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# GADFLIES NIBBLING

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### **Abstract:**

In this paper I examine issues related to public and private “moral authority”, and how this public moral authority interferes with the exercise of private moral authority. This paper explores what public authority is, and why that while in other field it can properly exist, in terms of morality it by its very existence is problematic because 1) it interferes with the exercise of reason in determining ethical action and 2) because it treats the public moral authority as something other than a human being. I then look to several ethical dilemmas as presented by several philosophers and show how this public moral authority interacts with these dilemmas as well as how this exercise of public moral authority is distinct from ethical reasoning that roots itself in a particular ethical theory.

## **Introduction:**

Who has moral authority? The people to who society grants moral authority. Americans tend to grant the icons of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr, Gandhi and Nelson Mandela, a sort of elevated moral authority. This is distinct from how a quote from an ethical expert is received. Such is evident in how one treats a quote from Nelson Mandela, versus how one treats a quote from Kant. A quote from Kant is “authoritative” in that Kant is assumed to be reasoning well, and so he must be argued against. When one is dealing with a Kantian position they will seek to argue against the position’s plausibility, show certain unlikable consequences of the position, and really look to engage the position logically. When one is dealing with a quote from Mandela however, one cannot simply seek to engage with the idea logically, as the words have an increased weight in saying “what ought to be done”. The quote may in no way increase the logical soundness of an argument, and yet rhetorically, the impact of the quote is hard to deny. This is a public moral authority, a thing completely dependent on its performative aspect. One’s public moral authority does not exist prior to a particular situation with the moral author not being determined by some philosophical principle, but rather existing only as an authority because of how their suggestions, thoughts and approval are treated in any particular situation. However, this concept of public moral authority is ultimately bankrupt because it tramples on private moral authority, and because it fails in treating the moral author as a human being.

## **Moral Authority: A public and private account**

Moral authority is a malleable concept which can both fit into a private account and a public account. Really though this isn’t so much a “malleable concept” but rather two separate and distinct concepts which authors have termed as “moral authority”. An individual conception of moral authority focuses on a person’s autonomy in making moral decisions which are, as Levy

puts it, beyond our judgement<sup>1</sup>, while public moral authority is performative where a person respects the authority of another person in their consideration of what ought to be done morally in any given situation. As C. Naomi Osorio-Kupferblum puts it “A person S1 has authority iff another person S2 voluntarily does something she would not have done otherwise because she believes that S1 would approve of it.”<sup>2</sup> This respect for the approval of the authority is given willingly by the person to an authority as distinguished from power which involves the coercion of the person<sup>3</sup>. It also follows that if this kind of respect is not given to a person’s moral judgements, then they are not a public moral authority.

A doctor has medical authority when one prescribes a treatment or medication, yet there are many challenges to the authority of doctors. Some are insufficient, such as those who contend that vaccines are poisons with no benefits. This is insufficient because it deals with what the doctor is directly an authority of, namely the falsifiable results of medicine, but not all challenges are from this realm. There are those who challenge doctors over the medication of patients for psychological conditions, contending that doctors miss the point of such experiences when their solution to a depression is medication. When a patient says, “there just doesn’t seem to be any point to living”, is that really a solution solved best by pumping a brain with dopamine, or are there other solutions which could provide that meaning? The answer requires more than just a consultation of the doctor. Further, a scientist has authority over falsifiable reality. A person who contends that the earth is flat is out of line in challenging the scientist’s authority

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<sup>1</sup> Levy, D. K. "Moral Authority and Wrongdoing." *Philosophical Topics* 38, no. 1 (2010): 107-22.

<sup>2</sup> C. Naomi Osorio-Kupferblum, "Conceptualising 'Authority'." *International Journal of Philosophical Studies : IJPS* 23, no. 2 (2015): 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

over whether the earth is round or not. The scientist not only has tools in regards to astronomy, but has pictures from satellites, as well as geographers who know that you can go either east or west and still reach China all the same. However, when scientists claim that there is nothing but physical matter and energy, and that philosophy is useless, they are now stepping into an area where it is no longer possible to falsify statements. They are simply going forth with hypotheses that seem apparent to them, and as such no longer have authority on what they are talking about.

David Michael Adams in *Ethics Expertise and Moral Authority: is there a Difference* seeks to explain why the Tarzian and ASBH Core Competencies Update Task Force, an organization whose “implied goal is to make ethics consultation a proper profession with certified practitioners”<sup>4</sup>, contends that those who have ethical expertise don’t also possess moral authority<sup>5</sup>. Adams reasons that this is because the Tarzian and ASBH Core Competencies Update Task Force wants to make sure the “authority” of the individual user:

They do caution (as does the revised Core Competencies report) that HCECs must not resort to an “authoritarian” model of consultation. Here the consultant wrongly “usurps” the authority of the appropriate decision maker and wrongly “imposes” her or his views upon others (American Society for Bioethics and Humanities 2011). If this is what Tarzian and colleagues mean when they warn that HCECs are not moral authorities, the warning is extraneous, since it is already well understood on all sides that HCECs are not final decision makers, do not write orders, and must not take over management of a patient’s case.<sup>6</sup>

This paragraph gets to the core of the issue for this paper, which is whether the acknowledgement of a public or external moral authority necessarily tramples one’s own personal exercise of moral authority. Adams is certainly resistant to this idea, noting in his quote that in terms of health care ethics consultants, they are explicitly not the ones making the final

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<sup>4</sup> David Michael Adams, "Ethics Expertise and Moral Authority: Is There a Difference?" *The American Journal of Bioethics* 13, no. 2 (2013): 27.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 28.

moral decisions. What health care ethics consultants do have is ethical expertise and the ability to both lay out what are considered acceptable moral options for clients who must make moral decisions, and to reason whether a new option is acceptable or not.<sup>7</sup> Those who have ethical expertise then serve as surrogate reasoners, with training and familiarity about the relevant ethical issues hoping to help their clients make sense of whatever particular ethical experience they find themselves in. This surrogate reasoning is a fundamentally different process from whatever an external moral authority does, for as Osorio-Kuferblum noted, a person is an authority to another if and only if the person's advice is taken by this another to such an extent that this another changes their behavior for the approval of the person. This is explicitly what is not supposed to happen with the health care ethics consultant, and explicitly what a study of experts is not supposed to do for the individual. One is a utilitarian, deontologist, ethicist of care, etc. not because they seek the approval of whatever thinker they are reading, but because by virtue of their exercise of their own reason, they hold whatever particular ethical position they do.

Now, perhaps Adams and Osorio-Kuferblum simply disagree on what "authority" is.

Adams puts it as follows:

To insist that HCECs possess ethics expertise and expert moral knowledge but not moral authority is on the face of it a puzzling claim, since the judgments of experts typically carry with them at least some kind of authority— otherwise there would be no reason for anyone to consult them. As Agich (1995) has observed, being an authority is at bottom an epistemic notion, reflecting recognition of the individual's specialized knowledge and mastery of some domain. It is this fact that gives us reason to consult such experts on issues within the scope of their specialty.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 27.

Adams here is contending that legitimate authority is founded on the authority's "knowledge and mastery of some domain" which grants the author the ability to be consulted. The performative aspect of authority for Adams is given in the authors ability to lay out what is optimal to do for a given situation<sup>9</sup>.

So, for example, it is because my surgeon is in a position to make an authoritative judgment about the optimal approach for my complicated surgery that I have good reasons to defer to his expertise on that matter; since my attorney can speak with authority on the best defense to raise in court regarding charges brought against me, I am warranted in following his advice and trusting his judgment.<sup>10</sup>

While perhaps Adams is correct in regarding authoritative judgement as rooted to in an "optimal approach" to a surgery or to a law case, but with regards to ethical experience there can be no "optimal approach" in the exercise of personal moral authority and agency, because of the last line there "trusting his judgement". For one to continue to exercise their own moral authority, it cannot rest on the judgement of another, for a judgement holds more than what an ethics consultant should do. As surrogated reason the health care ethics consultant lays out the many ways someone trained in reason might view an ethical issue, the things which might be valued over others, the rules one might hold, and so on. This is not an exercise of judgement, but an exercise of thought, an exercise of consideration where a person has the totality of options laid out before them. The act of judgement is in a person choosing one of these considerations, in committing to one of these ideas of the world as superior to the others.

Adams contends: "Were I to tell my surgeon that I appreciate his opinion but have no grounds for thinking he knows better than anyone else how my operation should be performed,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 27.

then it's clear that I don't acknowledge him as a surgical expert"<sup>11</sup>, and this is true in the realm of medical knowledge, true in the legal realm, but it is not true in the moral realm. If ethical expertise rises above making sense of the moral issues in a choice into the position of making judgements about those choices, the consultant has moved passed a place of consultation.

Now, while this perhaps is all well and good in the area of ethics consultation, the realm of public moral authority is quite a different place that requires more extensive reasoning as to why it should be opposed. First and foremost we need to understand how personal moral judgements work. Helga Varden analyzes Kant's moral philosophy in regards to whether or not one can morally lie to another person if they are doing so to save the life of that person's intended victim.<sup>12</sup> Kant says that if one lies to this murderer at the door, and nonetheless this murderer comes across their victim and kills them, then the liar is culpable in the murder.<sup>13</sup> This logic seems obviously wrong, but is in terms of the exercise of personal moral authority where the reasoning of this argument comes through. For Kant, when we act we are setting a universal maxim, with our action, a maxim that we are acting by.<sup>14</sup> The important part of this maxim setting isn't in rules that produce a good consequence, but in a person being consistent and non-contradictory. It is reason that gives us the moral law and our maxim, and what reason does is follow the rule of non-contradiction, where a thing is not both true and false at the same time. If

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>12</sup> Varden Helga, "Kant and Lying to the Murderer at the Door . . . One More Time: Kant's Legal Philosophy and Lies to Murderers and Nazis," *Journal Of Social Philosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010), 403. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 12, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 411.

<sup>14</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals," in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn, Peter Markie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 322.

I were to tell a lie to a particular person, but in general live my life as if persons were telling me the truth, then that lie would be contradictory for I would be holding that one should tell the truth and that one should not tell the truth. In regards to the murderer at the door, Kant notes that most people are not acting on the maxim “truth telling is unimportant”, but that “the ends are what matter in judging an action.”<sup>15</sup> The murderer is lied to because the action in itself is ethically unimportant, but the end, that is the intended victim not being murdered, is what’s ethically important. So, the person who makes the judgement that the ends what’s important in an ethical action should be held accountable to their own maxim.

Adding to this case of maxim setting is Carla Bagnoli’s work *Mafioso Case: Autonomy and Self-respect*, where Bagnoli examines the code of the Mafioso.<sup>16</sup> Mafioso are fascinating because they appear to have facets of what could be called a moral code, and yet they take part in stealing, thuggery and murder. Bagnoli takes this head on and contends that the Mafioso cares not for any particular contradiction in his thinking<sup>17</sup> but rather only contradicts the principle of humanity, which he doesn’t hold<sup>18</sup>. The Mafioso is not unexpectant of the troubles and toils of his life, of the fact that at any moment he might be betrayed and murdered, and the Mafioso himself might betray and murder another in kind. Lies, violence and treachery are some of the maxims by which the Mafioso lives his life, but the Mafioso also lives his life with faith to his lovers, silence to protect his culture, and honor to the families of his fellow Mafiosi. There are

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<sup>15</sup> Varden, Op. Cit., 410.

<sup>16</sup> Bagnoli Carla, “The Mafioso Case: Autonomy and Self-respect.” in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 12, no. 5 (2009): 477, Jstor (accessed December 12, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 480.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 480.

particular virtues which can allow a Mafioso to excel at his lifestyle, but that does not mean his life is in any way a “good life”. The Mafioso lacks self-respect and dignity, where he and others have equal standing<sup>19</sup>. This lack of equal standing means that those “above” him can do what they please, as he can do to those “below”. The Mafioso’s station is therefore in a constant state of flux, where proper morality cannot be had. One must treat other persons as persons no matter what in order for “morality” to mean anything, for where there is disparity in personhood there is depravity in ethics. This is because our reason says we cannot treat each other in ways that go against what we hold as maxims, the reason being that since we are persons deserving of being treated with these maxims in mind, so too are others. If you are to affirm that others be treated with respect, then you too should be treated with respect. This is not a statement resting on moral authority, but instead on moral reasoning.

Now all of these judgements are made based on the person’s own moral authority. The Mafioso looks at the life of the Mafioso, the code of the Mafioso, and affirms that life and code as moral, in much the same way a utilitarian affirms the rules of utilitarianism, or a deontologist affirms the rules of deontology. However, these three are not the same. Utilitarianism and deontology are what Adams would term “allowable options”<sup>20</sup>. They are not only part of the literature of ethics, but also founded upon reason and experience, as several other ethical theories are. The code of the Mafioso is not among the “allowable options” for good reasons. Bagnoli notes that the lack of key aspects of deontology makes it incoherent as a viable moral theory, and while the Mafioso code does extol certain “virtues”, I should say that a life where one has

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 484.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, Op. Cit., 28.

successfully murdered all their enemies through cunning while taking what they want could never be called a “good life”. The Mafioso code however, is not subject to this reasoning, making it bankrupt as a moral theory. Bagnoli discusses a family member of Mafiosi, Rita Atria.<sup>21</sup> Atria broke the Mafioso’s law of silence seeking revenge on those who assassinated her family members.<sup>22</sup> Atria did not immediately become a follower of a well developed theory of ethics, but rather clung to her old odious beliefs until subjected to cross examination and introspection.<sup>23</sup> Bagnoli notes that this change came about as Atria subjected herself personally to type of questioning a judge was subjecting her to during this time.<sup>24</sup> This sort of questioning necessarily began to expose the problem of her prior code of ethics, and represents the baseline development of ethics through the use of reason. This personal use of reason would show Atria developing in her own personal moral authority, rather than simply bowing to the authority of an incoherent code. Unfortunately, before her code of ethics truly changed at its core she decided to kill herself.<sup>25</sup> While a tragedy, Atria’s case represents what happens when an immoral thing is acknowledged as a public moral authority, and why ethical expertise is needed to show what options are actually moral.

Now, the Mafioso case shows exactly what the role of ethical expertise plays in personal moral authority. Bagnoli’s paper notes that the Mafioso are lacking a key element with regards to deontological ethics, which in many ways any rule based system should follow, and without

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<sup>21</sup> Bagnoli, *Op. Cit.*, 488.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 489.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 498.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

this their ethics are incomplete and immoral. The role of ethical expertise is not unlike the role of HCEC who when confronted with an ethical issue are asked to lay out acceptable options and can also consider whether a new option is actually ethical.<sup>26</sup> A person with proper ethical training is able to use their reason to consider valid options instead of simply getting what ought to be done from a figure above them, or simply their culture, as Rita Aria and the Mafioso obtained their vision of morality.

There's a certain demand for the exercise of moral authority when we live in a society, and these ethical questions are often mundane, but nonetheless important. Joan Tronto goes over such a case where a nurse was ordered by a doctor to place a cold bag of blood on the stomach of a patient to warm it up so he could administer the blood.<sup>27</sup> The Nurse rejected, as such an action, as Tronto puts it, was "stupid"<sup>28</sup> from the perspective of someone whose primary duty to patients was care and comfort.<sup>29</sup> The nurse here is correct in her challenge to the doctor if her personal moral authority decides that what he is ordering is wrong, and to defer to him, to surrender her personal moral authority to what he says not out of seeing his reasoning but out of his title and his authority would be a shirking of her own personal exercise of morality. If the doctor, or ethical expert, or public figure of virtue, had a special type of moral authority, an authority like that of a surgeon or a lawyer, that would mean that if they said putting the blood on the patient's stomach was the right action then that would be the end of the discussion. As Osorio-

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<sup>26</sup> Adams, Op. Cit., 28.

<sup>27</sup> Tronto Joan C, "Who is Authorized to Do Applied Ethics? Inherently Political Dimensions of Applied Ethics," in *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 14, no. 4 (2011): 415, Jstor (accessed December 12, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 415.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 415.

Kuferblum's definition shows, an authority is only an authority if and only if they get a person to do what they wouldn't have done.<sup>30</sup> In terms of moral authority, this does not mean getting people to act morally where they wouldn't have acted morally otherwise, but rather to get someone to act in a way which they disagree, to get the nurse to not only place the blood on her patient's stomach out of a coercive threat for her job, but to have her assent that her own judgements aren't worth listening to, that her morality is wholly subservient to that of others, and that reason isn't what she should be doing with other human beings, but rather obeying.

Perhaps the most unintuitive way this is wrong, is that it doesn't treat others as human beings. The central point of Kant's first formulation of the Categorical Imperative is that to treat others differently than oneself is to act in a contradictory way, as both you and this other person are human beings, and so to against the maxim you would want for yourself is wrong.<sup>31</sup> This leads to Kant's second statement of the Categorical Imperative, to not treat others as means but rather as ends.<sup>32</sup> This is because for the vast majority of ethical cases, the person acting unethically is doing so by treating another human being as less than, but in the case of the public moral authority, a human being is treated as more than. One might say that the authority is treated as a means, which is to say as a means to morality, but I feel that this might be taken too far. If one who held Socrates as an unequivocal moral authority was asked to drink the hemlock for him, I find it doubtful that this person would refuse. If anything is being treated as a means,

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<sup>30</sup> Osorio-Kuferblum, Op. Cit., 227.

<sup>31</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals," in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Steven M. Cahn, Peter Markie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 322.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 334.

it is the person holding the other as an authority. They are willing to subvert their own humanity, their own ability to morally reason, to another, and so they lack self-respect just as the Mafioso.

Now, perhaps one might contend that my analysis here is wrongheaded and asinine. Wouldn't any philosopher who holds to a moral school of thought that is not of their own invention be guilty of subverting their own moral authority, and as such lowering their humanity? This is not the case, insofar as one has reasoned through the issues. Julia Annas, a contemporary virtue ethicist, talks about the difference between the beginner and the fully virtuous is that the beginner does the right action because it is what they think the virtuous person does, the fully virtuous person does right action because they understand what is right.<sup>33</sup> I think virtue ethics is important here insofar as it is the ethical system that can actually make use of a moral authority, in its account of moral development. However, this difference also shows exactly how limited that moral authority would be even within a framework which uses it. Asking "what would King do?" is not the action of a moral adult, but of a beginner, a child. It is fine to point to King and say "this is a good human being". It is not fine to point to King and say "this is an authority of what it is to be good".

Beyond this, understanding becomes what necessarily characterizes someone exercising their moral authority when working in a framework, versus simply parroting the position. Take Bagnoli's essay which this paper already discussed. Bagnoli writes that paper partially to understand the Mafioso, but also to critique Christine Korsgaard, a prominent Kant scholar, on

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<sup>33</sup> Julia Annas, "Being Virtuous and Doing the Right Thing," in *Ethics: History, Theory, and Contemporary Issues*, edited by Steven M. Cahn, Peter Markie, 710-711. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

how to apply the reasoning of Kant to the case of the Mafioso.<sup>34</sup> Bagnoli contends that Korsgaard's thinking about the Mafioso being contradictory is wrong, and that really the important part is that the Mafioso lacks self-respect.<sup>35</sup> There's a disagreement, but this disagreement isn't simply coming from quoting Kant as if his words held merit from being his words, but rather disagreement about how to reason through an issue using Kant as a jumping off point. One who simply endorses Kant because he's agreed upon as a moral authority, elevates him beyond what it means to be human, and is guilty of treating Kant as a public moral authority. One who understands the Categorical Imperative and deontological ethics and applies them with their reason, rather than with hollow quotations is exercising their moral authority. One who commits oneself to maximizing the pleasure of the greatest number while minimizing their pain because Bentham and Mills are sensible English empiricists, are giving up their moral authority to other persons with no more moral authority than themselves. One who believes that the Principle of Utility serves as the strongest account of human experience, and that it serves as the most sensible descriptor of ethical experience, and so utilitarianism naturally, reasonably follows, and that ideally one runs Bentham's Hedonistic Calculus every time they're confronted with an ethical issue, is living and reasoning through their moral authority.

Another objection I'd like to consider is whether or not there is a "justified" public moral authority. At one point in my own considerations I was wondering whether or not a person like Mandela's words should have an enhanced moral authority, or even a sacred quality. While I, nor anyone, can take away the heroism and virtue of Mandela, I can say that trying to find a

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<sup>34</sup> Bagnoli Op. Cit., 480.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 484.

“justified” public moral authority is at best a waste of time. No matter what approach I could take in trying to parse out what would make it justified, beyond the moral authority of Gandhi being obvious, would require an application of reason. In fact, this application of reason would be required. How else would I know that extolling Andrew Jackson, a man who was considered a great president until recently, was a bad idea, and that giving his words performative weight on me was in fact endorsing an immoral authority? If reason is needed to tell good moral authorities from bad moral authorities, then why would one not simply use reason to tell good from bad?

I began with David Levy’s account of moral authority, but I left it without the explanation of why he comes to his conclusions. Levy is grappling with an interview between Stangl, a former German officer who was coerced by the Nazis to work as an administrator at Treblinka, and Gita Sereny, where she found herself stopped in pressing the question that he should’ve risked death over committing the atrocities he did.<sup>36</sup> This according to Levy is in “proper deference to Stangl's moral authority.”<sup>37</sup> Whether or not one can say to another that they ought to die instead of committing injustice goes above and beyond anyone’s particular moral judgement. One can certainly say that Stangl violated his duty to not harm those he hurt, but certain moral judgements are “stopped” as with Sereny.<sup>38</sup> Adding to this is a discussion of those we consider heroes, World War II veterans who violently slaughtered Nazis in order to reestablish peace, and protect their home countries. Helga Varden discuss those who committed such as actions, with Varden noting the psychological and moral damage which persisted long

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<sup>36</sup> Levy, Op. Cit. 108-109.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 110.

after their service.<sup>39</sup> Levy himself notes a positive example of actions left only to moral authority in a soldier throwing himself on a grenade.<sup>40</sup> The term used by both authors for the actions of the soldiers in these scenarios are “supererogatory”<sup>41,42</sup>, and while Levy does say the soldier and Stangl are not “analogous”<sup>43</sup>, they are useful for the question of what the role of a public moral authority would have. Say a man felt compelled to serve in World War II because of his family’s military history, but during his life he had reasoned into a sort of pacifism where he swore that he would never take a life. He exercises his reason in determining the threat to his country, the evilness of the Nazis, the justice of his cause, but nonetheless concludes that he cannot overcome his rule, and as such takes up the role of a conscientious objector. A public moral authority would have the force of respect where despite his personhood, this conscientious objector would lay aside his own moral reasoning to do what this authority commanded him to do. This tramples his moral reasoning. Perhaps the clearest example comes from Sartre, where he discusses a student faced with a decision between taking care of his mother or going to war in World War II.<sup>44</sup> There was no one to take care of his mother, and yet his country needed aid in its war with a clearly evil force. Sartre’s point is that there is no clear moral choice, no easy right or wrong, as he goes through several ethical systems to show that they are deficient in giving an easy answer. Now, imagine a public moral authority in this scenario, who chooses for the student. Imagine it was Sartre himself, a figure with more ethical expertise than the student, more

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<sup>39</sup> Varden, Op. Cit. 418.

<sup>40</sup> Levy, Op. Cit. 110.

<sup>41</sup> Levy, Op. Cit. 110.

<sup>42</sup> Varden, Op. Cit. 417.

<sup>43</sup> Levy, Op. Cit. 119.

<sup>44</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism Is a Humanism,” in *The Moral Life: an Introductory Reader in Ethics and Literature*, ed. Louis P. Pojman, Lewis Vaughn (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 598-599.

experience than the students, who by all accounts should be more able to make a moral decision than his student. What does it mean for the student then to follow Sartre's choice regardless of his own considerations and his own reasoning? While in action there would be no difference, doesn't the moral quality of it change? Doesn't the student's surrender of his capacity of choice and reasoning show that he is simply looking for an easy choice, rather than an attempt to be moral? Or does the surrender of choice have the same quality as if he had made the choice himself, and is beyond our moral judgement? But doesn't this make Sartre more than he is?

**Conclusion:**

This paper sought to show that a public account of moral authority while nicely descriptive of a phenomenon should be resisted as it tramples on the private exercise of moral authority. While this isn't to say that there aren't any standards as there are a range of acceptable, and unacceptable, ideas of what constitutes ethical experience, fundamentally this range of acceptable and unacceptable must be determined via a private exercise of moral authority. The fact that one feels stopped by a sense of reverence when confronted by a quote from a moral authority shows this. It's true that if I doubt my surgeon, he never really had authority, but doubting is a key function to any and all exercises of personal moral authority, any and all exercises of reason, and this exercise of personal moral authority is as unavoidable as the setting sun. Beyond this, to ask a woman or a man to rise above being a woman or a man, to be a standard which can simply decide for you without the hard work of ethically reasoning, is not only untenable, but quite probably immoral.

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