

Soft Power of Deference: An Analysis of a Key Pillar of

Moral Authority

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Abstract

When faced with the issue of leadership, we are tasked with finding when it is appropriate to follow. In following, we are deferring our own authority in favor of another's. The sliding scale of authority teeters between complacency and anarchy, providing a challenge as to where we can find the effective middle ground for a functioning society. This paper breaks down the parts of authority and discusses the necessity of community deference, namely with respect to the rise of a counter-cultural moral authority that seeks to better humanity. Moral authorities rely on a loyal following, from Nelson Mandela's fight against apartheid or MLK Jr.'s battle for civil rights, and while we pride ourselves in critiquing authority I argue that there is a time and place to order one's beliefs behind those of a moral authority in order to further the movement.

The study of authority has taught us that it is not an ultimate power. It draws its influence from external powers it itself is bound by as well as from a willingness of the people to adhere to the words of the authority, also known as deference. Deference is the natural ‘buy in’ of the public that is necessarily a voluntary action. Within the realm of moral authority, we recognize that the ‘authority’ figure of a society may have power while being far from the true moral authority who we seek to shape our moral systems. The purpose of this paper is to first understand what authority is, and more specifically how the component of deference gains its influence. Eliciting deference takes many steps, as it would be counter to authority to attempt to mandate a willingness of the public to obey an authority’s words. In this paper I will be establishing the relationship between deference and authority, the role humanity plays in deciding what, or who, one should defer their authority to, and finally the philosophical barriers for deference that are present in aspects of post-modern thought and anonymous authority.

Authority and Deference

In order to advocate for authority, we must understand what it is and what its alternatives are. A traditional understanding of authority creates a broad umbrella which misrepresents what philosophers would deem is true authority. Hannah Arendt describes authority in *What is Authority?* as being pre-political, garnering strength from existing moral and legal structures¹. A key stipulation Arendt makes is that an authority figure respects existing legal structures, consequently avoiding violence and manipulation when exerting that authority. Authority draws a clear distinction from power, which can exist within the realm of coercion or force. While power via persuasion can sometimes seem justified, I would argue that it is ultimately much more vulnerable to corruption than authority. Being fed lies or rhetoric that

¹ Arendt, Hannah. "What is Authority?" In *Between Past and Future*. N.p.: The Viking Press, 92

makes us go against our core values begins to infringe on our autonomy when choosing an authority, which will become important later on in this discussion. When compared to other power structures like totalitarianism or tyranny, authority actually falls short in terms of egalitarianism. It creates a clear hierarchy between various figures of authority and those who follow them, whom I will refer to as ‘subjects’ in this paper. However, I affirm that this hierarchy allows for an exchange of authority to the extent that we can still access our own power of autonomy, which outweighs the sacrifice that exists with being a part of a hierarchy. A crucial aspect of this type of society is the ability to defer one’s own individual authority in favor of another’s, and so long as one is freely doing so, the hierarchy and inequality of power becomes much less intimidating. Arendt additionally clarifies that an authoritarian government would still allow for freedom of the subjects, which I will refer to as autonomy later in this paper.² Now that we have established what authority is, we can define the inner workings of its structures, namely that of the necessary deference of the community.

As stated above, deference defines the natural ‘buy in’ of the community to the values of the society. In order to be cohesive with Arendt’s definition of authority, deference must draw its influence from being a normative power. A normative power is built into society and generally takes generations to solidify, the most relevant example of a normative power being the social pressure to uphold a promise. A promise is an ethereal concept where you are not contractually bound by your word, but there is an intrinsic value to follow through with that promise thanks to the normative influence of society. This type of pressure takes form in deference when we naturally trust an authority figure. Neither concept is infallible as it is up to the individual to bend to the social pressure and often times may not follow through, but I would argue that without normative pressure we would see a stark increase in

² Ibid. 96

these instances of promise-breaking, or in this case disobedience. We can imagine authority to be a status that can be passed from person to person rather than being manifest solely in an individual. Deference is our ability to morally justify when it is appropriate to defer that authority to another person, and give them the right to make decisions based on beliefs that supersede our own.

Sacrificing one's belief in favor of the beliefs of another is where we truly see the influence of authority. As worrisome as that sounds, it is a core tenet of the hierarchy that defines moral authority. The hierarchy is neither completely rigid nor truly empowering for the authority figure, however. Andrea Westlund writes in *Deference as a Normative Power* that "Voluntary authority is generated through an interpersonal transaction that involves a directed act of deference paired with appropriate uptake of that deference,"³ which exemplifies the symbiotic nature of the authority and the community above which it presides. This introduces the concept that even though there is an unequal distribution of influence between the subject and authority, there is an initial equality in autonomy as the authority seeks the deference of the subject and cannot garner influence without it. An important dichotomy to recognize is that the obligation for an action can be motivated by either a *command* for obligation or a true *belief* in the obligation for a greater purpose. I argue that the belief in an obligation is the only effective way to garner the 'buy in' for authority as a common goal and that subsequent obligation has incredible rhetorical strength. A component for reinforcing belief lies in the social aspect of the subjects, where other members defer authority insofar as there are mutual expectations that other subjects will act alongside them. When their end goals are aligned with those of the authority figure, following orders appear as an act of free will as opposed to simply a response to a command. The key difference is that by ensuring that the authority figure has made very clear his or her intentions and that

³ Andrea C. Westlund, "Deference as a Normative Power," *Philos Stud*, November 8, 2012, 457

they align with the subjects', a belief in an obligation exists prior to an action. In contrast, a command would dictate that there is an action that must take place and that the subjects are obligated to do so due to their position in the hierarchical structure rather than acting based on a content-independent belief that is shared by all parties.

The concept of content-independence was coined by H.L.A. Hart and guides the actions of an authority figure away from utilizing manipulation and power to accomplish their goals. Westlund writes that in order for a reason to be content-independent, "...its normative force does not depend on the merits of the course of action for which it is a reason."⁴ This means that the intent of the authority figure should be so clear that it acts as a mode of inspiration for the subjects to follow, regardless of the merits or specifics of the following command to act. Bringing this into the realm of moral authority, we can look to a leader who appears virtuous enough to inspire moral values. It is not enough for her to command that we come together as a community to help those struggling with poverty; her intent must be implicit so that people are unifying under the reason rather than the command. The explicit tying of commands to moral values leaves the subjects to decide if they are being controlled and persuaded by the authority rather than feeling the onus to act based on a commonly shared set of values.

Persuasion, when it is manipulative, is a disqualifying factor of true authority. For the sake of this paper, we are forced to leave behind the political and social efficacy of persuasion in favor of the pursuance of deference. The crucial component of deference, and by association moral authority, is personal autonomy of the subjects. Autonomous agents will always have an interest in the power to defer, in that they can change their mind about who they deem is an authority figure or they can choose to sacrifice their personal judgment

⁴ Ibid., 458

in favor of that authority.⁵ This is the component that causes philosophers to struggle because it would be much simpler if we could just assume that a strong enough authority would have the power to justly limit the autonomy of the subjects. Moral philosopher Christian Wolff argues that deference to authority is at odds with autonomy because it removes the moral responsibility to decide for oneself, and he would be right if we did not frame the argument properly.⁶ The choosing of an authority figure is a morally binding commitment for a subject who seeks value in deferring personal power to an individual with greater experience, for example. Ultimately, it is the moral choice of that subject to align himself with that authority, to which he may sacrifice his own reasons in favor of another's. His autonomy is clear and present in the decision-making process and is thusly the target of deference as normative power. This is not to say that the ends always justify the means however; I will argue later in my paper that if humanity is not being upheld along the way to the common goal then the subject should not defer to that authority. The subject needs to be able to see and approve of the rationale of the authority figure in order to make the decision to defer. Every step of the way we must uphold the autonomy of the individual, otherwise we delve into the realm of persuasion and coercion. In order to avoid manipulation we need to understand the ideas that justify our actions of respecting authority in terms of emulating an authority figure, which is described by an analysis of epistemic authority.

Epistemic authority seeks to understand how we can visualize and respect authority while acknowledging that we cannot command people to believe a certain way. Dependency theories indicate that epistemic authority only exists when you believe that your judgment is better served under the guidance of an authority figure rather than you developing your beliefs on your own. In a piece titled *A Defense of Epistemic Authority*, Linda Zagzebski

⁵ Ibid., 462

⁶ Ibid., 465

references Joseph Raz's theories on dependency and authority, specifically using the thesis for belief in authority as a starting point. This thesis argues that if someone believes something and I believe said person to be an authority, I must conscientiously believe it is something worth emulating.⁷ This takes form in admiring an authority figure who expresses traits that you respect, not just principles. On the road to finding a common understanding of the moral good, we tend to look to other sources for support and so long as we have not adamantly formed a personal belief on a subject, any sort of guidance cannot be deemed manipulative, but rather educational.

Zagzebski justifies the ordering of reason or belief in relation to the authority by discussing the pre-emptive nature of deference. 'Pre-empting' in this instance does not mean ignoring your own personal beliefs, but it means knowingly ordering it behind that of the authority you have chosen. We have established that there is a sacrificial trust in choosing an authority, and that sacrifice means that you acknowledge your own personal shortfalls in judgment given the current situation. An example of this would look like a physician diagnosing a patient who came in for a routine checkup. Even if the patient felt completely healthy, perhaps the physician finds a lump on the skin of the patient that concerns her. If the physician indicates that there may be something wrong and recommends that the patient stay for additional testing, it is generally understood that he will acquiesce to the doctor's suggestion. This is due to the patient, who feels healthy, recognizing his shortfalls in judgment relative to the doctor who has expertise in the field. The patient allows the belief of the doctor to pre-empt his own in totality, accepting the physician's suggestions as they come up rather than pushing his own belief that since he feels fine, there must be nothing wrong with him. It is not enough that the patient integrates the reasons of the physician into his own calculus of reason, but hers must be held above his own in order to get to the bottom of the

⁷ Linda Zagzebski, "A Defense of Epistemic Authority," *Res Philosophica* 90, no. 2 (April 2013), 299

health mystery. This example assumes that the patient respects the doctor to a great extent as one would a moral authority figure that they have chosen. While this medical deference is not always the case, the examples of patient push back only exemplifies our struggle with the concept of pre-emption. Zagzebi points out that pre-emption is the hardest part of deference because of our disdain for fully sacrificing our own reason.⁸ Even with an open mind, we tend to prefer to integrate the ideas and beliefs of others, but in order to strengthen the just power of authority it is paramount that the subject acknowledge the content-independent nature of the authority figure and subsequently allow their reasons to fully pre-empt the subject's own.

Now let us bring this specifically into the realm of *moral* authority through a case study of the moral revolution led by Nelson Mandela against the apartheid regime in South Africa over the course of his lifetime. In the face of apartheid, the institution that systematically limited the autonomy of the Black community, Mandela aimed to change societal norms in such a way that would foster a desegregated community in more than just a legislative sense. Car bombings and violent protests marked the early years of his movement, but it was after being imprisoned for over 27 years that he changed his tactics toward a non-violent, morally driven movement. Had Mandela succeeded in overthrowing the government, he would not have established an Arendt-sanctioned moral authority, as established earlier in this paper, as violence and power would have been a crucial pillar of the movement. Rather, his time in prison and the rhetoric of moral values (i.e. equality, free will, autonomy, justice, etc.) placed him in a position as a moral authority that then needed buy in from the public. I beseech you to understand the overwhelming social pressure to bend to the norms of the apartheid era and the direly low odds of success of a revolution, and how dissenting could mean physical harm or imprisonment on the part of the subjects. These subjects then made an autonomous choice

⁸ Ibid. 298

to follow Mandela and his counter-cultural values regardless of the risks posed to themselves. These subjects looked to the moral authority, ordered their beliefs and concerns about their own well-being *before* Mandela's call to action, and took part in a revolution that changed the social climate of South Africa forever. Their own authority may have discouraged them from attending rallies or participating in boycotts where the government was watching, but they deferred that authority in favor of the new moral wave that did not command them, but allowed them to believe in an obligation to follow for the bettering of humanity. This is where we see moral authorities using deference as a normative power; they draw support from a list of values that the public then freely chooses to follow wholeheartedly.

When talking of ordering the beliefs of another prior to one's own we must also address a very real harm of deference before fully supporting it as a means to empower authority. The implied humility of deferring power opens the door for corruption with very tangible impacts. An example within Westlund's paper is *The Deferential Wife* article by Thomas Hill, which depicts a woman who happily fully defers decision-making to her husband. This level of subservience is alarming especially considering that I am advocating for the importance of deference to someone you believe to be a moral authority figure in your life. In order to address this issue we need to note the autonomy of the agent in the decision making process. We can look to examples like the Deferential Wife or, more extremely, the citizens under the Third Reich regime of Germany. With the relative lack of social backlash within the country we are forced to critically analyze why the citizens elected Hitler in the first place and why the officers still followed his regime's commands no matter how heinous they were. Oftentimes deference is given under prohibitive societal conditions, which undermine the autonomy of the individual. Therefore, the question posed is how do we know when our choice to defer has been coerced by the authority? Note that deference has been

attributed with the transferring of authority, and how I as the subject make a decision to transfer my power to another. If in any case I feel that I have been backed into a corner and I feel as though I *must* defer, even internally believing it is for the best, then I am not giving my autonomous decision to sacrifice my reasons. A large amount of the support for the Third Reich was out of fear and concerns of safety, and the Deferential Wife existed in a time where social structures prohibited her from being fully independent of her husband. In both cases, we see subject authority being coerced away from the subject rather than voluntarily deferred, which is why it must be made very clear what makes an authority figure as well as where the autonomous decision to defer takes place. As a preliminary solution, we can understand that an exchange of authority must exist where equal agency exist prior to the exchange as well as both parties having clear intentions to ensure that their goals are truly vertically interlocking, or aiming for a common end.

Philosophical Barriers to Deference

From understanding the core tenets of authority and the function of deference, we only understand that there is not a current comprehensive normative push to follow moral authorities. That is because over time our social morality changes within the nation; just look to the social environment before Women's Suffrage or the Civil Rights Movement. I have discussed the importance of deference thus far, but we must also recognize harmful rhetoric against the act of deferring. Generally speaking, modern societal trends push towards individuals being their own moral authority, and that one must never be complacent. In an attempt to avoid a complacent populace, the pendulum has swung so far that deference is now seen as a weakness. If we lose our ability to defer, rising moral authorities lose their capacity to garner followership without the use of violence or coercion. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to discuss how deference interacts with the popular school of thought

which is post-modernism, and address the barrier excessive critique has on an individual's willingness to defer their authority.

First, let us look to Daniel Burston's view of post-modern thought and its influence on the educational community. Burston argues in his paper *Authority, Effectiveness and Teaching in the Postmodern University: A Frommian Perspective* that authority cannot be defined in a vacuum⁹; authority relies on an interpersonal hierarchy that places one over the other, for our purposes, we imagine a moral figure having 'better' morality or judgment than one under them. A pedagogical approach to authority explored by Burston takes a look into the liberal arts classroom of a university. The issue that many college professors face, particularly in the humanities, is a culture of criticism which results in the devaluing of authority that should be given to the professor. The devaluing of authority not only inhibits the didactic nature of a lecture, but also shapes the mentality of university students as they experience authority in the real world. This culture of criticism is further explained by the rise of post-modern thought starting in the 70's and 80's. Proponents of postmodern thought deconstruct master narratives, whether they be political or moral, and continually question the existence of any truth-claim.¹⁰ Post-modern thought can be a valuable tool in the classroom in that it starts a dialogue that ultimately strengthens 'good' structures and tears down the 'bad' ones. A dangerous problem with this side of post-modern thought, however, is that it does not necessarily provide an end to criticism. It runs under an ideology that you will produce constructive dialogue through critique, however by denying the presence of any truth-claim it hinders meaningful motivation to construct ultimate moral frameworks or values, rather it favors deconstructing narratives. A heavy reliance on deconstruction may breed individuals

⁹ Daniel Burston, "Authority, Effectiveness and Teaching In the Postmodern University: A Frommian Perspective," *Duquesne University*, 16.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 15

who seek out minute justifications for opposing authority, which I will refer to as contrarians.

That is not to say that post-modern thought is the ultimate evil, but rather there are varying forms of critique in philosophical thought encompassed under the greater umbrella of postmodernism. Michael Foucault is a postmodern thinker who, true to his professional identity, provides a critical analysis of postmodernism. Foucault's work operates under a form of critique distinct from those who seek to poke holes in truth-claims, the excessive critique outlined above. He labels this as *problematization* and believes it to be a more holistic and productive form of critique than contrarian thought in that it actually accepts contrary components of an authority, in this instance, so long as there is still general consistency. When faced with a moral system, rather than focus analysis in seeking out exceptions and contradictions (such as hyper-specific examples to 'disprove' the benefits of utilitarianism) the focus is on more holistic questions such as who is making the statement, what is the social context of the statement, and who does it harm or benefit? Recognize that under a framework rooted in highlighting contradictions, the personal backgrounds and histories of figures like Nelson Mandela or MLK Jr. may have disqualified them from being a moral authority, as both are haunted with a past of amoral acts such as violence or extramarital affairs. Foucault states, as reported by Colin Koopman in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, that "To one single set of difficulties, several responses can be made. And most of the time different responses actually are proposed. But what must be understood is what makes them simultaneously possible: it is the point in which their simultaneity is rooted; it is the soil that can nourish them all in their diversity and sometimes in spite of their contradictions."¹¹ By allowing a focus to be on the actor and social context, Foucault

¹¹ Colin Koopman, *Critical Problematization in Foucault and Deleuze: The Force of Critique without Judgment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 107

proposes a form a critique that allows for the uncertainty of solutions to still merit the subject's deference. That is to say, a pragmatic solution to a moral problem can be found through the act of problematization without making ourselves out to be the ultimate moral authority that deconstructs solutions. Koopman further discusses the harms of deconstructive post-modern thought, stating that "...negative dialectics...ceaselessly pursue the work of contradiction."¹² Through an analysis of post-modern thought it is important to make clear the type of critique that can be harmful when it becomes the priority, in this case it is the negative or contrarian dialectic. From there we can recognize that there is a form of criticism that is a guide rather than a relentless focus on any contradictions in the moral calculus that determines the justification of deference. To defer to an authority provides the opportunity for new, likely counter-cultural authorities to gain power. A subject does this by ordering the belief of the new moral authority's prior to one's own, and the reordering of beliefs is important especially in a society that has a constantly shifting set of morals.

The fluidity of morals is arguably the most important trait of a moral system – its ability to change and grow insofar as it remains linked to our communal understanding of other human beings is important. Contrarian thought clashes heavily with counter-cultural movements as they tend to operate under a value system that contains a truth-claim. While it is generally viewed as beneficial to have a rigid, unwavering set of morals we must recognize that all existing morality has been built on majority biases. Our idea of 'humanity' in the last two centuries alone has shifted immensely, as rising moral figures argued that it is not right to sell other human beings as property, initially unpopular movements like Women's Suffrage earned them the basic right to vote, and how even now we are struggling

¹² Ibid. 89

with the rights of the LGBT+ community. In Judith Butler's *Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy from Undoing Gender*, she writes that

International human rights is always in the process of subjecting the human to redefinition and renegotiation...it rewrites the human...our very sense of personhood is linked to the desire for recognition, and that desire places us outside ourselves, in a realm of social norms that we do not fully choose, but that provides the horizon and the resource for any sense of choice that we have.¹³

Our ability to rewrite the definition of 'human' can be a very powerful tool for those who have been traditionally excluded from that definition. As Butler argues, those falling outside of the definition are bound by norms that uniquely inhibit their access to their own free-will. Any progress we have seen is a direct result of the fluidity of moral systems, and how our understanding of the traits and nature of human beings evolve into policy changes that allow them access to the society they live in. This evolution is crucial because we must recognize our shortfalls as human beings, and that we cannot fathom every potential social situation that would merit a moral response. While I recognize that 'fluid' may seem similar to a shaky, weak moral system that can be manipulated, it is still important to maintain that malleability so that it is at least possible to follow moral authorities as they rise to defend divisive issues relating to our evolving understanding of humanity. Questioning our definition of humanity as time progresses is of course a form of criticism, however I still maintain that criticism to the point of inhibiting deference will weaken those who are challenging our current definition of humanity, who need natural buy in from the general public in order to institute change.

Deferring to a Humanitarian Authority

¹³ Judith Butler, "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," *Feminist Theory*, 3rd ser., 2010, 550.

With the introduction of humanity into this paper, it is fair to have a discussion on the role it plays in our calculus of choosing a moral authority. While I do not necessarily intend to defend the Kantian conception of humanity being an end in and of itself as well as an objective good, I will argue that it is likely the most powerful guiding value within the realm of moral authority. The uniqueness of humanity lies in its acknowledgment of individual autonomy of a person's actions as argued by David Sussman in *Authority of Humanity*. He writes

While the value of humanity, read broadly, could make our choices determinate, this value would not be an end alien to the will itself...in recognizing the general value of humanity, we would not be submitting to some external demand. Instead, we would only be accepting a particular interpretation of our own vague but ineluctable commitments. Our freedom would begin not just where our reasons run out, but at the point where we start to have a substantial understanding of ourselves as free beings.¹⁴

This essential analysis plays into the concept of individual autonomy in relation to deference. The ability to defer must exist in an environment that values autonomy, or free will, and Sussman argues that humanity exists as a normative value that both acknowledges the actors free will as well as the free will of others. To be clear, I am associating the term 'free will' with the idea that we find a high level of concern about the autonomy of other humans, i.e. it is not in the best interest of the autonomy of an African American individual to be sold as property in the 1700's. Humanity already exists as a normative value in the modern era that places a social burden on moral actors to care about the suffering of others. In keeping the consideration of our own autonomy valuable, Sussman has defined a moral push factor that does not utilize a command, or in other words the problematic *persuasion* that threatens the core tenets of authority.

¹⁴David Sussman, "The Authority of Humanity," *Ethics* 113 (2003): 363.

The discussion of humanity is a crucial one, in that it is currently being challenged by the rising tide of contrarian thought as a moral push factor and thus we need to weigh the two against each other. There are two ways to do this: first, we look to the end goal of each factor and secondly we can analyze its role in the mind of a moral actor. It is heavily disputed whether humanity is an end in and of itself, but I would argue that even if it is not, the impetus of humanity often leads to moral values such as community, individual prosperity, and autonomy. It is not necessary in this paper to delve deeper, because we can see that comparatively there is no true end to the contrarian method. Its focus lies mainly in critiquing master narratives by pinpointing logical contradictions that may have little to no effect on the narrative's purpose. Through denying the possibility of a truth-claim, this method provides no alternative values other than the act of critique. By prioritizing the push factor of humanity as the driving force for deciding when to defer, at its very roots we are basing our decisions on the fundamental premise of the free will of the people of our society.

Now we can examine the role each factor plays in the mind of the moral subject. While humanity pushes for autonomy, the role it plays lends itself to the assumption that your free will is valuable insofar as it also preserves the free will of others. It also draws its power from normative structures and is therefore a passive push factor. The subject is then guided to favor moral authorities that also root themselves in a value of humanity and is then more likely to defer to those actors. What contrarian thought does, whether intentionally or not, is attempt to harmfully solidify our moral systems by denying the legitimacy of rising moral authorities. This form of criticism may be able to point out flaws in the status quo, but it lacks the impetus to follow a moral authority that seeks to change the problem. It does this by inhibiting our ability to fully defer our authority to that new moral authority because we are unable to allow their beliefs to pre-empt ours in totality. The nature of this thought process eliminates the act of true deference that is crucial for subjects as they begin to follow

a new, just moral authority. As discussed earlier in this paper, an integration of beliefs with an authority is not nearly as effective as a full re-ordering of beliefs when attempting to create a normative obligation for change. Therefore, this form of post-modern thought denies the subject's capacity to order their beliefs behind another entity, and functionally commands the subject to substitute their own authority as the ultimate one. This reestablishment of authority is accomplished by the aggressive nature of critique becoming manifest by means of an authority where there is no true exchange of the subject's authority.

Anonymous Authority and Deference

Even the strongest moral leaders have the capacity, or humility, to defer their own authority if it is necessary to push those moral values forward. It is when we lack either the willingness or an individual to defer our authority to that we run into issues. The fundamental problem of an anonymous authority is that there is no actual person to defer your authority to. The hierarchy of authority requires a tangible entity of which an exchange of authority may happen, and anonymous authority establishes no such hierarchy. Burston provides a way to understand what anonymous authority is by analyzing the Frommian concepts of authority. He argues that there are three kinds of authority: rational, irrational, and anonymous. Rational authority is "A relationship between two or more people of unequal age, experience or status, where the person in authority seeks to abolish their differences in status eventually by bringing the student up to his (or her) own level." It is then argued that "irrational authority is designed to perpetuate or intensify conditions of inequality, often through the use of force, or the threat of force, and/or the use of deception, secretiveness and/ or the manipulation of interpersonal relationships."¹⁵ Understanding the previously established hierarchy that authority brings, it is critical that we analyze the ability

¹⁵ Ibid. 16

for individuals to access different levels of the hierarchy that will always exist in the modern world. Fromm's irrational authority is the type that uses violence and persuasion which is the exact type of authority that Arendt would deem illegitimate, whereas rational authority is the type where the authority figure seeks to increase the status or individual autonomy of those beneath him without resorting to forms of oppression that solidify the authority's position in perpetuity. With these two definitions established, we recognize their distinction from anonymous authority. The interpersonal relationship central to rational and irrational authorities, regardless of which we prefer, allow for the possibility of dialogue between the authority and the subject. Anonymous authority robs this relationship from moral frameworks, therefore the push factor (i.e. unrelenting criticism) itself faces no reflection from the individual. This is what I argue about anonymous authority being the vehicle for contrarian thought; an individual has now chosen a system of thought that does not rely on humanity and interpersonal relationships to drive their actions, establishing themselves as the *ultimate* moral authority whose duty is to deconstruct master narratives. Although Kantian thought states that each individual has in themselves a certain level of authority, I posit that fighting the concept of deference by recognizing oneself as an ultimate authority denies the influence of constructive authorities which are counter-cultural, but at the same time, seek to uphold the humanity of others. By an individual denying their own capacity for deference, the ability or desire to defer to any authority operating under a moral truth-claim is eradicated and the necessity to learn from authorities is weakened.

The concept of anonymous authority is pervasive in modern society as argued by Burston, where the ethereal components of morality we are intended to follow lack the tangibility necessary to create a human interaction.¹⁶ This interpersonal transaction was discussed earlier in this paper as being necessary for the establishment of a relationship

¹⁶ Burston, "Authority, Effectiveness," 18

between a moral authority and its subjects as argued by Westlund, and by eliminating tangibility we cannot participate in the process of deferring. What is unique about anonymous authority is that, as Fromm puts it, “both command and commander have become invisible. It is like being fired at by an invisible enemy. There is nobody and nothing to fight back against.”¹⁷ The intangible nature of anonymous authority poses a problem with deference, as its power cannot be checked when there are not two parties of which to exchange authority. This analysis would urge the question: “How is this different than a moral push factor like humanity, where you cannot tangibly engage with a concept like free will?” My response to this would be that insofar as the value itself, like humanity, is linked to the preservation and respect of qualities intrinsic in humans, it always creates an interpersonal reaction when that moral framework is applied and influencing one’s actions. Contrarians, on the other hand, do not operate in a system that *must* value humanity. The thought process of dissecting truth claims to find internal inconsistencies rather than focus analysis on the holistic implications of that truth-claim can be rooted in any number of justifications within an individual’s agenda. This means that they can operate in a non-relational vacuum, where excessive critique can be a vehicle for the subject to justify one’s own actions that would otherwise be stymied by deferring to a moral authority that would not condone those actions. This begs individuals to firmly hold on to their own authority, as it is now their duty to dissect and disprove any ideas that contain truth-claims. Deference is now seen as a weakness, as to defer would mean denying your own authority which has been elevated by this new wave of excessive criticism. The act of deferring relies on subjects looking to an authority that builds something worth buying in to, not something that deconstructs without leaving behind a structure that can be followed. This ties back into the analysis of the hierarchy of authority, how movements operating under counter-cultural

¹⁷ Ibid. 18

moral claims require a significant amount of buy in to make an impact on society. These counter-cultural moral claims would be that of equality during the Civil Rights movement or the rights of the LGBT community, where those movements gained momentum from the deference of individuals even outside of those respective communities and the corresponding organization that a just hierarchical structure provides. These individuals bought into a new moral system regardless of the stigma imposed onto its supporters, and that necessitates a value of deference where subjects seek to defer their authority to a movement that is rooted in humanity rather than fall back on a mentality that seeks to deconstruct truth-claims like that of equality.

Conclusion

As moral philosophers, we are tasked with not only critiquing ideas but also searching for moral truths to guide us. The pendulum of authority swings between complacency and perpetual distrust in authority figures or their ideals. While it is easy to argue against complacency, it is more difficult to welcome the concept that there are times where subjects must order their beliefs behind those of an authority figure for a moral good. In order to establish a moral authority, we need to understand the act of deference and practice it after we have found that moral good. Deference stands in the face of contrarian thought, where the thinker functionally places themselves as the moral authority insofar as they are obligated to critique and deconstruct any moral framework containing truth-claims that has been proposed without having to look up to a single moral authority. Establishing a hierarchy is an organized method to change societal norms; if it were not for the structure and leaders of social movements across the globe, then counter-cultural ideas like desegregation or marriage equality may have been overwhelmed by the majority opinion. Deference can never find its influence as a normative power if the society constantly fights the rise of new norms

– both positive or negative – and for the sake of moral authority we must allow the idea of deference to remain a palatable philosophical concept for current and future generations.

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