

Power

It is to the ancient Athenians that we owe our most fine-tuned understanding of the conundrum of power, that the finer it is to be in our service the more carefully we need to use it. Power is both self-created and created by us. The Athenian insight, into the use of fine power, was unique.

In the world of politics there are different shades of power. There is, for instance, *noisy power*—the power of tanks rolling through the streets of a small city, machine guns peering cruelly from the bolted side panels of the steel marauder. That kind of power is ready to strike and speaks for itself. Then there is *quiet power*, the power of a single thin eyed marksman, posted in the eaves of a forgotten castle in the shadow of a treasured monument. Either kind of power can dispatch you in a second, while the same could simply protect you, protect you from other power. It could simply prevent others from harming you. In other words power is a flexible, ponderous, potentially stabilizing social factor. Mastery of either kind of power is arguably the ultimate leaderly craftsmanship. With such mastery one can call the shots of history, winning peoples with a nod, or destroying them with a frown.

One of the most urgent deployments of power, in a constitutional democracy, is the power to control men of good will. Without turning them into passive victims of the state, *though all the same as victims of the state*, they are most inconvenient to control. We might say that this discovery was one of the greatest Hellenic perceptions, and that it marks the genius of Pericles, in the great funeral oration, that marks the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War, the first year that was the greatest test of the truths involved in ancient Greek culture.

Strictly speaking, then, It will have been Pericles and Thucydides, two of the most esemplastic and culture shaping summations of Hellenic excellence, who placed the olive crown of achievement on the head of Greek excellence. They defined masculine excellence in the arts of governing. They found the power point where the wise conception of power in this undertaking, coincides with that of the fifteenth century Florentine Leonardo da Vinci, who, two thousand years later than the Greeks, found an epicenter of excellence in the controlled power of his fellow Florentines, whose skills were exemplary for the human condition.

Leonardo was a consummate practitioner of all the arts. He knew how to evaluate artistic men, within the individual human or state, for he was himself a universal man, who saw through the power of genius, who saw through the strengths of individuals into the universal quality of the human condition. The cognitive trick for Leonardo was, for example, to see through the individual vein complex into the whole organic complex of the human as he existed in wholeness and detail. Leonardo was able to see the universal in the detail,

The social masterpiece, in the creation and arguably understanding of power, was arguably Jesus Christ, whether you experience him as the mind's ultimate experience of power, or as a divine willingness. Chiseled, puzzled over, a presence carefully sustained in the space between the absolute freedom of understanding and the according potency of every power, he was the power that learning enacts from itself.

Three faces of power: that of Pericles, to celebrate the power of men who have taken the risk of a great defense of men of power and the ideal; that of Leonardo, who was able to read straight through to the universal human in the individual sample, as it were into the absolute power of the living organic cell, a reflection taking us back, say, to the image of the Nobel researcher into nucleic acids, who seems to be peering through slices of thin magnifying glass into the quintessential power of DNA; finally that of Jesus Christ, whose power, crossing the lines between the figurative and the actual, powerfully transforms whatever it touches.