

Obedience Isn't The Ethical Choice

Here's something you probably don't hear every day: I dislike obedience.

Obedience is not something to be encouraged or celebrated; it's one of the most dangerous human traits there is. Obedient people have caused far more problems than rebels. It's not even close.

The Holocaust can be laid directly at the feet of obedient people — including people who weren't otherwise bad, but who were obedient. It wasn't only the Nazis and those who enabled them, their victims were also too obedient.

You may think that's a rare case; surely obedience is usually better than disobedience. You'd be wrong. It may seem safe to obey someone today, but their next order might be evil. If you get in the habit of obeying you may not stop to think before you obey the wrong order.

The tendency to follow orders is still a source of trouble, especially among government employees who ought to know better than to obey orders that are unethical and, in many cases, prohibited by the Constitution. Yet, obedient employees lack the backbone to refuse when their paychecks, or even their freedom, depend on obeying bad policies.

It takes courage to disobey, especially when the one giving orders has the power to hurt you. Obedience is the cowardly course, but it could be seen as pragmatic when you believe there's no alternative.

Refusing to obey is dangerous in direct proportion to how evil the one giving the orders is. Even in this case, obeying will probably be worse for everyone in the long run. Doing the right thing when ordered to do otherwise might cost you. It's worth it even if you don't see it yet.

I have no respect for anyone who is automatically obedient and great respect for those who disobey bad orders. I can even respect those who disobey and choose to do the wrong thing. They'll face consequences, and I wouldn't save them from themselves, but at least they weren't automatically obedient.

Don't demand obedience in the people you have power over. If you have a good argument for why someone should do what you want, make it. A threat to use violence against someone for not obeying you isn't an argument. It exposes you as an authoritarian. Demanding obedience usually means your argument is weak ... if you have one at all.

As government gets more authoritarian, obedience to it becomes less ethical. Don't obey

the bad guys.