

# Authority and Morality

*"I have as much authority as the Pope, I just don't have as many people who believe it." – George Carlin*

Two pillars combine to support this edifice of domination that we live under: **authority**, which is the belief that one person or group of people has the right to make decisions for others and to impose punishment upon them if they disobey, and **morality**, which is the belief in the concepts of "good", "bad", "right", "wrong", "obligatory" and "forbidden". None of this is really helpful for any kind of free and authentic life, hence, I would like to see the whole thing done away with.

The justifications for authority comes from a lack of trust in people making wise decisions for themselves, likewise, the justifications for morality comes from a lack of trust in people's judgement in determining what is supportive of themselves and others around them. The mechanism of authority is the relinquishing of one's independent decision-making capacity over to someone else, likewise, the mechanism of morality is the relinquishing of one's independent capacity for making assessments and evaluations over to some prescribed code that was written by somebody else.

"Good", "bad", "right", "wrong" is moralism. Amoralism is not caring about any of that, and using a different standard for evaluation. "Might makes right" is a moralistic statement because you are bringing the concepts of "right" and "rights" into the picture, but one can still find value in the statement even without believing in it by seeing that the one with the most "might", i.e., the ability to parlay the use of force, holds the most sway in any given social situation. One follows what that person says out of fear of getting one's ass kicked. This is the fearful situation that is often conjured up when people imagine scenarios where there is no authority or morality present, but this is also the case for the world that we live in now: what else are all the police, military and prisons doing everywhere?

Compliance in order to save one's skin does not mean, however, that one has to **believe** any or all of the stories that surround the person or people who are deemed to be in "authority". One could just be marking time and not drawing attention to one's self until those people go away. We are fortunate that people are not mind readers, for often when those in authority see people portraying the affectations of obedience, they often make the assumption that the corresponding thought processes of obedience are in place as well.

Morality is a type of story that people tell each other, similar to myths and legends, it is a story that gives an explanation for who we are, what we are doing, and what we should be

doing in this world. Beyond just explaining things, morality also contains proscriptions and injunctions, along with an added motivating emotional oomph that feelings of fear and righteousness provide.

When one talks about “morality” and “moral behavior”, one is also referring to something else in addition to the conceptual club that is used to psychologically bludgeon people, and that is a road map and way of relating with other people that generally, conceivably, results in more social peace and harmony. That is speaking in broad strokes though, for the closer one gets to the fine details, the more room opens up for disagreement on interpretation. I am all for the use of social tools that are supportive of mutual coexistence and cooperation, the thing is, I think that what that is varies from person to person, place to place, and situation to situation. I don’t think that any kind of standardized universal code could possibly encapsulate it all, and that instead social harmony requires a great deal of dialogue, deliberation and creativity among those involved.

My hatred and hostility to those in authority comes from the sheer arrogance that I see in the situation, them setting themselves up to be little gods and messiahs, where they not only feel entitled to tell others what to do, they also feel entitled to create a little cosmology story (i.e., morality) where apparently the very nature of the universe justifies why they are in authority. Come off it – you are human like all the rest of us!

The thing is, though, I believe that often those who exercise authority are not even aware that they are doing so. Authority, and the accompanying morality, is so prevalent in our society that it is like the air we breathe – we often do not even notice it. It is often through accomplishing a kind of conceptual break, usually through the telling of a different kind of story, that people are able to raise their head above the water and see the world around them fresh for the first time.

The story that I tell about human beings is that people are capable of making their own decisions and having their own lives go in the directions that they want through the choices that they make. The story that I tell also has everybody with the abilities to discern what they want, why they want it, and with the ability to assess whether they are successful at getting that or not. Nobody is required to either believe in or use each other’s stories. The decisions people make and the directions that people go in may in the end not serve them or lead to the kind of results that they want, but that is for each person to discover on their own. Advice can be given, suggestions can be made, but ultimately each person must walk their own path themselves.

To try to play games of authority is to attempt to ignore all of this. It is to try to force others to take the approach that one considers to be correct, it is to ignore one’s own capacity to choose and make decisions. Going the authority route is to follow the dictates of others and to ignore the feedback that is gained from the results of the decisions made and to instead

keep one's mind preoccupied with the various stories that are presented by authority.

Those in authority are constantly ready with an array of threats to be used in response to anything that displeases them. The tools at their disposal include emotional manipulation, playing cards in a game that is stacked against their opponent (such as through the use of "grades" and other points-systems), appealing to other more higher authorities, social manipulation resulting in social exclusion, and the ultimate trump card, physical force itself. These are the responses of a person who is ready to pounce, a predator on the prowl.

Ultimately, the only way out of this is for a person to discover their own power. A person has the ability to believe their own stories, and to choose what stories that one uses in the first place. One has the ability to choose one's own actions, one's own words used, and one's own responses to other people and situations. One can know why one does what one does, and what one is trying to accomplish. Others can try to help you to forget all of that, but nobody can take it away from you. It's existential.

Socially, though, constructed through the cumulative beliefs and actions of those who surround us, what we find ourselves in is a **prison**. That is because, control over one's own beliefs and choice-responses aside, there is seemingly no way out. Those who are playing the authority game invite us to do the same at the barrel of a gun. There are various other prisoners who surround us, as well as various predators, and those who support that predator behavior. What is needed here are prison survival strategies. Prison escape is always an option, but that is always much glamorized and easier said than done. And there is always the question of where one will go once one is out, and how one will then survive in that new and different environment.

But that is getting ahead of ourselves here. The first step is cutting through the illusions that surround us. Learn to notice a story when it is being told, and learn to discern who exactly is benefiting from the stories that are being told. Learn to recognize one's own ability for choice and agency in a given situation, and learn to discern one's own intentions, reasons and goals, instead of relying on pre-formulated standardized responses. To live without authority or morality requires a lot more effort on one's part – it involves a lot more personal thought and self-reflection, and a lot more facing up to one's own self-responsibility. But in the end, it is an experience of being truly alive, even when it is not allowed.