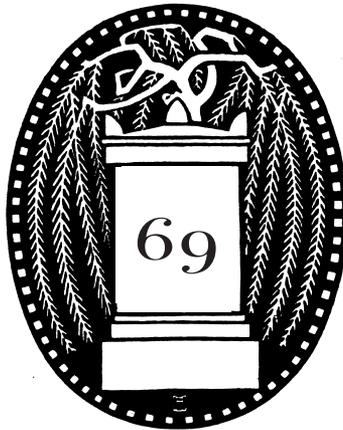


**JOURNAL OF  
PHILOSOPHY &  
HISTORY  
OF EDUCATION**



2019

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The Journal of the Society of Philosophy & History of Education

# On Authority in Society and Education

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The political power international, national, and local governments wield; the economic power of multinational corporations; the power and authority of local business leaders; and the impact of leaders of various social institutions, churches, schools, media, and nongovernmental organizations evidence themselves across societies and influence individuals' social lives. Those elected or employed to create policies and enforce laws use authority and power against a backdrop of social, religious, political, and economic ideologies and conditions competing for society's attention. Ancient civilizations developed the basic structures of authority and power legitimizing religious, political, military, and social institutions. They often differentiated levels of authority and developed bureaucracies hierarchically with those of lower rank answering to those of higher rank. From the ancient Chinese to Russian czars, the tables of ranks defined a person's level in society. Nicholas I said, "I do not rule Russia; ten thousand clerks do."<sup>1</sup> Many societies applied laws and punishments differently depending on a person's status. Even today, when law enforcement purportedly respects all citizens' rights, those enforcers cannot escape treating individual citizens based on their perceptions. So often when one thinks and talks about such ideas as power, authority, and control, one is actually thinking about their misuse or abuse, the negative aspects. "Power," as Lord Acton says, "corrupts."<sup>2</sup> Power certainly corrupts in the present political climate of get-what-you-can. To achieve that get-what-you-can goal, one may take credit where none is due and lay blame on such scapegoats as one's predecessors, one's opposition, or those expendables positioned to insulate the leader. Socrates warned, Plato writes, of rulers who place their own good and interests over the good and interests of the society.<sup>3</sup> Although all seek personal power and recognition of one's own authority, an ordered society requires leadership based not on personal gain but on what benefits the society, although individuals disagree on how best to do that benefitting.

I posit that properly exercising authority benefits society by fostering the dispositions or attitudes of mind necessary for evolving a

healthy, democratic society of compassionate, open-minded, educated individuals. Because the meaning and value of “authority” has changed over time and because many conflate power and authority, using them interchangeably, I distinguish power from authority before outlining authority’s historical and philosophical foundations. I then summarize Max Weber’s three-pronged concept of authority, Hannah Arendt’s contention that authority has disappeared, T. T. Paterson’s four-pronged concept, and R. Theobald and L. C. Spears’ extension of Weber’s and Paterson’s definitions to include authority in educational leadership, authority they named “servant leadership.” Although I make connections to education throughout, I conclude by focusing on John Dewey and R. S. Peters’ examinations of authority’s role within democracy and education.

### **Power v. Authority**

Power and authority are used almost interchangeably, but power is sought and obtained while authority is bestowed. Individuals seek and use power to coerce obedience and submission. Richard Schmitt identifies personal power as “the power to get what one wants...the power to dominate...[and] the power to manipulate”<sup>74</sup> and get others to do what they would not do otherwise. Personal “power can also shape situations and persons so that they will never think to resist.”<sup>75</sup> Schmitt clarifies that power extends beyond the individual’s power to shape situations and other persons to “hegemonic power...inherent in existing institutions.”<sup>76</sup> This institutional power both dominates and manipulates social structures.

From the Latin, *auctor*, “authority” refers to the production, invention, or cause, one should acknowledge or obey<sup>77</sup> and, like power, can take several forms. The “authorities” are those individuals and agencies formally entrusted with maintaining some code or enforcing particular behavioral standards. An “authority” is one with extensive knowledge or expertise in a specific discipline, subject, or field. Those who recognize the influence of one with authority willingly comply. This structure of authority moves from the formal, “the authorities,” to the general, “an authority,” to the informal, “authority.” The historian on Rome, Theodor Mommsen, saw *auctoritas*, informal authority, as not part of the recognized social structure but something ignored at one’s peril like the authority of the *materfamilias* (female head of household). Identifying *auctoritas* and *potentia* (power) as bases for Roman government and politics, Mommsen differentiated *auctoritas* accordingly into *patrum auctoritas* for the family and *auctoritas senatus*, for the assembly of clan leaders or governmental authority.<sup>78</sup>

Hannah Arendt points out that historically authority was not always present although Plato and Aristotle sought to create something

like authority that existed neither in the Greek language nor in political practice but in the Greek household and family life.<sup>9</sup> The tyrant who “ruled by violence, had to be protected from the people...and insisted that his subjects mind their own business and leave to him the care of the public realm.”<sup>10</sup> The family leader or “despot” was not a good model for such authority and was unsuitable for political purposes since the despot’s power of coercion was left unfettered due to the rights and responsibilities of the *paterfamilias*. For Plato, authority (or something at least akin) “implied an obedience in which men retained their freedom.”<sup>11</sup>

### **Max Weber’s Concept of Authority**

The German sociologist, Max Weber, posits three types of legitimate domination: legal authority, traditional authority, and charismatic authority. The first, legal authority, is based on “a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands.”<sup>12</sup> Traditional authority, Weber’s second type, is based “on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of status of those exercising authority under them.”<sup>13</sup> The third type, charismatic authority, derives from devotion to the exceptional attributes of an individual and “of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained.”<sup>14</sup> Weber realized that the three “ideal” types are not found in pure form but provide a starting point for the study of human organizations. Each type of authority has its own subtypes and variations, each with its own rules, jurisdictions, organizational hierarchy, training, differentiation, job description, and documentation. These can be formal like governments and their departments and agencies, large industries and businesses, and social institutions for educational and religious practices.<sup>15</sup>

When explaining the first type of legitimate domination, legal authority, Weber contends one could base that authority on “agreement or by imposition...with a claim to obedience of the members’ organization.”<sup>16</sup> Individuals may hold multiple memberships; each organization’s laws circumscribe the boundaries within which members function and adhere to its laws. Legal authority is most prevalent in bureaucratic organizations employing a hierarchical administrative structure. The leader “occupies his position by virtue of approved appropriation, of election, or by having been designated for succession.”<sup>17</sup> The leader appoints or selects other members of the bureaucracy to perform specific duties, receive compensation, be eligible for promotion, and be “subject to strict and systematic discipline and control.”<sup>18</sup> Weber recognizes the technical abilities of an organization’s members continually increase as the members’ experience and training become more important to the organization.

For Weber, the second type of legitimate domination, traditional authority, means obedience based on “the sanctity of the order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past.”<sup>19</sup> Obedience accrues for traditional leaders whose rules are based on historical validity and who require loyalty to themselves. In a traditional organization, the “most important posts [are] filled with members of the ruling family or clan.”<sup>20</sup> Those members have an often-conflicting set of tasks and powers; the individual deciding “a matter or deal[ing] with appeals...[is] treated either traditionally...or on the basis of the master’s discretion in such manner that all agents have to yield to his personal intervention.”<sup>21</sup> Subsets of traditional authority are “gerontocracy, patriarchalism, and patrimonialism.”<sup>22</sup>

Explaining the third type of legitimate domination, charismatic authority, Weber asserts “charisma is the great revolutionary force...[that] may affect a subjective or internal reorientation born out of suffering, conflicts, or enthusiasm.”<sup>23</sup> Charismatic authority is based on “how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples.’”<sup>24</sup> These followers and disciples freely recognize the charismatic leader with “complete personal devotion, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope.”<sup>25</sup> As a contemporary example, some say the last U.S. presidential election saw the defeat of both political parties and a shift to Weber’s charismatic leadership model. The rise and fall of charismatic organizations and institutions depend upon the charismatic leader. Such institutions and organizations often do not long survive the leader unless the charismatic community can transition to either the traditional or legal-bureaucratic structure through the process Weber called “routinization...through traditionalization or legalization.”<sup>26</sup> The success or failure of a charismatic group seems to depend upon its ability to institutionalize, but the process of routinization faces the problem of succession—transition from charismatic to a more traditional or more hierarchical administrative scheme—and the economic issues arising from that transition.<sup>27</sup> For Weber, although authority arising from the charismatic is routinized through the tradition-based transition and established as a legal-hierarchical institution and although some charismatic groups fail to survive routinization or institutional evolution, this social process is still in constant use.

### **Arendt on Vanished Authority and Machiavellian Theory**

Unlike Weber, Hannah Arendt maintains “authority has vanished from the modern world.”<sup>28</sup> A lack of common experience, tradition, and religion facilitated its disappearance. As social institutions and political party systems lose prestige, influence, and the power to inspire constituents to action, shifts toward more authoritarian and more

totalitarian movements increase. Arendt tied tradition, religion, and authority together as binding society. Tradition and religion have become less and less important as consumer societies and popular culture remove and replace Arendt's social bindings. Historical events do not support the liberal assumption that modern societies consistently progress toward freedom rather than toward authoritarianism ultimately becoming totalitarian. On the other hand, Arendt contends the conservative assumption that modern societies are losing authority founded in tradition, religion, and faith in social institutions and a stable economy to be equally questionable. Weber's evolutionary scheme of authority is lost in this era of mass communication and social networking that replace tradition, religion, and society's traditional authority. Authority becomes power through the media's coercive control while only media-based tradition and religion serving an increasingly authoritarian power base survives. The church, a dominant political force beginning in the middle ages, gave over to the secular state. Arendt suggests this change coincides with the thought of "Machiavelli, who stood at the threshold of [the modern] age and, though he never used the word, was the first to conceive of revolution."<sup>29</sup> Machiavelli's acceptance of violence over authority set the stage for subsequent revolutionary thought, for he was

...well-acquainted with...outstanding elements of modern revolutions—with conspiracy and factional strife, with the stirring up of the people to violence, with the turmoil and lawlessness that eventually will throw the whole body politic out of gear, and, last, not least, with the chances which revolutions open to newcomers.<sup>30</sup>

Machiavelli advises a ruler, a person in legal or traditional authority. Revolutions or mass movements, however, require charismatic leaders who can attract followers by the force of their personalities, ideas, or rhetoric. From the time of Spartacus to the present, the role of the charismatic revolutionary brought significant social, cultural, political, economic, and ideological change to societies. Charismatic leaders singularly or in concert are the source of revolutionary forces, sometimes violent, sometimes peaceful or, at least, nonviolent.

Isaiah Berlin also notes Machiavelli's contribution to the question of authority, political science, and empirical application of governmental techniques.<sup>31</sup> For Machiavelli, the prince (leader) should use authority to obtain power and, once gained, use power to create "a good society that enjoys stability, internal harmony, security, justice, a sense of power, and splendor... [b]y developing certain faculties of men, inner moral strength, magnanimity, vigour, vitality, generosity, loyalty, above all public spirit, civic sense, dedication to the security, power, glory, expansion of the *patria*."<sup>32</sup> Condemning behavior that leads to political weakness,

Machiavelli values political skill as the means to improving society's welfare. Berlin says:

Machiavelli is possessed by a clear, intense, narrow vision of a society in which human talents can be made to contribute to a powerful and splendid whole. He prefers the republican rule in which the interests of the rulers do not conflict with those of the ruled.<sup>33</sup>

Berlin summarizes Machiavelli's "wicked pieces of advice" to princes as they relate to authority. Machiavelli suggests, among other things, that the prince or leader: 1) employ terror or kindness as the case dictates; 2) excite fear but not hatred; 3) promote religion though it may be false; 4) confer benefits but let others do the dirty work; 5) do what he or she must but represent it as a favor; and 6) caress or annihilate—appeasement and neutralism are fatal.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, although Machiavelli's advice to the prince seems to differ greatly from Weber's authority model, one need not investigate deeply to realize the prince's or political leaders' and the manager's or business leaders' behaviors can be similar. Given recent events, one might add a contemporary, Trump corollary: always maintain expendable subordinates whose removal may be considered punishment for one's own actions.

### **T. T. Paterson's Concept of Authority**

T. T. Paterson subjects management and administrative behaviors to scientific investigation to develop "a general theory of systems which...[leaders] could apply to management as the subject of the systematic organizing of jobs and [those] who fill them."<sup>35</sup> He constructs his management theory by creating a new method based on creating "simple premises and building up a series of propositions or hypotheses which could be tested against observations."<sup>36</sup> Paterson focuses his application of the scientific method on structural authority while still considering the traditional and charismatic authority Weber conceptualized. Trained in chemistry, biology, and anthropology, and a world-authority on administration, Paterson develops what he calls "methectic theory" including organizational, administrative, general systems, and authority theories. "Methectics," now called, Methexis, "is the study of organization in terms of bestowed and adopted roles."<sup>37</sup> An individual's relative position within the organization and that individual's knowledge and capabilities ultimately determine these roles. For Paterson, "organization can be studied as a problem of role participation...."<sup>38</sup> His concept of authority, the "right to do something," consists of four types: 1) one's position in the organization's, institution's, or enterprise's hierarchy determines one's structural authority; 2) the individual's knowledge, experience, and training gives one sapiential authority; 3) an individual's personality and

personal attributes earn him or her personal authority; and 4) the individual's perception that "his actions are proper, just, fair, and good"<sup>39</sup> constitute his or her moral authority.

Paterson's first type of authority, structural authority, gives the right to command "vested in a position in the enterprise";<sup>40</sup> control over others in their tasks and the right to punish those who fail in their functions. Responsibility to subordinates and accountability to superiors keep those in authority in check. Defined as "the entitlement to be heard by reason of knowledge and experience," Paterson's second type, sapiential authority, is his most important contribution to the investigation of authority.<sup>41</sup> Unlike structural authority, sapiential authority neither originates in organizational structure nor does structural, bureaucratic position limit its influence.<sup>42</sup> Finally, Paterson views his third and fourth types, personal and moral authority, determined less by the hierarchic structure than by the individual's personal qualities. Referring to the Roman, *partum auctoritas*, the individual's personal authority resides in his or her expertise rather than position and is an authority necessary for "the community's survival."<sup>43</sup> Specifically, an individual with personal authority influences not because he or she dominates others but because he or she relates personally and interdependently with others. Personal authority relates to the "compatibility of the personality of the person exercising structural and sapiential authority."<sup>44</sup> The individual whose "personality enhances...structural or sapiential authority"<sup>45</sup> exercises personal authority; the good, just, and fair individual who attempts "to do things which better the enterprise" exercises moral authority.<sup>46</sup>

Paterson's concept of sapiential authority relates closely to authority in education. Schools require educational leaders who exercise more than structural and traditional power but sapiential, personal, and moral authority. In their *History of American Education*, John Pulliam and Jim Van Patten recognize sapiential authority's importance.<sup>47</sup> Their source, India-born, British economist and futurist, Robert Theobald (1929–1999), wrote about technology's and consumerism's impact and the internet's and personal computers' potential.<sup>48</sup> Theobald wrote futurist books and articles from the 1950s to his death in 1999 contributing such ideas as a guaranteed annual income, technology's increasingly important role in society, new conceptions for education, and sapiential authority's importance to economics and sociological studies. Theobald notes the hierarchical, organizational model whose upper ranks dole out rewards and punishments to obtain the desired behavior and production not workable because "Power necessarily corrupts information. The more power people wield, the less their subordinates will tell them what ought

to be known” for fear of reprisal.<sup>49</sup> For Theobald, “concentration of power is counterproductive,”<sup>50</sup> for organizations need “servant leadership,” his term for the “sapiential authority” that “puts the right to make decisions in the hands of those who are most competent.”<sup>51</sup> The idea of servant leadership was well-developed beginning in the 1970s by R. K. Greenleaf and became a management model. L. C. Spears assigns servant leadership ten characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people’s growth, and building community.<sup>52</sup> Theobald observes “servant leadership demands that we commit ourselves to our own growth and that of others. This can only take place when we accept ourselves and our fallibilities. Balancing these two perceptions leads us to the tensions between leadership and followership.”<sup>53</sup> Theobald also observes women typically to be more adept than men at servant leadership.

### **J. Dewey and R. S. Peters: Authority, Democracy, and Education**

For John Dewey, authority, specifically authority’s source, is problematic. Beginning first in religion then in philosophy, traditional authority “arrogated to itself the office of demonstrating the existence of a transcendent, absolute, or inner reality and of revealing to man the nature and features of this ultimate and higher reality.”<sup>54</sup> Dewey deems such reasoning for traditional authority insufficient, for he views philosophy to originate in the “ordinary empirical, relatively real, phenomenal world of everyday experience”<sup>55</sup> and “to clarify men’s ideas as to the social and moral strifes of their own day.”<sup>56</sup> In education, external aims “limit intelligence as intelligence; they are not the expression of mind in foresight, observation, and the choice of the better among alternative possibilities. They limit intelligence because, given ready-made, they must be imposed by some authority external to intelligence.”<sup>57</sup> These external authorities are many. Along with funding education, the state dictates such school particulars as the required number of days in the school year, teachers’ qualifications, curricular requirements, and even specific standards to which teachers teach and on which they test students. This dogmatic control of education divorces learning from the application of intelligence and “throws us back, once more, upon teaching and learning as a mere means of getting ready for an end disconnected from the means.”<sup>58</sup> The means of education for Dewey are experiences, the normal experiences external to the structured instruction and discipline of the routinized process of a fixed curriculum with fixed methods. For Dewey, “Appeal to experience marked the breach with authority. It meant openness to new impressions; eagerness in discovery and invention instead of absorption in tabulating and systematizing received ideas.”<sup>59</sup> Tabulating and

systematizing received ideas establishes such false dichotomies as “work and leisure, knowing and doing, man and nature,” such dualisms as “body and mind, theoretical knowledge and practice, physical mechanism and ideal purpose,”<sup>60</sup> and the “erroneous conception of the relationship between knowledge and social interest, and between individuality or freedom, and social control or authority.”<sup>61</sup>

Authority’s tendency to encroach on freedom “enstating oppression, tyranny, and...regimentation”<sup>62</sup> concerns Dewey. Because authority in the extreme is too restrictive and freedom in its extreme becomes license, Dewey opposes separating authority from freedom. “We need an authority,” he says, “...capable of directing and utilizing change[,] and we need...a kind of individual freedom...that is general and shared and has the backing and guidance of socially organized intelligent control.”<sup>63</sup> Against his conception of authority’s and freedom’s interpenetration is economic forces’ power, especially its movement toward a collective, planned economy—fascist, socialist, or Bolshevik—that gained power even while Dewey was writing against such power in 1936. To combat this movement toward the authoritarian, the totalitarian is the growth of authorized intelligence “exemplified by...scientific advance...releasing not by suppressing the elements of variation, of invention, and innovation, of novel creation.”<sup>64</sup>

Authority is exercised in society’s interests or exercised in any group’s interest within that society; the primary source of control is the control included in the task at-hand.<sup>65</sup> Education includes the formation of respect and manners and of “attitudes and habits” that enhance “future learning that springs from easy, ready contact and communication with others,”<sup>66</sup> contact and communication based on a free environment.<sup>67</sup> Such an education requires the view of “teaching and learning as a continuous process of reconstruction of experience.”<sup>68</sup> Dewey recognizes the necessity for authority but requires experience to be its source, science its means, and community or social, not personal, interests its instructor.<sup>69</sup>

The English philosopher of education R. S. Peters was also interested in authority’s role in schooling. Authority, he says, is “one way of bringing about conformity.”<sup>70</sup> For Peters, “modern science has put into our hands instruments for the exercise of power...[that] can be used to reinforce authority over a centralized sort, or they can be used to disrupt it.”<sup>71</sup> Authority regulates behavior without recourse to force, propaganda, and threats.

Authority thus presupposes some sort of normative order...properly used in those situations in which decisions about what is correct or incorrect are reached by appealing to

some source or ‘*auctor*,’ or where certain people are thought to have peculiar insight into what is correct or true.<sup>72</sup>

An *auctor* might be a person in a position of authority (structural) and/or be a person with expertise (sapiential). The teacher is positioned as *auctor*. He or she serves “to initiate others into what is regarded as worthwhile in itself. On the other hand [he or she] is also appointed to train people for some occupation and to act as an agent of selection in the competition for jobs and for higher education.”<sup>73</sup> Peters found himself agreeing with Dewey about the “need for first-hand experience to supplement precept and instruction”<sup>74</sup> and with Dewey’s emphasis on “passing on the inquisitive, skeptical, pragmatic attitude of mind.”<sup>75</sup> The ultimate source of authority is being continually reconstructed. The “fundamental task lies in training in the more *general* attitudes of mind of which the democratic way of life is a particular application.”<sup>76</sup> The basis of such training originates with the experiences of individuals in society and within the social institution, the school.

### **Concluding Summary**

I have focused on the historical and philosophical foundations of authority and authority in education to demonstrate their proper use: facilitating a compassionate, open-minded society. Ancient civilizations used authority in their social and governmental structures; early religious groups recognized authority’s role in their organizations; and Machiavelli suggests ways rulers and leaders might use authority to gain power, efficiency, and success if not necessarily to achieve good. Max Weber’s research into types of authority establish the framework for investigating authority and education. Paterson uses Weber’s work as a jumping-off point to suggest studying sapiential authority within educational leadership, and Robert Theobald develops that idea into the concept of servant leadership. In leadership, authority does not coerce, does not force, and does not hector or bully, for these are activities of corruptible and corrupting power. Hannah Arendt contends losing authority results in losing home, religion, and school as important, traditional authorities while more and more authoritarian and totalitarian political movements replace them to assume political, economic, social, educational, and sometimes religious control. For Dewey, educational authority means developing society’s young and should relate to everyday experiences in the community, schools, and society. Peters focuses on authority’s role and use in a democratic society because, for him, authority founds the attitudes of mind necessary to democratic life based on respect and tolerance.

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