

Philosophy Society Discussion Group - 02/10/2018

THE PHILOSOPHY OF POWER

1. What is 'power'? The ability to control people or manipulate events, or something subtler? Are there qualitatively different sorts of power e.g. state-power, civilian-power, positive/negative-power? (A popular distinction is hard/soft-power*)
2. Can power be intrinsic, granted without one's having done anything to acquire it? Or is power something always practiced or 'extrinsic,' i.e. the result of an effort to cause something in the world to occur? Is it something which one enacts, or which passively occurs?
3. Is justice the 'might of the right' or the 'right of might'? What place does power hold in both justice in general, and in our socio-cultural understanding of justice? Is justice a series of 'universal' laws, or do we influence the definition of it? Can justice apply to me differently because I have power?
4. Many psychologists and philosophers alike believe power to be essential to happiness ('environmental mastery'). Do you agree with them? Can one be happy and powerless? Is there such a thing as the 'right amount' of power? Can and may we externally limit people's power to increase their happiness on account of this, and what amount of power is required to have this ability (too much? just enough?)

*Soft power is the ability to influence events (like giving someone money to increase the chances of them liking you: if x then possibly y), whilst hard power is the ability to cause events (like a monarch's ability to imprison people without trial – standard causality: if x then y).