

To have moral (= deontic, executive) authority is to have an office or position defined or constituted by certain responsibilities and rights—namely, those involving making decisions that obligate others, at least *prima facie*, to comply with them, regardless of what their personal decisions about the matters would otherwise have been. In the nature of the case, the voice of moral authority is at least *prima facie* overriding for those subject to or obligated by the authority. Furthermore, the authority, or some other agency whose function it is, has the right and the responsibility to enforce [*sic*] compliance with its decisions. Such is the case with the parent, the teacher, the foreman, the policeman, the judge, the legislative body, the head of state, and so on.

All such officials hold offices defined or constituted by responsibilities and rights that involve making decisions that certain others have *prima facie* overriding obligations to accept and to act on. Moreover, in cases of inexcusable disobedience, the authority in question or some other agency has not only the right but also the responsibility to impose penalties. Such penalties serve two functions. The first is educational, in that they make clear the importance of compliance. The second is to give the person who is insensitive to other considerations a reason that will move her or him to comply. There are compelling reasons for compliance, and the authority or some associated agency has the responsibility for enforcing it.

If, however, the offices exercising authority are wisely constituted, and if the competence of officials is generally maintained, then those subject to the authority of a particular office have good reasons to comply with the authority quite apart from whatever penalties there may be for failing to do so.

This means that wisely structured and well functioning authority does not compromise genuine freedom. For under such conditions, the individual or group subject to the authority has good reasons, quite apart from any penalties that may be involved, to comply with its requirements. Freedom is compromised only if the rational, informed person would have to take the penalties into account in order to find a good reason for complying. Ideally, the coercing force of moral authority would be used only against those who

grossly fail to do the morally right from their own reasoning. The rational, informed person, acting from her or his own deliberations, would never feel the external restraint of authority nor would her or his beliefs and inner motivations be manipulated and shaped by indoctrination or propaganda. Of course, we never achieve perfection on the part of either moral authority or rational human beings. Therefore, perfect freedom under authority is never achieved but can only be approximated. It can, however, be approximated ever more closely by increasing the rationality both of authority and of the human beings subject to it.

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