

The Pillars of Power

By Sue Hostetler

The famous nineteenth century politician and writer Lord Macaulay once said “The highest proof of virtue is to possess boundless power without abusing it.” When I came across this quote I couldn’t help but wonder what I would do if I was granted unlimited power. Would I want to rule the world? Or maybe just France so I could have all of the free Hermès products my heart desired? Then I started thinking about all of the various kinds of power that exist in the world. We certainly live in a culture of ambition-obsessed people willing to do almost anything for a little taste of power (and celebrity). Consider those willing to humiliate themselves on the reality TV shows for that bit of fame.

But, which kind of power is the most fun to have? Which kind makes life easier? Which corrupts the most? And most importantly, what exactly does each type of power actually buy you?

At the top of everyone’s list would have to be **the power of MONEY**. And we all know exactly what that gets you; namely, whatever you want. Financial control can get you two of the most sought after things in life: freedom and independence. (Oh, and also, a gorgeous house in Cap d’Antibes and a fleet of Maybachs). And, according to my research, money actually does buy happiness – maybe just not in the way you think. Multiple studies show that people who donate to charity are 40 per cent more likely to say they are “very happy” than non-doners.

The power of AUTHORITY, NOBILITY or FORCE must be pretty intoxicating and have certainly been corrupting for many over the years. But being an elected government official (or a military strongman) seems to buy you some stuff I’m not so sure I want. Don’t get me wrong, I’ll take the perks like Air Force One, the crown jewels and the ability to enact laws that make our world a better place to live. But I could do without the assassination attempts, relentless media attention and grueling pressure of being responsible for the welfare of a nation.

SOCIAL power has been quite popular since the 1800s and the days of American moralist and writer Henry James, and is wielded with great precision in the cultural capitals of the world. This one might be the most fun to have. If you’re interested in obtaining prestige, party and fashion show invitations, societal acceptance, a good table at Harry Cipriani in NYC and seeing your photo splashed across the pages of *Vanity Fair* magazine, this form of power should be your goal. The good news is social power sometimes does not require great intelligence or even hard work. The bad news is it is often held only by certain families, casts or tribes and necessitates having the right ancestors.

My personal favourite would have to be **the power of KNOWLEDGE or EXPERTISE**. I’ve always loved the old saying “knowledge is power” – you have the power to use it...grant it... withhold it... share it. In short, it creates more



opportunities than other types of power. It is also my belief that you can acquire or achieve just about anything you want by focusing on cultivating your mind or perfecting your passions. This is often a noble route to power and more importantly seems to be a worthwhile way to live your life – pursuing an existence of knowing more and obtaining the

skills and secrets to do something better than anyone else.

I could go on and on...religious power is surely widely sought-after. And the power of tradition has always been potent. But, in the end, I think I still like the idea of all of those beautiful Birkin bags. If only I had gotten to Sarkozy before Carla Bruni. *B*