

Power and Social Responsibility?

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I have titled my talk after your conference theme which, as you know, is "Power and Social Responsibility." But I have added a question mark after it so that it now goes, "Power and Social Responsibility?"

I have taken the liberty of adding a question mark to your conference theme because I feel it conveys the impression—or is it merely a hope?—that power tends to equate with social responsibility; that power begets social responsibility.

In my reading of your theme, I believe that if it were to be more explicitly stated, it would read "Power Over People and Social Responsibility Towards the People," implying that those who have power over others will have, or will almost have, a sense of social responsibility towards the latter. Or perhaps you meant to say should have a sense of social responsibility towards the latter?

I am not very certain about what you really meant. I have found that you may be scientists—political scientists—but you are rather imprecise in some things you do.

I received an invitation saying I am to speak at a dinner. But there was no mention of time or place. Being a researcher, of course, I looked at the program and, apparently, it was not even the time you meant because very few were here at five past seven. Of course, Dr. Gabriel Iglesias did remember yesterday morning, and telephoned me, saying, "By the way, I forgot to tell you, it's at Vinzon's Hall."

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So, this is the reason I am not very certain whether I have interpreted your theme correctly.

However, if I have, I would say you are in error. If you are a member of a group over whom others have power—and you believe those who have power over you exercise, on their own volition, social responsibility towards you, I am afraid you are quite likely to be disappointed. If, on the other hand, you are a member of a group possessing power of any kind over another group, and, out of plain compassion, you exercise social responsibility over those in your power, you are either “one in a million,” as the saying goes, or you are simply naive at wielding power, not having really wielded power at all.

I hope you will take it easy with me. I have come to learn. And, if I learn enough, maybe one of your professors would give me 3 units of credit. In any case, if we are to properly join the issue, I think we should agree on what the term “power and social responsibility” meant in the context of our discussion.

Power over other, I think, simply means the capability of influencing the actions of others—whether by threat of punishment, by promise of reward, or by both; and whether by political, by economic, by religious, or by plain physical means. Social responsibility, on the other hand, may be defined as the exercise of power by a group over another group in a manner that benefits, equitably, both groups as a whole.

On the basis of my definitions, power and social responsibility can now be correctly equated also with the power of those who are to be influenced to impose social responsibility on those doing the influencing. Or, if we read to you political science, social responsibility on the part of those who govern is imposed only by the power of those who are governed.

I believe it can be amply demonstrated that, with very few exceptions or exemptions, social responsibility, demonstrated by those who have the power to influence others over those who seek to be influenced, is directly proportional to the power of the latter to counteract the power of the former. In addition, the benefits of social justice are distributed in proportion to the power of the recipient of the benefit.

Whether the arena is political, economic, religious or plain physical, those speak of influencing the actions of others can only actually do so if those whom they want to influence allow them to.

This is, of course, the basis of the dictum, "power corrupts." In the context of our discussion, perhaps, we can paraphrase this to say "power influences, and absolute power influences absolutely." Or, to say it in another way, the capability of power to influence absolutely is limited only by the power of those who seek to be influenced.

There is no doubt that in any society, group, or group undertaking, there is need for leaders—the ones who influence, and followers—the ones who are influenced. In an ideal situation, no matter what the arena is, those who lead should have enough power edges over those who follow in order to lead effectively, or in political sense, to govern effectively.

But those who follow should, in turn, have enough power to impose social responsibility on those who govern. That responsibility is to speak of the welfare of the group, or society as a whole, rather than the welfare only of those who lead.

Can we achieve that in our society? Can a society where availability of opportunities for improving one's lot, and availability of freedom to do one's own thing, are constrained only by the need to impose denial in equal measure, for the common good, be governed? And, can those who govern come to a stable term in our country?

Thank you.