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Power, Virtue, and Vice

Peggy DesAutels*

ABSTRACT

I approach virtue theory in a way that avoids idealized social ontologies and instead focuses on social hierarchies that include relations of power. I focus on the virtues tied to improving social environments—what I refer to as social-ethic virtues—and examine how the development of social-ethic virtues is influenced by motivations for and situations involving power. I draw on research in social and personality psychology to show that persons motivated by power and persons holding powerful social positions tend to behave in ways that correlate with certain virtuous and vicious patterns of behavior. I maintain that patterns of moral or vicious behavior (habits) tied to those in powerful positions are upheld by a combination of motivational dispositions and situational factors and that although a strong and dominating sort of power can corrupt, an agentic power to effect social, political, and institutional change is necessary for the social-ethic virtues.

> Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
> —Lord Acton

1. A NONIDEALIZED APPROACH TO VIRTUE AND ETHICS

Most virtue theory is idealized and provides unrealistic and unattainable exemplars for living virtuous and flourishing lives. A nonidealized virtue theory, on the other hand, should provide useful guidance for living virtuously in our day-to-day choices, behaviors, practices, and projects. It should accommodate human cognitive and practical constraints and respond to the complexities of actual experienced lives over time. Among the practical constraints are the limitations connected with the social situations in which we are embedded. In other words, contemporary virtue theory should be psychologically and socially realistic while accommodating a developmental perspective. We become more virtuous as we mature only if we develop certain types of virtue-conducive psychologies and only under virtue-conducive conditions.

When we take a nonidealized approach to virtue theory, perhaps the most significant social reality is that persons' psychologies develop and are embedded within hierarchical social structures. Some groups of people have power over other groups of people and control the resources needed to flourish. Some individuals amass great power and expect others to serve and obey them. More sinister is the social reality

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* University of Dayton. E-mail: peggy.desautels@gmail.com

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that some individuals coercively control others; some psychologically abuse others; and some enslave others. Given the reality of the human condition, it is impossible for all to be free of systematic social constraints and to live virtuous flourishing lives.

We can attempt as best we can to eliminate social structures that oppress and enslave persons and groups of persons. We can attempt to promote social structures that empower and encourage people. But what we cannot eliminate is the social fact that some people will have more social power than others, and given that fact, it is inevitable that some people will amass and abuse power. Hierarchical social and political institutions will remain. Wealth inequities will remain. Abusive husbands, abusive bosses, abusive dictators, and so on, will remain. And unfortunately, patriarchal as well as racist and classist cultures and institutions will remain.

My aim in this paper is to approach virtue theory in a way that avoids idealized social ontologies and instead focuses on social hierarchies that include relations of power. (For more on nonidealized approaches to social theory see Charles Mills [2004].) I begin by focusing on a subset of virtues—what I refer to as social-ethic virtues. I then briefly discuss the ways that those attempting to develop social-ethic virtues are influenced by motivations for and situations involving power. I draw on research in social and personality psychology to show that persons motivated by power and persons holding powerful social positions tend to behave in ways that correlate with certain virtuous and vicious patterns of behavior. Those motivated by and those in positions of power overlap, since those motivated by power are more likely to hold positions of power. I maintain that patterns of moral or vicious behavior (habits) tied to those in powerful positions are upheld by a combination of motivational dispositions and situational factors and that although a strong and dominating sort of power can corrupt, an agentic power to affect social, political, and institutional change is necessary for the social-ethic virtues.

2. VIRTUE AND A SOCIAL ETHIC

There are a number of possible goods that could contribute to a good life and a number of possible (even conflicting) virtues that could be combined in unique ways in a virtuous person. There are, as Owen Flanagan puts it, "varieties of moral personalities" (Flanagan 1991). Nonetheless, some virtues are more morally significant than others, including the social virtues tied to creating and maintaining flourishing communities. As Aristotle points out,

> . . . for though admittedly the good is the same for a city as for an individual, still the good of the city is apparently a greater and more complete good to acquire and preserve. For while it is satisfactory to acquire and preserve the good even for an individual, it is finer and more divine to acquire and preserve it for a people and for cities. (Aristotle 1985, 1094b)

For Aristotle, the highest good is political science—the study of justice, living well, and doing well. A more contemporary way to put this is that the development of virtues is tied to addressing injustices and inequities in our social communities (nations, cities, organizations, workplaces) and attending to those who are suffering in those communities is important to living a virtuous life. This includes the development of social structures and communities that make it possible to manifest social-ethic virtues.

Jane Addams's (1860–1935) social approach to ethics is of relevance here. Addams differentiates an individual ethic from a social ethic. On her view, someone who adheres to an individual ethic focuses on being kind, expressing compassion, and being attentive to the suffering of local and specific individuals, but does not attend to the social systems and environments, including prejudices and systematic injustices, that produce and maintain this suffering. She contrasts an individual ethic with a social ethic that focuses on identifying and providing material and social conditions that best enable all to flourish. Addams writes, "To attain individual morality in an age demanding social morality, to pride one's self on the results of personal effort when the time demands social adjustment, is utterly to fail to apprehend the situation" (Addams 2002, 2). Living by a social ethic requires, for Addams, that persons cultivate sympathetic understanding. They should not simply assume that they understand what others need in order to flourish. Rather they should immerse themselves in needy communities, listen empathetically to those who need assistance, determine what institutional and social adjustments need to be made to ameliorate the situation, and then coordinate with others to make these adjustments.

I focus here on the virtues tied to Addams's social ethic and ask whether and to what degree holding positions of power aids or abets the development of social-ethic virtues. Note that social-ethic virtues are tied to long-term commitments and projects and include sympathetic interactions as well as an ability to understand and change complex systems and institutional structures. A number of social scientists have shown that many of our day-to-day behaviors, e.g., such "helping" behaviors as stopping to assist a stranger who has dropped some papers, are shaped by situational factors and not by supposed virtuous "kind-to-strangers" character traits. Nonetheless, most agents have life-guiding motivations and goals on which they act in the broader contexts of chosen situations in their lives. Some agents even have specific virtue-related life-guiding motivations and goals that result in predicable types of chosen projects and types of moral or vicious behaviors. These could include the goals of more consistently identifying and responding to systematic structural injustices in political, institutional, and social settings—of cultivating and exercising virtues tied to a social ethic. Or, conversely these could include the goal of amassing as much power over others as possible in order to dominate and control them—of arguably cultivating a vice of coercive control of others. In this paper, I examine (1) the motivational disposition tied to power, (2) the conditions under which those who are motivated by or in positions of power are likely to exhibit social-ethic vices, and (3) the conditions under which those who are motivated by or situated in positions of power are likely to exhibit social-ethic virtues.

Although my focus here is on a social ethic and virtues and vices of those with power, I have focused elsewhere on virtues and vices of those who are subjected to and attempt to resist power. When a person is oppressed, the virtues needed to resist are, as Lisa Tessman describes them, "burdened virtues." The oppressed are burdened because their flourishing is constrained by limits on freedom, material resources, political power, and social standing as well as by moral damage to their characters (Tessman 2005). I have argued elsewhere that there are special psychological and moral burdens for those, e.g., whistleblowers, who resist institutional power as well (DesAutels 2009). If virtues of resisters are "burdened virtues," perhaps it would be useful to think of virtues and vices of the powerful as "exalted virtues and vices," since these vices are maintained and amplified by a powerful agent's authority, material resources, and social status.

3. VIRTUE AND THE SITUATION

A number of social psychologists have shown ways that situational factors, often quite subtle, influence our day-to-day behaviors (see, e.g., Milgram [1974]; Ross and Nisbett [1991]). As a result, some contemporary moral theorists have offered a situationist challenge to traditional forms of virtue ethics. They argue that we most likely do not have Aristotelian-style global character traits that reliably predict or explain moral behaviors across a wide range of situations (see, e.g., Doris [2002]; Harmon [1999]). Situationist psychological research appears to show that situational factors play a more significant role in determining our moral behaviors and tendencies than do supposed stable character traits. Likewise, we would expect that situational factors play a more significant role in determining vicious behaviors and tendencies than do stable character traits.

There is no doubt that even those with the best of moral intentions are vulnerable at least to some degree to situational factors. One obvious correction for this vulnerability is to design and create situations, when possible, that elicit moral behaviors. I agree with Maria Merritt who writes, "An undertaking more sensible than the attempt to make your character as independent as possible of all particular social settings or relationships, would be the exercise of care in your choice of them, and so far as possible in how you allow yourself to be affected by them" (Merritt 2000, 378). She points out that we have good reason to "take an active, discriminating interest in the climates of social expectation we inhabit" (Merritt 2000, 381). I also agree with Mark Alfano who makes the stronger point that simply choosing our situations carefully is not enough. He writes, " . . . rather than simply seeking and avoiding situations based on their virtue-conducive properties, we may take a more active role and create (both for ourselves and for others) situations with an eye to their virtue-conduciveness" (Alfano 2013, 80). Circumstances constrain what we can do, but they also offer possibilities; and the circumstances are at least partly of our own making.

Like Merritt and Alfano, I suggest that we critically examine environments and institutions to better understand their contributions to virtuous and vicious behaviors. Based on what we learn, we should then create better systems, policies, institutions, etc. Although it may be true that it is psychologically impossible to have robust character traits that are expressed across a wide range of situations, it may nonetheless be possible to arrange our and others' experiences in ways that result in persistently engaging in long-term moral projects, habitually behaving in moral ways, and consistently expressing patterns of behavior that coincide with virtuous behaviors. I maintain that if we wish to become more virtuous (that is, live so as to advance moral goals and behave in ways consistent with a social ethic) we must embark on both moral self-improvement projects and moral situation-improvement projects. I also suggest that although we may not have full-blown character traits, we do, nonetheless, construct self-narratives and have broad patterns of motivation that tie in with certain virtuous and vicious patterns of behavior.

4. VIRTUE AND THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Although we may not have virtues as traditionally understood, we construct narrative identities and life stories that when analyzed show social motivational themes. These themes are of relevance to and tie in with certain virtues and vices. Dan P. McAdams, a leading personality psychologist who conducts research on life stories writes:

> . . . the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and bodies with who we were, are, and might be in the social contexts of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class and culture writ large. The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity. (McAdams 2008, 242–43)

Although it may not be psychologically possible to develop robust character traits, personal narratives show that some of us have self-described dispositions and tendencies to be motivated by some things and not others and to then consistently act on these motives. According to McAdams,

> the kinds of behaviors and experiences which are set into motion—energized, directed, and selected—by a given motive are recurrently preferred by the individual who is dispositionally high on the motive. Thus, motives concern what people like to do—what they enjoy experiencing. (McAdams 1988, 72)

Power and intimacy are two distinct types of motivational forces or characteristic adaptations that McAdams has identified in subjects' life stories. (McAdams 2008, 1988) He maintains that individuals tend to differ by being motivated either more by power or more by intimacy. I say more about this below and how the dispositional motive for power, in particular, ties in with certain types of social-ethic virtues and vices.

5. POWER AND PSYCHOLOGY

Power can be conceptualized and analyzed in a number of ways. One approach emphasizes *power over* others—the domination of and exercise of control over others. Another emphasizes *power to* act—the capacity or ability to accomplish something. *Power over* is a much more negative conception of power than is *power to*. The two are intimately connected: if one person has *power over* others, the others correspondingly lack the *power to* make choices that matter. I will be discussing both versions. It is also important to differentiate *individual power* from *systems of power*. (For more perspectives on power, see Overbeck [2010] and Allen [2014].) It is certainly possible for an individual to exercise personal power over someone else (e.g., a domestic abuser), but I emphasize here institutional systems of power and the hierarchical roles within these institutions that result in some people having power over subordinates through rewards or punishments as well as the power to act in both beneficial and harmful ways towards those with less power and status.

There are a variety of approaches to researching psychology and power. Some psychologists examine changes in behavior when subjects are in situations involving power and others look at motivations and dispositions to obtain power. At one extreme, situationist psychologists study the psychological effects of situations involving strong power—complete control over others—and of being embedded in such rigidly hierarchically organized institutions as prisons or military complexes. At the other extreme, situationists study slight and often implicit psychological effects tied to situations in which there are differential group-based social statuses. Philip Zimbardo, a social psychologist, focuses on situations involving strong power over others. He is well known for setting up a simulated prison situation in which experimental subjects were randomly assigned to play the roles of powerful guards or compliant prisoners (the Stanford Prison Experiments). Other social psychologists have measured the degree to which those in power positions or with high social status express empathy when compared to their less powerful or lower status counterparts. Personality psychologists have looked more at individuals' power-related characteristic preferences and motivational structures. Some, including Dan McAdams, analyze themes in personal narratives and life stories to identify those who are dispositionally more motivated by power than by intimacy. The situationist and personality power-related findings in psychology overlap, since those who are motivated by power tend to seek out positions of power.

5.1 Social psychology and power

The Stanford Prison Experiment is now a classic example of how a situation involving extreme power differentials can drastically alter how otherwise ordinary people behave. Those who role-played being guards and prisoners in this simulated prison experiment were dramatically transformed by their roles. Although not all of the guards were transformed to the same degree, all became desensitized to the suffering of the "prisoners" and failed to challenge the system of abuse. In less than a week, some of the "guards" became surprisingly and quite creatively abusive. Zimbardo summarizes how the "guards" were changed as follows:

> Some of our volunteers who were randomly assigned to be guards soon came to abuse their newfound power by behaving sadistically—demeaning, degrading, and hurting the "prisoners" day in and night out . . . . Other guards played their role in tough, demanding ways that were not particularly abusive, but they showed little sympathy for the plight of the suffering inmates. A few guards who could be classified as "good guards," resisted the temptation of power and were at times considerate of the prisoners' condition, doing little things like giving one an apple, another a cigarette, and so on. . . . [N]one of

> them [those assigned to be guards] ever intervened to prevent the "bad guards" from abusing the prisoners; none complained to the staff, left their shift early or came to work late, or refused to work overtime in emergencies. (Zimbardo 2007, 207–208)

This experimental simulated prison was a microcosm of a system of power in which there are extreme hierarchical roles, strong norms and pressures to conform, and forces of dehumanization that all contributed to a loss of empathy for and an unwillingness to help those who are suffering. In other words, all of the "guards" developed social-ethic vices at least to some degree and some became extremely vicious while in their roles as guards. Fortunately, once the experiment was halted, these power-related vicious behaviors disappeared.

Although the Stanford Prison Experiment was just that, an experiment, accounts given by and behaviors of those who served as prison guards at Abu Ghraib, engaged in genocide in Rwanda, or participated in the Holocaust echo the accounts and behaviors of those role-playing guards in a simulated prison. Zimbardo has studied many of these accounts and shares the following summary of interviews with Hutu militia members.

> The French journalist Jean Hatzfeld interviewed ten of the Hutu militia members now in prison for having macheted to death thousands of Tutsi civilians. The testimonies of these ordinary men—mostly farmers, active church-goers, and a former teacher—are chilling in their matter-of-fact, remorseless depiction of unimaginable cruelty. Their words force us to confront the unthinkable again and again: that human beings are capable of totally abandoning their humanity for a mindless ideology, to follow and then exceed the orders of charismatic authorities to destroy everyone they label as 'The Enemy'. (Zimbardo 2007, 15)

In order to develop social-ethic virtues, it is important, I think, to familiarize ourselves with the kinds of situations that lead to the extreme opposing social-ethic vices of mass torture and genocide. True, most of us don't live and work in prisons (and most of us are not active participants in genocidal behavior!) but the situations and systems of power created by many of our institutions and organizations have much more in common with prisons and genocides than we would like to believe. Zimbardo rightly maintains that the "military-corporate-religious complex is the ultimate megasystem controlling much of the resources and quality of life of many Americans today" (Zimbardo 2007, 10). These megasystems are controlled by the powerful elite who often appeal to ideology and fear to enlist subordinates to maintain and expand the systems that disadvantage themselves and others.

> It's all done with words and images . . . . The process begins with creating stereotyped conceptions of the other, dehumanized perceptions of the other, the other as worthless, the other as all-powerful, the other as demonic, the other as an abstract monster, the other as a fundamental threat to our cherished values

> and beliefs. With public fear notched up and the enemy threat imminent, reasonable people act irrationally, independent people act in mindless conformity, and peaceful people act as warriors. (Zimbardo 2007, 11)

One of the take-away messages from Zimbardo's work is that if any one of us were to be placed in an extreme situation like those found in prisons or genocides, we would be just as susceptible as the next person to the power of the situation. Another take-away message is that we are as susceptible to vice as the next person when participating in any system or culture that dehumanizes or stereotypes groups of people. This is the kernel of truth underlying what Hanna Arendt called the "banality of evil." It is our moral responsibility to be on guard against this susceptibility and to attempt to make all situations more conducive to humane and dignified treatment of others.

The Stanford Prison Experiment was conducted in 1971. Since then a number of psychologists have added to our understanding of the social psychology of power. For a compilation of noteworthy recent research on the topic, see Guinote and Vescio (2010). Some recent findings include that an increase in power or social status is correlated with a decrease in empathy and concern for the well-being of others (Fiske 1993; Fiske and Dépret 1996; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske and Yzerbyt 2000; Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee 2003; Galisky et. al. 2008, 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld, and Anderson 2003; Russell and Fiske 2010; Hogeveen, Inzlict, and Obhi 2014). Findings also include that those in powerful positions tend to be less sensitive to individuating information about their subordinates (Fiske and Dépret 1996; Goodwin, Gubin, Fiske, and Yzerbyt 2000); that those in power tend to believe they know what is best for others (Cikara and Fiske 2007, 105); that increases in power are correlated with increasingly negative evaluations of others accompanied by increasingly positive evaluations of self (Georgeson and Harris 1998, 2000); that those in power talk loudly and interrupt more (Hall, Coates, and LeBeau 2005); and that those in power tend to emphasize instrumentality by objectifying others in order to use them for personal gain (Keltner, Gruenfeld, Galinsky, and Kraus 2010). All of these power-related tendencies are tied to social-ethic vices.

An especially interesting study shows that even those who are simply primed to recall a situation in which they had power show a decrease in interpersonal sensitivity (motor resonance in the brain) from the priming effect. The researchers found "a linear relationship between power and the motor resonance system, whereby increasing levels of power are associated with decreasing amounts of resonance" (Hogeveen, Inzlict, and Obhi 759). It doesn't take much at all for us to become less sensitive to the needs of others.

5.2 Personality psychology and power motivation

A significant direction in personality psychology is the empirical study and thematic analysis of personal narratives or life stories. This approach is grounded on the view that identities are constructed through narratives and that these stories help to direct, make sense of, and integrate people's lives. As I mentioned above, Dan P. McAdams is a personality psychologist who elicits and analyzes subjects' life stories in order to identify, for example, growth goals, motivational patterns, and characteristic adaptations. Jack J. Bauer is another (see, e.g., McAdams [1988, 2008]; Bauer and McAdams [2010], Bauer [2011]).

McAdams recently published a concise summary of some of the more significant findings in personality psychology that use the personal narrative approach (McAdams 2008). Of special interest to me are narrative themes tied to power and intimacy. McAdams writes,

> Studies have shown that social motives concerning power and intimacy (viewed as characteristic adaptations) are systematically related to recurrent narrative themes in life stories. People with strong *power* motives tend to construct personal narratives and life stories that feature agentic life themes as self-mastery, status and victory, achievement and responsibility, and empowerment; those high in *intimacy* motivation tend to construct more communal life narratives, emphasizing love and friendship, dialogue, caring for others, and belongingness. (McAdams 2008, 249)

Power motivation refers here to a recurrent preference for both amassing and controlling resources and increasing social status and control. It often includes a desire for conquest and domination (power over) along with a more benign desire for agentic effectiveness and mastery (power to). McAdams builds on David Winters's work on the power motive:

> The essence of power is the ability to make the material world and the social world conform to one's own image or plan for it. This is a complicated process involving steps such as forming a plan, articulating it, rallying support and amassing resources, convincing others, checking the implementation, using positive and negative sanctions, and so forth . . . . [T]he power motive should predict office seeking and office holding. (Winter and Stewart 1978, 400 [quoted in McAdams 1988, 85])

The contrast offered by McAdams to the power motive is the intimacy motive. "The intimacy motive is defined as a recurrent preference or readiness for experiences of warm, close, and communicative exchange—interactions with others deemed ends rather than means to other ends" (McAdams 1988, 77). These communicative exchanges can be with family, friends, children, or others. Although some of these interactions are between those of unequal power and status (e.g., parent-child), studies have shown that those who score high in intimacy motivation are judged by their friends and acquaintances to be significantly less dominant than those who score low in intimacy motivation (McAdams 1980; McAdams and Powers 1981; McAdams 1988, 83).

So apparently, some people are primarily motivated by power and are more concerned with achieving control over their social and material worlds than they are with maintaining close, caring relationships. These people risk having correlated vices of using others as a mere means to their own ends, dominating and exploiting others, and so on. Not all people motivated by power are evil, however. Some may simply be motivated to have the power needed to affect positive change and some may be able to avoid the vicious extremes. Even so, sometimes the only way to act using one's power is to think abstractly about a social system and to factor out the individualities of those who are suffering within that system—to reduce one's sympathetic response and listening stance in order to move forward.

It is an uncontroversial fact that men are more likely than women to have systemic power (political, corporate, and so on). However, many social and personality psychologists ignore or downplay power and gender. For example, all of the participants in the Stanford Prison Experiment were male, but this is not emphasized much by Zimbardo. A few psychologists have looked for and found some power and gender-related differences. For example, there is some evidence that ties aggressive and impulsive behavior to high power motivation in men but not in women (Stewart and Chester 1982). Although men are stereotypically viewed as motivated by power and control and women are stereotypically viewed as motivated by intimacy, there are no consistent findings to date that these stereotypes hold up. There have been some studies that show sex differences in those who are power motivated. For example, one study concluded that among those who are well educated and high in power motivation, men were more likely than women to marry partners who chose not to pursue professional careers. They speculate that this is in order that men who are motivated by power can better influence and control their wives (Winter, Stewart, and McClelland 1977).

In addition, our power-related beliefs and systems reflect the social understandings and master narratives of our cultures. Two social psychologists who study effects of gender, Mina Cikara and Susan T. Fiske, note,

> The pervasive beliefs about men and women legitimize a system in which men have relatively more control than women in public domains (e.g. professional settings), whereas women are thought to have relatively more control than men in private domains (e.g. the home). (Cikara and Fiske 2007, 102)

Carolyn G. Heilbrun has similarly noted that in western societies, many women "have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control over—their lives" (Heilbrun 1988, 17 [quoted in McAdams 2008, 247]).

6. POWER, VIRTUE, AND VICE

It should be clear that the more power that people exercise over others, the more likely they are to exhibit vicious behaviors. At its worst, strong power contributes to and perpetuates torturous cruelty and deprivation and results in the opposing extreme to social-ethic behaviors. Some of the specific vicious social behaviors correlated with absolute power over others include: Coercive control, exploitation, harassment, debasement, and a complete disregard for, or taking pleasure in, the suffering of others.

Most power is not absolute, but societies and institutions tend to organize themselves in hierarchies and to distribute power and status unevenly. Culturally-situated vices are upheld by social and material advantages along with strong beliefs of entitlement. For example, a sexual harasser often has a strong belief of entitlement to sex from those over whom he has power. Pervasive cultural attitudes and narratives that include group-based inequalities and dependence asymmetries will result in dominant group members exhibiting vicious traits (e.g., sexism, racism, etc.). John Stuart Mill makes note of the harms to men's character in patriarchal societies when he writes,

> All the selfish propensities, the self-worship, the unjust self-preference, which exist among mankind, have their source and root in, and derive their principal nourishment from, the present constitution of the relation between men and women. Think what it is to a boy, to grow up to manhood in the belief that without any merit or any exertion of his own, though he may be the most frivolous and empty or the most ignorant and stolid of mankind, by the mere fact of being born a male he is by right the superior of all and every one of an entire half of the human race . . . . What must be the effect on his character, of this lesson? (Mill 1869, par. 33)

Alongside the vices associated with group-based power differentials, there are the vices associated with those who take on powerful roles in institutions. The powerful become more socially vicious through a failure to attend to or empathize with the needs of subordinates and through thinking they know what is best for others. The more powerful they get, the more likely they are to fail to focus on others as individuals and instead to use others instrumentally. They are also well-placed powerful *insiders* in that institution. If the institution itself is unjust or others in powerful positions are abusing power within that institution, it is usually impossible to address the injustices or to challenge others with power (e.g., to whistleblow) without being retaliated against and losing the power one once had. Senator Elizabeth Warren makes this point in reference to a conversation she had with Larry Summers when he served as the director of the National Economic Council. She writes that after a dinner,

> Larry leaned back in his chair and offered me some advice. I had a choice. I could be an insider or I could be an outsider. Outsiders can say whatever they want. But people on the inside don't listen to them. Insiders, however, get lots of access and a chance to push their ideas. People—powerful people—listen to what they have to say. But insiders also understand one unbreakable rule: They don't criticize other insiders. (Morgenson 2014)

Even when someone is as committed as Senator Warren to effect widespread positive social change, in order to have and maintain the power to do so, that person has to become an insider unwilling and unable to criticize harmful entrenched systems, practices, and individuals. Thus insider power is paradoxical—you have power to effect positive change, but you most likely do not have that power if you hope to keep your power.

Is it possible, and if so what would it take, to remain socially virtuous after gaining and exercising the power needed to effect widespread positive social and institutional change? No doubt, there are varieties of intelligence, personality traits, motivational dispositions, and expertise effective at gaining, maintaining, and exercising power virtuously. And there are a number of strategies one can take to avoid losing sympathy for others and becoming corrupt as effects of power. Those motivated to make a positive difference in the world should first think very carefully about their chosen situations and choose those that are most conducive to the development of social-ethic virtues. These "situations" include educational trajectories, careers, roles, affiliations, employment, and moral projects.

If virtuous agents find themselves in situations that they cannot escape and that perpetuate injustices (or fail to be conducive to socially virtuous behavior), it is, of course, important to resist these situational pressures as much as is possible. Zimbardo offers some possible steps to take in order to resist unwanted situational influences that include: avoiding mindless inattention and practicing mindfulness about one's situation; maintaining a sense of one's own responsibilities; asserting one's own and other's uniqueness and individuality; distinguishing just from unjust authority over oneself; remaining vigilant over how a situation is described or framed; avoiding an exclusive focus on the present—focusing on past commitments and future goals; and opposing unjust systems (Zimbardo 2007, 451–56). I agree that mindfulness is important (see DesAutels 2004). I also agree that resisting unjust systems is important, but doing so can be daunting at best and may result in more harm than good both to the resister and to those harmed by injustice (DesAutels 2009).

Although resisting injustice is important (and someone has to do it!) it is also important to directly respond to and create institutions or organizations that meet the needs of others. Jane Addams's virtues and accomplishments are exemplary of a life devoted to a social ethic. She familiarized herself with the day-to-day struggles and needs of the poor immigrants in Chicago and responded by establishing Hull House. The social services provided by Hull House included child-care, meals, bathing facilities, job training, arts, and social events (Addams 1961). She emphasized the unique individualities and rich cultural backgrounds of the poor immigrants she served. In other words, she created an institutional social democracy—the antithesis of an abusive power system. She was also instrumental in changing conditions for exploited and impoverished workers through a variety of social, political, and economic reforms. And she was a life-long pacifist who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

Most of us will not come close to matching Addams's virtues and accomplishments. However, there are many of us who, in our own ways, devote our lives to the public good. After collecting many, many life stories, McAdams identifies and describes from some of these stories what he terms the "generative adult." He writes about generativity as follows:

> Procreation, child care, certain acts of altruism, and commitments to moral codes and societal continuity, as well as a wide range of strivings and behaviors

> aimed ultimately at promoting the social good from one generation to the next, especially as displayed by mature, socially integrated adults, can be seen as expressions of generativity. (McAdams 2013, 31)

The social ethic virtues I emphasize here overlap with the tendencies found in McAdams's 'generative adult' and closely match those promoted by Addams. They may include family-focused virtues but on Addams's and my view must also include virtues devoted to justice and the relieving of suffering in our wider communities. On my and Addams's view, and unlike McAdams's view of the generative adult, adherence to strict moral codes should be avoided. The risk is that moral codes often rigidly assume what "the good" is for others and what types of acts are moral and immoral. Instead, the pragmatic emphasis is on learning more about the optimal conditions for human flourishing and how best to bring those about in the light of actual historical, institutional, and cultural conditions.

What motivates persons to devote their lives to the social good and to develop the social-ethic virtues? McAdams points out that often those who devote much of their time and energy to the public good are motivated to do so early in their lives. Perhaps they were raised on religious convictions or in families that highly valued social justice. Or perhaps they had a formative childhood memory of being exposed to human suffering and being moved to respond. Not everyone with like backgrounds and experiences develops social ethics virtues—some personalities are more responsive than others to the plights of others. And some people are better able to identify and respond to complex social issues. In addition, some people may be compassionate in one-on-one situations or in response to a particular image of a suffering person, but many people are unable to translate this empathetic response into feeling compassion for and responding to the suffering of large numbers. Paul Slovic describes what he terms "psychic numbing." Most of us cannot fully comprehend large-scale tragedies or form emotional connections to large numbers of sufferers (e.g., millions being murdered in a genocide) and instead become numbed and unresponsive (Slovic 2007).

Nonetheless, some of us do spend our lives responding as best we can to large-scale suffering. What psychologies do such individuals have? According to McAdams, a theme that shows up in the life stories of generative adults is a conflict between a strong need for power and a strong need for love. As he puts it, "They want to exert a strong positive impact on the world and they want to be accepted by others in warm and caring relationships" (McAdams 2013, 47). Unfortunately, it is very difficult and often impossible for both of these needs to be met simultaneously, so many generative adults are conflicted. Regardless, some do manage to have and meet both needs if not synchronously throughout their adult lives, at least diachronically (e.g., focus on family for a few years then focus on social issues after that). Notice that here power is emphasized as "power to" and not "power over."

So, is Lord Acton right to say, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men"? He may well be right that absolute power corrupts absolutely. But I argue that some types of power in some types of people facilitate social-ethic virtues. And some great women and men are virtuous. It is, indeed, both psychologically possible and morally desirable to need and obtain power to affect positive social change.

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