

from the editors

Greater Good

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Greater Good (ISSN 1553-3239) collects, synthesizes, and interprets groundbreaking scientific research into the roots of compassion, altruism, and peaceful human relationships. It fuses this cutting edge science with inspiring stories, promoting dialogue between social scientists and parents, teachers, community leaders, and policy makers.

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Greater Good
SCIENCE CENTER

INTERROGATION TACTICS, ILLEGAL wiretapping, preemptive force, recess appointments. Over the past seven years, we've seen the Bush administration challenge conventional limits placed on executive powers, much to the dismay of many Americans.

As we gear up to choose the next occupant of the White House, it's easy to criticize these abuses of power and demand something more from our next president. But it's harder to articulate what a more responsible use of power would actually look like. And beneath our high hopes for the next administration, it's tough to shake the feeling that these kinds of abuses may be inevitable—power corrupts, doesn't it? Perhaps such strong applications of power are even necessary to get things done.

This issue of *Greater Good* addresses some of these complex and troubling issues around the psychology of power. We've surveyed the vast literature on this topic, and we hope the result is edifying and even inspiring.

Much of the research confirms that, yes, power does have the potential to corrupt. Under certain conditions, a taste of power can induce even good people to abuse others. But it's also clear that abuses of power are not inevitable. People are capable of transcending the negative influences of power—and when they do, they prove to be more successful leaders and have stronger, more enduring connections to others.

What we have assembled in this issue is a vision of power that deviates from most treatments of the subject. It's a scientifically-based vision of power, one where empathy and social intelligence trump force and coercion. Research shows that when power is wielded responsibly, with respect for others, people on both ends of the equation enjoy a higher quality of life.

The contributors to this issue provide a litany of practical tools you can use to prevent yourself and others from abusing power, whether in the workplace, the classroom, the bedroom, or in everyday interactions with friends or family members. They also reveal the extensive damage caused by power abuses: employee burnout, frayed marriages, and hostile parent-child relationships, as well as health problems among the people who sit low on any social totem pole.

The Bush administration does hover in the margins of many of these essays, sometimes addressed implicitly—as in the lead essay's

case against unilateral uses of power—and sometimes explicitly, as in anthropologist Christopher Boehm's analysis of the evolutionary roots of political power and in the interview with foreign policy expert Anne-Marie Slaughter. But ultimately, of course, the principles discussed in this issue go beyond this or any presidential administration. These principles even extend beyond the obvious power dynamics between leaders and their followers.

Instead, as our contributors make clear, power pervades just about every aspect of our lives. This means everyday social situations are fraught with the potential for abuse and manipulation. But it also means that, through our interactions with others, we have regular opportunities to promote equality, respect, and cooperation. Seizing these opportunities requires more than just good intentions. It requires that we understand the psychology of power. And it requires that we promote public awareness—and public policies—to guard against the negative influences power can have on anyone.



Jonathan Payne

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Coming up in *Greater Good*:

The Fight for Play (Spring 2008)

Research says play promotes social, emotional, and academic development—plus, it's fun. But kids today are playing less than previous generations. What can we do to help give kids and adults time and space to play?

Are We Born Racist? (Summer 2008)

Science has uncovered psychological and biological roots of prejudice. But that's only half the story. This issue will explore new research into how we can overcome our tendencies to discriminate against others.