

My main feeling is that the roots of the word (which is not one that RW explored) lie in religion, specifically the Christian religion. There was a Charismatic movement in Anglicanism that focused on such matters as speaking in tongues. These are the sort of practices that one might associate today with Evangelicism, but this did not at first take up the idea of charisma.

The usage of political charisma seems to have developed towards the sociologist Max Weber's idea of the charismatic leader, whose authority is derived not from knowledge or structural position, but from the way in which he/she is viewed by adherents. A charismatic leader is deemed to have some sort of divine qualities, whether or not this is apparent to non-adherents, or whether it could survive closer examination.

Charismatic political leaders in our time perhaps include Ramsay MacDonald (pre-1929!!), Churchill (wartime), Hitler, Stalin, the various Kims in North Korea, Thatcher, Trump, and of course, the current darling of the media, Nigel Farage. The fact that many people can see nothing of merit in any of these people, and find it hard to see how anyone can see them in any beatific manner, does not diminish their charisma. Their charisma comes from supporters, who often, I assume, place all their hopes and fears in the hands of this person, as some sort of saviour. They can fall mighty far and mighty quickly, like that well-known Conservative supporter and "charity" figure, James Wilson Vincent Savile.

To this could be added figures who are not direct holders of office and power, but who have had some sort of charisma in leadership, like Savile, the monarchy and Diana, various pop musicians and film "stars", Pope John Paul II, and the endless business leaders like Branson, even Sugar. While it is others who create charisma in individuals, such individuals and their backers can manipulate images so as to create or enhance a sense of divine qualities.

My main feeling is that charisma can be dangerous, and the key to it may be the manipulation of people's feelings, often those of the powerless.