

## Power Is The Paradox

People have a hard time getting what they want; in fact, the things they want can be incompatible with each other. In Shakespeare's Macbeth, the protagonist is lured to murder the king, Duncan, by the desire for power, an appetite honed by witch's prophecies and his wife's encouragement. But when he reaches the kingship, he finds himself insecure. He attempts to remove threats that decrease his security, including his companion Banquo and his son Fleance, predicted to be king. His lords grow angry and revolt successfully, after witches lure Macbeth into a false sense of security by further foretelling. In Macbeth, we see that, despite appearances of contradiction, man's goals of comfort and power are forever opposed in increment, though the two may decline together.

The power from knowledge causes discomfort. As often has been said, ignorance is bliss. After Macbeth is promised the throne, Banquo asks why Macbeth is less than ecstatic. "Good sir, why do you start, and seem to fear / Things that do sound so fair?" (Act I, Scene 3) Macbeth's new knowledge makes him uncomfortable, as he realizes the implications. His first thoughts considering murdering Duncan appear, and he is scared. After he commits the murder, Macbeth says, "To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself." (Act II, Scene 2) Knowing that has committed such a vile act makes him uncomfortable. It will be difficult to act innocent and to deal with his guilt. When he later decides to murder Banquo and Fleance, he tells his wife, "Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, / Till thou applaud the deed." (Act III, Scene 2) Hecate sets Macbeth up for his final fall. The security provided by the second set of predictions is only short-lived. Feeling there is no threat to his power, Macbeth acts wildly, bringing his downfall and loss of both comfort and security. The problem with knowledge was that it was power resulting in a decline in comfort.

Those most comfortable have the least power. The enjoyment of security prevents strength. The Porter delivers an ironic speech on the evils of drink, explaining, "Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance: therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him and disheartens him; makes him stand to and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and giving him the lie, leaves him." (Act II, Scene 3) While drink may cause comfort, this is contradicted by its other effects. It takes away the power, the performance. This recalls the guards, comfortably asleep but not standing guard, the latter their blame, as they are said to stand and kill the king and then stop standing to. After the murder, Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain decide to forgo the power of the kingship. Says Donalbain, "Where we are / There's daggers in men's smiles; the near in blood, / The nearer bloody." (Act II, Scene 3) He realizes that his father was murdered because of the position he was in. It would be much safer to not be king, despite the loss in power, because the threats are too great. Power serves as both a blessing and a curse.

Gaining power causes discomfort. When trying to gain power, hoping to increase their pleasure, people find themselves wracked with guilt and paranoia. Macbeth sees how lucky the dead and powerless Duncan really is. Duncan has no power but faces no threats either. He is much safer than Macbeth, who lives in fear of losing the throne. As he observed, "To be thus is nothing, / But to be safely thus." (Act III, Scene 1) His power as king wasn't really as great as he thought it would be, and his power is really for nothing because he feels so threatened. The same idea is found again when his wife opinions

"Nought's had, all's spent,  
Where our desire is got without content.  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy

Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy." (Act III, Scene 2)

Everything they had done to gain the power they desired just led to greater discomfort, as they found the dead were much happier than they. After the murder, Lady Macbeth is troubled by feelings of guilt, making her sleep erratic and uncomfortable. "Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One- two -why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?" (Act V, Scene 1) Lady Macbeth is suffering from an illness of her own cause. The power brought with it much suffering and trouble.

Though people seek both power and security, the two ends are in conflict. The power of knowledge and the pursuit of power lead to a decline in comfort, and those without power find the most comfort. Macbeth and his wife find power to be troublesome, with those they killed even enjoying a more pleasant life. Like trying to measure two factors with precision, trying to reach both goals to a high degree is impossible. At the same time, the two are able to decline together. I myself have felt the problem of this paradox. Much of my power makes me uncomfortable. For example, when I have to make important decisions or when I know more than I want to. A balance needs to be found between complacent security and dangerous pursuits of power.