

Moral Judgment: why should we judge and who has the right to?

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Abstract:

In this paper, I explore the origin of the moral authority to judge another person's wrong actions through the relationships to those involved in the situation. I also argue that moral authority has an aspect grounded in past experience with similar situations and the ability to understand what it means to be held and to hold another morally responsible. The purpose of defining moral authority and its application is determined to be for the moral growth of the perpetrator, until further development is denied, in which case the possible occurrence of manipulation to stay in relation with the unchanging person is considered.

In this paper, I address the commonly expressed moral responsibility of human beings. Specifically, I explore who is responsible for a given action, and who has the authority to judge both the morality of the action and the person who committed it. There are many aspects to these issues that need to be discussed. One being what it means to be held responsible or to hold another responsible since a person cannot be judged until some form of responsibility is in place. It is also imperative, for relevance in every day experiences, that I take an empirical approach to explore why and how we are able to act as we do in this morally responsible way. Based on this approach, we are all responsible for our actions so long as we are not being manipulated without consciously being aware, or have resentment towards the manipulator. The authority to judge immoral actions then emanates from the relationships we have with one another and to the situation—specifically our involvement with the victim or perpetrator. Further, strangers are not granted moral authority, not only because of the lack of relationship, but also because of the lack of knowledge of the complexity of the situation and the tendencies of the perpetrator in general. In addition, I argue, the application of granting authority to be on the basis of inducing self-reflection in perpetrators for moral growth until they no longer desire to change.

Before addressing how a person is morally responsible, it is necessary that the use of moral authority for the scope of this paper is defined. Moral authority can be assigned to a person actively performing an action, the perpetrator, or to a person providing some type of critical analysis toward the perpetrator, the judge. In either case it is the capacity a person has to decide and contemplate the extent of right or wrong an action is. Based on an analysis of the action and the degree to which the judge has authority, he/she may then apply proper means to the situation to help the perpetrator intrinsically grow.

To begin, it is important to explore the basis for a moral judge's authority in deciding whether a person is culpable or not. In the paper, "On being responsible and holding responsible", Angela Smith provides just this by first assuming that the person is responsible for his or her actions in the most general sense wherein he/she physically performed the action. She then suggests that a person's authority lies in their direct relationship with the perpetrator. In order to fully express that point she uses an example of confronting a stranger about his morally questionable actions towards his wife at a party¹.

Since I do not know this person, or his wife, an explicit reproach on my part would be presumptuous and meddling, even if critical attitudes toward him are perfectly warranted. If I am not a stranger, but close friends with one or both of these people, by contrast, I may have legitimate standing to express criticism in such a case.²

Smith is proclaiming reproach from a stranger is inappropriate, since she cannot judge his actions accurately, and so it would be wrong to do so. However as compelling as this is through experience, one might object by addressing how personal relations and experiences can create a bias toward the judgment of another. If a person has committed a similar action to the culprit, he is less likely to follow through with as extreme or any chastisement toward the perpetrator. The forgiver does this to lessen the possible guilt felt for his previous participation. For example, if we have lied to a friend in the past and find out they too lied to us, we may be more apt to forgive them. Whereas, another friend that is always honest, may be more inclined to judge harsher when lied to. This type of preemptive bias is what our court systems specifically seek to avoid. In order to make sure justice is applied in every case, a judge and a jury unrelated and uninvested in the situation hear all sides and judge accordingly. In legal situations, it would seem that the most accurate moral assessment would come from outside the situation entirely.

¹ Angela M. Smith, "On Being Responsible and Holding Responsible.," *Journal of Ethics: An International Philosophical Review*, 478.

² *Ibid.*, 478

However, as theoretically probable as this seems, it is not practically viable, as we often times do not trust strangers nor take their negative repercussions from our actions kindly as Smith proclaims. So even though it may create the most accurate feedback in legal cases, it is not the most efficient way to approach moral authority. Garrath Williams provides more support for the opposing view, my thesis, that relationships are the most efficient way to provide moral authority.

Williams takes a similar approach when defining who has moral authority by first distinguishing authority to judge from the act of holding someone responsible. He, similarly to Angela Smith, writes that even though we are discussing whether a culprit is to be awarded consequences for their actions, they are nevertheless responsible for those actions regardless of the judge's decision. It is important to recognize that he and Smith initially imply the main purpose of judging the culprit is to provide some sort of criticism for self-reflection; as the accuracy of this assumption will be analyzed later. With that being said, his stance, though similar to Smith's in proclaiming that the only people with real moral authority are those with relationships to the perpetrator, further develops the theory by completely rejecting authority to strangers. Smith primarily implied that it would be socially unacceptable, while Williams takes the extra step to explain that even though strangers at times may have information that those in the relation do not, they lack the moral standing to inform them of their misconduct. To further exemplify his point, he uses the circumstance of a woman who is cheating on her boyfriend, and a stranger, who is friends with her boyfriend, who happens to have seen her coming and going, but cannot tell him what is happening. The stranger has no authority to disclose this information because it is not within his jurisdiction to inform him due to the lack of proper relation between the perpetrator, in this case the woman and himself, the observer. Williams also states that it is

likely his friend will not believe him anyways if he were to disclose the information. Here, Williams supports my thesis. A stranger does not know enough about the complexity of the situation, or the persons usual tendencies to properly judge. In the stranger situation, he could make the assumption that she was cheating, and tell his friend, but without knowing enough about the situation he could be horribly wrong and cause detrimental effects to the relationship. Perhaps the man she was visiting was her brother, and she frequented his house due to recent emotional instability, and now due to the carelessness of the stranger she has to deal with two unstable people amongst other factors in her life.

Williams also establishes the role of relationships, out of which moral authority arises, using a stronger foundation than was presented in Smith's article. In doing so, he explores the idea of owed obligations presented by Margret Gilbert. He asserts that relationships are more than simple obligations owed to one another and the fear that the obligations owed to us may not be repaid in the future. Williams states: "Our concern is for the other person herself — for the person as a whole, and not only for how she may act by us or for our relationship — and so it naturally extends to other spheres of her life."³ With the basis of a relationship being so complex, he concludes that there must be a shared responsibility for the person's actions in other relations and by consequence, the person's growth. If those in relation to the culprit are to share in the responsibility for the outcome of a situation, they must have authority to some degree in how it turns out. From this basis of shared responsibility an argument for those being closest to the perpetrator being granted the most authority is derived. Those closest to the perpetrator are likely to have the most influence and therefore share the most responsibility for the resulting decision to act. These people are also the most informed as far as how often this person commits offenses

³ Garrath Williams, "Sharing Responsibility and Holding Responsible.," *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 355.

and the overall character of the person in general. The most informed people are usually those in a closer position as far as “location and opportunity” to judge, whereas others may not be close enough to cause a significantly constructive effect⁴. This complexity further counteracts the previously mentioned objection because in a practical sense those with the closest relations will be the best judges, not only because they are more knowledgeable on the facts of the situation and the person, but also because they are physically in a spot to judge the person in a beneficial way. Williams also addresses possible disadvantages to accepting this ground of moral authority. For example, complications arising in the relationship like resentment or even lies in the future to avoid reproach, but thinks that with proper establishments of trust and proximity these will not be exaggerated issues⁵.

The objection mentioned in the previous paragraph is exaggerated with an empirical study done by Brett A. Boyle, Robert F. Dahlstrom, and James J. Kellaris. The study was done to show that previous experiences or observations can affect people to act in specific ways or conversely to view certain moral actions differently. They give an example of two business men, who having experienced differing broadcasts on the way to work respond to the same suggestion posed in opposite ways. One man had heard a recap of current atrocities while the other an interview with Mother Theresa. The man who had heard the negative news report followed through with the borderline unethical business suggestion, while the man that listened to the positive report rejected the suggestion.⁶ The authors called this occurrence, contextual-induced bias, and based their study on proving that most of the time ethical decisions are influenced in as

⁴ Williams, "Sharing Responsibility," 354.

⁵ Williams, "Sharing Responsibility," 360.

⁶ Brett A. Boyle, Robert F. Dahlstrom, and James J. Kellaris, "Points of Reference and Individual Differences as Sources of Bias in Ethical Judgments," *Journal of Business Ethics* 17 (1998): 517.

similar way by this type of bias. The conclusion of this study was that people whom are more inclined to deeper and more extensive thinking were less influenced by the priming activity (showing people situations with specific connotations to cause a similar response) when making ethical decisions; while impulsive thinkers were affected by the priming due to reaction on instinct. They then concluded that to avoid this bias, especially in workplace environments, the exposure to “highly ethical exemplars” should be increased as well as awareness of this bias.⁷

One of the main flaws in this possible objection is intrinsically found in their empirical findings; specifically, that deeper thinkers are less influenced by the presented contextual-induced bias. Since I have established moral authority as originating from relationships, it is important to analyze how a person will act differently in a relationship when making ethical judgments, than they would independently. Perhaps when faced with a decision that she would primarily be responsible for, the true traits of the person, like tendency to reason thoroughly, would determine the action she would decide upon or the stance she would take on a moral level. However, when in relations with others we tend to care more about the long-term effects of our reaction. For this reason, though the initial reaction is most likely based on contextual priming, people are more inclined to think through the situation deeply before fully deciding on an action to take because more is at stake. In this way, people with moral authority, are more similar to the deeper thinkers the authors mention. This causes judges to provide more informed decisions based on extensive reasoning than those without relations to the person regardless of their past experience. However, none of this can be accomplished without first accepting some type of responsibility for actions performed.

⁷ Boyle, Dahlstrom, and Kellaris, "Points of Reference," 523.

Another aspect of moral authority that has been overlooked stems from the ability to act as a morally responsible being as Holly Smith's analysis of Michael McKenna's book, *Conversation and Responsibility*, suggests. Without the capacity to understand what it means to be morally responsible, moral authority cannot exist, no matter how close physically or emotionally the perpetrator and the judge are. Holly Smith describes several interpretations of the guidelines McKenna proposes for determining moral responsibility. The general idea is that a person is considered morally responsible in so far as they are able to evaluate what will cause harm or pleasure and they are able to understand what it means to be held and to hold another morally responsible for actions. Holly discusses varying degrees of what it means to hold another person responsible including the idea that other people have a moral right to demand certain actions such as to not be harmed. She then considers three differing interpretations of McKenna proposed theory for holding others responsible, of which I find the second the most persuasive and pertinent to my thesis. The second is the most general out of the three, claiming that a person who is able to hold others responsible with either simple or complex reasoning and can be held responsible himself/herself⁸. This takes into account varying degrees of responsibility to include children who use a simple reasoning system as they develop into more rational beings and some adults that may not reason as well as others. The other two interpretations add unneeded complexity to understanding the action of holding another person responsible. They exclude those that do not fit into the extreme cases of rationality. Specifically, the first interpretation excludes those that do not understand the moral community and the demands they have a right to make. The third excludes those that cannot describe their reasoning for an action or apologize.

⁸ Holly M. Smith, "Does Being Morally Responsible Depend on the Ability to Hold Morally Responsible?," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*.

The fundamental idea in the third interpretation is important to moral authority from the stand point I have chosen, though on the surface it seems exclusive in superfluous and complex ways. If one can explain the reasoning behind an action, it seems he would be more experienced in that situation and therefore a better moral judge to someone else in a similar situation. This allows for the movement to a more practical application of moral authority by using experience as a learning tool to enhance society and the morals it continues to follow. If the experienced judge were able to clearly describe persuasively to the perpetrator why he was wrong and how he should correct his ways, it would be more beneficial than having the perpetrator suffer consequences from which he may not learn. By allowing moral authority in cases of experience with the assumption that a proper foundation of trust was established, it also allows for the reinforcement of morals in the judge so as to avoid repeat offenses in the future. The benefits of this type of moral judge also seem to outweigh the con of possible bias as mentioned previously, in some cases.

As considered above, experience can be beneficial by creating a discussion to change the culprit's current views on morality, but is this the job of the moral judge? This aspect was inspired by William's article as well as Holly Smith's when they both assumed that the purpose of having or granting moral authority was to judge. Is moral authority to judge applied to help the perpetrator make vital changes to their self in order to become the best that they can? Or do we simply invoke this to define who the person is and if they are fit for societal interactions? Or is it for a selfish reason such as forgiveness? By selfish forgiveness, I intend when the person is motivated by cultivation of inner peace and letting go of resentment for their personal benefit rather than for the benefit of the receiver. If it is forgiveness, William thinks the closer a person is to the victim the more authority they have to forgive, with the victim having the most right to

forgive. The correlation between authority and forgiveness seems reasonable, as a person completely removed from the situation would have no reason to forgive and no authority to judge; however, there may be others involved that are not being accounted for in this regard. Friends and family of the perpetrator may not have a connection to the victim, and therefore do not have authority to forgive in William's model, though they may be just as upset at his wrongdoings as the victim's family. As I have defined the scope of moral authority, it would seem forgiveness and selfish means in general do not accurately capture the motivation of granting authority. Not only are the victim and his relations left out of this view by lacking moral authority to judge because they are not relatively close to the perpetrator, but those that do have authority such as close friends of the perpetrator lose motivation if purpose is defined by forgiveness.

Later in the article William discusses how it is the responsibility of people with relations to one another to help guide people in good directions and help correct ill behavior⁹. This seems like a better fitting model for motivation for authority, and in fact was assumed originally in both Angela Smith's and Williams' articles. When a person is judged and perhaps even given an explanation about how she was wrong, she is given the opportunity to learn from her mistake and perhaps save the community from suffering from her actions in the future, but more importantly promote her own flourishing. However, as Williams addressed, there is a point a person reaches where he is no longer changing in some aspects and is who he is going to be. In that instance, you as a person in that relationship have to decide if you are willing to live with the person as he is and accept his moral flaws or not. After that, you solely are responsible for the treatment you receive and no longer have real authority to judge it, because you agreed to the terms you now

⁹ Williams, "Sharing Responsibility," 358.

are subject to¹⁰. In light of the perpetrator's authority to accept further development or not, it is relevant to explore boundaries of judgment as it applies to inspiring growth in a person.

David Levy, in the article, "Moral Authority and Wrongdoing", addresses the scope of moral authority granted to a judge based on experience or involvement in the situation. His analysis builds on my theory of the purpose of moral authority by explaining how similar experience can actually grant a person more authority through understanding, than someone on the outside of the situation. The basis for his analysis is Nazi officer, Franz Stangl, interviewed by Gitta Sereny. While interviewing Stangl on the continuation his immoral actions, Sereny reached a point where she no longer felt she had authority to determine that he should have risked death over performing heinous actions. Levy establishes that perpetrators, like Stangl, have a certain moral authority to make decisions for themselves that cannot be completely undermined by others moral authority to judge. So, while one might be able to claim it was wrong to have performed evil, he cannot claim it was worse than risking death would have been. Levy extends this idea to incorporate others that may have been involved in the situation. In the case of the existence of a hypothetical person, Mr. Ander, who chose to risk death over committing more evil, he would have more moral authority than others to judge Stangl based on his extensive understanding of the situation due to similar involvement. Though granted more authority than others, he still cannot cross the boundary of proclaiming what Stangl should have done. More precisely explained, "Ander has a different moral authority than those of us who were uninvolved. Where we can say, 'What you did was monstrous,' Ander can add, among other things, 'You are a coward.'"¹¹ This is because Ander has a certain understanding for the

¹⁰ Williams, "Sharing Responsibility," 359.

¹¹ David Levy, "Moral Authority and Wrongdoing," *Philosophical Topics* 38 (2010): 112.

circumstance and all that was at stake, that would be unclear if not directly involved in the situation. Along this same reasoning, Levy draws the conclusion that victims and their families will also have a different degree of moral authority than both the uninvolved and the accomplice do. Due to the difference authority has based on experience, our ability to criticize the person on their action is also limited in the same way. However, "This does not mean that we cannot respond morally to someone, just not with a judgment counter to the judgment established on someone's moral authority. We can respond, for instance, by thinking that some judgment expresses someone's weakness or low character."¹² Indirectly, this emphasizes the point that those with experience have the capacity to be better judges, not only because they can explain why they were wrong in perhaps a more relatable way, but also because they are more knowledgeable on the situation in general.

The more experience, or the closer a person is to the situation, the more comprehensive their understanding will be, and the less likely they will be to impulsively react. The article by Levy emphasizes the depth to which a judge will be able to evaluate an action as introduced in the study by Boyle, Dahlstrom, and Kellaris. Perhaps the similarity of the situation will cause them to reflect on their own decision, and the aspects that played into it. Decisions are complex, and for this reason, they are not always explicit in their morality. When all aspects are considered of the situation and the person, there may be a sufficient reason to break the moral standards as determined by the perpetrator exercising their own moral authority. The best judge in this case would be one with the most knowledge on the situation and the person, so while we have established the importance of relationships in moral authority on grounds of helping a person change, the judge's experience can also be an important, yet sufficient, factor in the application

¹² Levy, "Moral Authority," 114.

of authority. It is important to recognize here that while experience can be useful, in some situations it can be more detrimental, like those contained in a community of immoral norms.

In the article, “The Mafioso Case: Autonomy and Self-respect”, Bagnoli explores this idea of moral change from the most extreme view, further expanding my empirical theory of the purpose of moral authority. Even in the most extreme case, such as participating in a gang, a sense of authority is not lost. She demonstrates how mobsters, though they appear to be immoral, actually follow a set of guidelines similar to moral people. “Many of the practices they agree to enter require that they be bound by commands and act accordingly, even when not inclined to do so, and even when they have no personal interest in it.”¹³ From this starting point Bagnoli reasons that the only step needed to become moral beings is to make morality seem convincing enough to devote to it instead of the rules they are currently living by. She purposes that mobsters devote to such tragic lifestyles because of a lack of reflection to see themselves with self-respect and others as equal. In order to emphasize that such a conversion can take place, she gives the example of a mobster’s transition to thinking morally. The development of practical reflection in mobster, Rita, is induced by a dialectic of questions through an external source, or “an institutional figure who challenges her has having equal standing.”¹⁴ “In this respect, Rita's moral progress consists in learning how to question herself, that is, in acquiring by practice the mechanisms of self-examination, hence of moral thinking.”¹⁵ Through Bagnoli’s example we can see that self-reflection induced by others can inspire growth and change in a positive way no matter how extreme the case, and is in some ways dependent on a morally authoritative figure to

¹³ Carla Bagnoli, "The Mafioso Case: Autonomy and Self-Respect," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice: An International Forum* 12, no. 5 (November 2009): 481.

¹⁴ Bagnoli, "The Mafioso," 490.

¹⁵ Bagnoli, "The Mafioso," 489.

begin the process. Though Bagnoli implies Rita developed to a point of self-questioning for reflection, I would extend this argument to state that in some situations we are not the best judges of ourselves as we attempt to lessen the magnitude of consequences to justify an action. This leaves room for the necessity of moral judges as an external source for accurate self-reflection in all stages of development. This ensures that we are honest with ourselves so that we do not justify, or make the action seem less immoral than it actually was.

Rita, after justifying immoral actions for most of her life, chose to appeal to law out of extreme anger and drive for revenge ensued from the homicide of both her father and her brother rather than out of the good of the community or out of a change of values. For this reason, the close relations she had in her previous community were still very much present, and since relations are important to moral authority, it was a difficult process for Rita to transition through. She not only had to learn how to hold herself accountable for certain actions through self-reflection, but also move through the guilt of rejecting the gang's standards and defy all relations with them. Bagnoli expresses how anguishing this was for Rita to accomplish because of how much more relationships impact actions than simple conformity to rules, so even though Rita felt pride in following moral laws, she also felt distress and was outcasted by those she had grown up interacting with.¹⁶ This furthers my thesis that relations are stronger and have more lasting effects than abidance to laws and simple punishment for wrong doings do.

To fully apply Rita's case to my thesis, it is necessary to expand on the point mentioned above. I state above that Rita was able to develop morality by building relations out of the gang community, yet earlier I specifically argued that experience would make a person a better judge.

¹⁶ Bagnoli, "The Mafioso," 488.

In this case, one might argue as an objection, that my theory breaks down in extreme cases as Rita's for that exact reason. If relation is so crucial to moral authority, how is a mafioso member supposed to develop, or ever receive accurate criticism if everyone in the community is living by immoral norms? Though my theory explores the application of experience as a beneficial aspect of moral authority, it is not necessary for the judge to have. Experience is only beneficial if it aids in positive development of the perpetrator, and for that reason, in situations where it is not valuable, or perhaps even detrimental, moral authority exists without it. This becomes especially important in cases such as the mafioso one where a moral judge, without experience or investment in the gang, is fundamental to establishing moral development. Further, as mentioned above, Rita was extremely conflicted when she began the process of thinking morally. She had to make new relationships outside of the community, to teach herself how to reflect such as with the judge. Though this relationship was not exceedingly complex, she still developed to at least an acquaintance level since she was to the point where she would quote the judge in her journal to help her reason through thoughts she had. As represented with Rita's case, this path is long and strenuous, met with much resistance from both the community, and within the self. Since this is the case, it is not often we experience gang members transforming in this way, especially due to the difficulty of finding someone in proximity that is not involved in the community of such immoral acts.

The example of Rita also shows how subjective our view of moral authority is. Many people would praise her courage to attempt a transition out of that lifestyle because it shows personal development. This is because the small change it would make towards the good of the community is both not extreme enough to recognize as a main factor for pride, and because our values as a society align with personal development in general especially when it pertains to

those closest to us. When applying moral authority in the way I have established, this is especially clear. The criticism given to the perpetrator is out of the care towards them to become better people. On a large scale, we may attribute this desire towards a better society in general, but on the base level we simply contemplate their change with the big picture rarely in mind. For example, when scolding a friend, we tend to say, that it was wrong to have performed that action, and it will reflect badly on their character and ask if that is the type of person they want to become or be seen as, but rarely proclaim they are making the community a worse place to live in. This could be due to the partial responsibility we have in who the person is becoming as Williams suggested, or just simply that we care about the person we know so well, more so than the people we do not know that make up the community. Either way moral authority is empirically subjective because it is defined by relationships.

Once people we care about reach the end of their willingness to develop, we have to decide if we want to continue the relationship with them. This idea of agreeing to terms and staying in certain relationships regardless of the moral behavior we perceive as wrong could be attributed to manipulation from the other person. In relations such as these, we may shift our views of morality and perform unethical actions we would not have considered without them. In this case it is pertinent to discuss when and if a person is responsible under the influence of another person. David Alm specifically addresses the issue of manipulation by invoking a compelling soft compatibilist theory. In this theory, moral responsibility is heavily dependent on external factors and the agents knowledge of them. He develops the idea that a person need not only be unaware of the reasoning being applied and the changes being made in his own mind, but also feel resentment toward the manipulator in order to avoid being held responsible for his action. These qualifications are pertinent to the theory, as they exclude cases of persuasion or of

guilt projected on to others for blame. The examples given of these exclusions include people who would have performed the action regardless of being manipulated, because once aware of the situation they feel resentment, instead of giving in knowingly; as well as those who are presented compelling arguments and change their opinions accordingly, because they are aware of the changes occurring¹⁷. By these requirements, I would agree that the victim is not responsible for his actions to the point of accepting complete responsibility. Complete responsibility would require the full range of consequences, and while some may be warranted, the person was not able to rationally make informed decisions and should not suffer all of the blame simply because the action was committed. However, I do not intend to argue an extreme stance. To a lighter degree, the agent's physical performance of the action can and perhaps should be held responsible. If the perpetrator were to be simply let off the hook because of their unconscious reasoning, rules and laws that hold a society together would begin to break down. It would create cases where manipulators would purposefully use people for their own ends, and as long as they did not get caught, there would be no harm done to the participating parties speaking in relative terms. To keep society from suffering in this way, both parties should share the punishment to the same degree that they are both held responsible. This would allow for a reverse effect in the agent for example, possibly preventing further action in the future.

Within this theory of manipulation, Alm provides a counter argument to my purposed argument, of granting authority to children, by attempting to disregard the manipulation of children from parents in claiming that they may not even be able to be held accountable for their actions in general. Though this is true in a legal sense, the second interpretation Holly Smith

¹⁷ David Alm, "Responsibility, Manipulation, and Resentment.," *Social Theory and Practice: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Philosophy*.

provides is a more thorough and compelling analysis of what children can be held responsible. It is more plausible that a child would be manipulated under the terms set by Alm than an adult would because they are still developing rationally and have a more trusting relationship in accepting judgements made by those closest to them. The degree to which this relates to responsibility is in the manipulator. If we disregard the entirety of the situation claiming that it simply does not matter if they are manipulated or not because either way they hold no responsibility, we also disregard the authority to judge the manipulator and therefore all chances of changing his immoral behavior and future growth as a person.

In many cases, those closest to the perpetrator may not explicitly witness the action. With the mentioned case of manipulation, this may be exceedingly important to evaluate the perpetrator's true character, though it may not apply to many other circumstances. Therefore, explicit observation of immoral action may seem like a negligible detail in the scheme of moral authority. However, it was a main component of compliance to moral norms addressed by Dubreuil and Grégoire. They proclaimed: "There are good reasons to believe (both intuitive and experimental) that even the impression of being observed has an impact on norm compliance."¹⁸. Not only does this further exemplify that those physically close to the perpetrator will have more of an influence on him, but it also presents a possible phenomenon wherein authority is dependent on witnessing the action. In some cases, it may be necessary for a perpetrator to be observed as in the circumstance of lying or manipulating, for if he is not observed, he may never be caught further reinforcing this morally wrong action, but as mentioned before, the observer must be one with a proper relationship to have authority to respond appropriately. However, it

¹⁸ Benoît Dubreuil and Jean-François Grégoire, "Are moral norms distinct from social norms? A critical assessment of Jon Elster and Cristina Bicchieri," *Theory And Decision: An International Journal For Methods And Models In The Social And Decision Sciences* 75, no. 1 (2013): 148.

does not seem to be a necessary condition for the observer to explicitly watch the action to accurately judge it. In fact, seeing the action may cause unnecessary emotional reactions that could cloud his assessment and cause inaccurate responses. Adding the observation aspect might also cause for complexity and misinterpretation of reactions on the side of the perpetrator. If there are too many people it could cause public humiliation, and the perpetrator might just associate the action with the negative ostracization rather than initiating self-reflection. As this was the determined point of granting authority, it seems the possible disadvantages of observation are not worth risking the overall goal¹⁹. Additionally, it seems that witnessing manipulation would be difficult as the perpetrator most likely will not want to be caught, so this may not even be a realistic benefit to begin with.

In conclusion, moral authority is dependent upon one's own ability to understand what it means to be held responsible on either a simplistic or complex level. The degree to which a person is able to understand this determines how much moral authority they have along with how close their relation is to those involved in the situation. The more a person is able to understand the circumstances and describe reasoning for actions the better they are able to assess the situation and help the person evolve into a more moral person. It seems that the main goal of determining moral authority is precisely this, to help other people become more moral people or in some cases determine who they are and if we are up to accepting the terms of the relationship. Manipulation in a relationship is an exception to moral responsibility and hence should be judged differently since a person is unconsciously changing some beliefs from the pressure of another individual, and would feel resentment toward that particular individual if they were revealed the truth. This holds true in the case of children whom are still developing their reasoning ability

¹⁹ Dubreuil and Grégoire, "Are moral," 151.

because, though, they are not as advanced as adults, still have some reasoning and ability to understand responsibility.

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