength; and the very instant that our usefulness has come to an end we are slaughtered with hideous cruelty. No animal in England knows the meaning of happiness or leisure after he is a year old. No animal in England is free. The life of an animal is misery and slavery: that is the plain truth. (Ibid.: 3-4)

It can be understood from this quotation that, if no animal is free, well-fed, knows the meaning of happiness, and that the life of animals is resumed in misery and slavery, it is because Mr. Jones is misusing his political power. The power that he has to inflict pain to animals could have served to work out new strategies to give them a full manger.

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The further Old Major proceeds in his speech, the more exposed is Mr. Jones' abuse of power and the better we understand that, "no animal escapes the cruel knife in the end" (Ibid.: 5). Of course, the way animals are exploited by Mr. Jones shows them that "to that horror" shall all of them come whether they are "cows, pigs, hens or sheep" (Ibid.). This dreadful fate reserved for any animal and which marks the end of their life is a great hint at the uselessness of their existence before Mr. Jones. The helplessness of animals against Mr. Jones gives us an idea of the absolute power that Jones wields upon animals. In spite of all the tasks that the horses are doing, Mr. Jones waits until they lose the power of their muscles to "sell [them] to the knacker, who will cut [their] throat and boil [them] down for the foxhounds" (Ibid.). Particularly for dogs, who have no better fate, "when they grow old and toothless, Jones ties a brick round their necks and drowns them in the nearest pond." (Ibid.)

While analysing Old Major's speech with regard to the fate reserved to every animal, it can be concluded that Mr. Jones is a pitiless power holder who uses it the way he pleases. Especially with dogs, he becomes very wicked regardless of the task that they have accomplished. Old Major is sending to us a great message about Jones' abusive use of power and his lack of assistance. Instead of looking after dogs when they get too old and toothless, Mr. Jones rather chooses to drown them in the nearest pond because dogs are no longer of any use to him. When we analyse the image of Mr. Jones tying a "brick round" the necks of old and toothless dogs, it demonstrates his cruelty and brutality in the exercise of his power. As a result, Old Major's speech comes at the right moment for animals to "work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race!" (Ibid.). Are the problems of animals related only to the human race? Surely no, because just after getting rid of men through the rebellion, Napoleon, one of the pigs, who comes to power, does worse than Mr. Jones as far as power abuse is concerned.

### **2. The Analysis of Napoleon's Power Abuse**

Orwell opens his second chapter by presenting Napoleon as "a large, rather fierce-looking Berkshire boar, the only Berkshire on the farm, not much of a talker, but with a reputation for getting his own way" (Ibid.: 10). These introductory words about Napoleon give us an idea that he will not be easy to manage. The description is not only centered on Napoleon's large aspect but also on his fierce-looking which are elements that make allusion to fearfulness. If his appearance alone is fearful, it implies the menace he will be to others. In addition to this large appearance, we get to know that he is not much of a talker. This practical aspect of Napoleon is what Orwell alludes to as someone "with a reputation for getting his own way". This is the very essence of power, that is, to use one's reputation to get things done. Indeed, Napoleon has really used his reputation against all the other animals to get his will done.

Napoleon imposes himself and is ready to use his absolute power to make others do what he wants. This leads him to use his power in an abusive way. That is why we are not surprised to see him imposing his own decisions in their very first meetings and compelling other animals not to vote against snowball's Windmill plan. Having noticed that Snowball, his main challenger, is a threat to his projects, Napoleon worked out a plan with the help of Squealer to get rid of Snowball by expelling him from the farm. Napoleon utters a high whimper and:

At this there was a terrible baying sound outside, and nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars came bounding into the barn. They dashed straight for Snowball, who only sprang from his place just in time to escape their snapping jaws. In a moment he was out of the door and they were after him. Too amazed and frightened to speak, all the animals crowded through the door to watch the chase. Snowball was racing across the long pasture that led to the road. He was running as only a pig can run, but the dogs were close on his heels. Suddenly he slipped and it seemed certain that they had him. Then he was up again, running faster than ever, then the dogs were gaining on him again. One of them all but closed his jaws on Snowball's tail, but Snowball whisked it free just in time. Then he put on an extra spurt and, with a few inches to spare, slipped through a hole in the hedge and was seen no more. (Ibid.: 36-37)

This is how Snowball is violently expelled from the farm by Napoleon's bodyguards. Concerning the reaction of other animals to this first use of Napoleon's power, Orwell tells us that they remain "Silent and terrified, [and] crept back into the barn" (Ibid.: 37). It can be argued that Snowball's expulsion from the farm, marks the beginning of Napoleon's dictatorship, for, just after this terrible shock, he proceeds to forbid the Sunday morning meetings which he supposed are useless and wasting time. He has also indirectly put an end to the freedom of speech when he declares that there will no more be debates after the hoisting of the flag.

It is obvious here that nobody has elected Napoleon to power, he comes to power by force. He continues with terror when he "announced that there would be work on Sunday afternoons as well. This work was strictly voluntary, but any animal who absented himself from it would have his rations reduced by half" (Ibid.: 41). This specific announcement is hypocritical, in so far as, the reduction of rations contradicts the word voluntary. The fact that the absence of any animal will result in reduced rations

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means that there is no choice after all, for that animal. From this analysis, Napoleon is indirectly compelling all the animals to come in order to preserve their full rations and this shows his abuse of power.

Another element justifying Napoleon's abuse of power is when he establishes the cult of personality. As a result, "Napoleon was now never spoken of simply as "Napoleon." He was always referred to in formal style as "our Leader, Comrade Napoleon," and the pigs liked to invent for him such titles as Father of All Animals, Terror of Mankind, Protector of the Sheep-fold, Ducklings' Friend, and the like. (Ibid.: 63)

Once Napoleon's absolute power has been sung, he decrees that other animals are inferior to pigs. He not only reduces animals' rations over and over again but he crowns this wickedness with the successive executions of his enemies as well. The fact of killing other animals betrays Old Major's Animalism. That is the reason why he swiftly proceeds by changing all the commandments to fit them with his ambitious policy. Indeed, Napoleon has broken all the rules through his abusive use of power in such a way that animals have ended up sleeping in bed, killing other animals, drinking alcohol, engaging in trade and finally walking on two legs. In addition, the name of the farm has shifted from Manor Farm to Animal Farm and back again to Manor Farm, which means no change after all. Due to this total resemblance, the narrator is right to say that, it is impossible to distinguish the man from the pig at the end of the novel.

After all these analyses, it can be noted that the exploitation of animals is no more a question of a human as a leader. Orwell is telling us that, Mr. Jones, a human being and Napoleon, an animal, have both failed in leadership because of the individual's irresponsibility in the exercise of political power. Whether it is Orwell's two leaders or anybody else, this person would have failed in their leadership if they had not been responsible enough in their exercise of political power. For G. Rolland (1987: 33), to be a leader has nothing to do with "predestination [or] having all possibility in oneself' [...] but it is rather more about how these 'qualities could be developed [and be] coupled with [a good] will." So, these are the qualities that Napoleon could have developed to correct Mr. Jones' irresponsible mistakes and become a model in his leadership.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The analysis has shown that alcohol and excessive ambition for power and leadership are the root causes of Mr. Jones' and Napoleon's irresponsibility in *Animal Farm*. Mr. Jones' irresponsibility stems from his recurring habit of drinking too much alcohol. He, therefore, loses trust and becomes less dependable which entails his carelessness for animals. He would have been a more responsible leader if he had stopped getting drunk everyday. The irresponsibility of Napoleon rather comes from his excessive ambition to command others, though he ends up alcoholic.

The paper has also shown that both Mr. Jones' and Napoleon have failed in their leadership. This failure of leadership is due to the irresponsibility of each in their exercise of political power. Mr Jones' irresponsibility leads him to use his political power abusively to keep animals hungry or unfed all day long, and this brings about a rebellion that leads to his violent expulsion from the farm forever. The irresponsibility of Napoleon leads him to absolute power and dictatorship, a regime in which he changes all the rules and goes against Animalism through the executions of other animals. Furthermore, the analysis has underscored that, the issue of animals' misery and exploitation is no more a question of the leader's species. If Mr. Jones, a human being and Napoleon, an animal, have both failed in leadership, then, it is rather the individual's irresponsibility in the exercise of political power which leads them as power holders to fail in their leadership.

All in all, the paper proposes that anybody who aspires to a good and responsible leadership must refrain themselves from some vices, namely: irresponsibility, power abuse, alcohol and excessive ambition for power or leadership. Whether it is Mr. Jones or Napoleon or any other entity, that person or entity would have failed in their leadership if they had not been responsible enough in the exercise of their political power. Only responsible attitudes in a good conduct can create more responsible leaders in more balanced political regimes for the benefit of society.

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