

What Authority?

Robert Tilden May 29, 2016

Authority is the capacity, innate or acquired, for exercising ascendancy over a group. It is a manifestation of power and implies obedience on the part of those subject to it.

An analogy may be helpful to put all these concepts in place. The leader is a driver or a car; a manual transmission car. Before you go anywhere you check the fuel gauge, good the authority gage isn't on empty. Just like the fuel, the authority exists of the car being on and using fuel. so even if you have authority (fuel) you're not always utilizing it, good leaders; after all, spend a good amount of time taking in information. Now I drive an automatic transmission so I'm no authority on this but, as you drive around and, especially with changing conditions you're constantly changing gears from lower gears to higher gears and back to lower gears. The low gears give you more power. The higher gears give you more speed and efficiency. You're using your authority (the fuel) in two modes: power (low gears) and persuasion (the high gears). Maybe you're arguments or orders are the equivalent of turning of the wheel left or right. I haven't quite worked out what the reverse means in this analogy but the analogy works in that a functional car needs both gears, and fuel. Also, most people would not enjoy driving let alone being driven in a car that's in first gear for hours on end.

So, to sum up, I claim that Authority is the fuel of leadership. It enables leadership. It is how leadership is measured.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said: **Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.** The reason this quote is worth paying attention to I think, is that Eisenhower successfully lead a multi-national force over the largest beach landing in history. On the surface, you may think that he had brute force authority over his subordinates but historians have, I think, conclusively shown that indeed he was chosen for the job not for his tactical or strategical thinking but because of his ability to form consensus. He led whole bunch of primadonnas who were not used to yielding to others. He did so with abundant authority, patience, power and persuasion.

Every social structure has built into it individuals who take on the authoritative part, be it parents over minor children in a family, officers over enlisted men in a military formation, clergy over laity in a religious order. Ultimately, each one of these social structures yields authority to a higher structure until we reach an ultimate over-all-reaching structure which enjoys ultimate authority, this is called Sovereignty.

Sovereignty in turn is associated with God, Kings and Queens, or the State. This talk will focus therefore on Kings, Queens, heads of states, as ultimate sovereigns. I will shy away from

dealing with the sovereignty of God since our denomination does not forcefully adhere to that premise.

Philosophers differ about the source of authority, Locke claims it is found in natural law that is in each individual who willingly gives some of it up to a higher social order when individuals decide to function as a society. This is why the American Constitution opens with 'We the People'. Many other philosophers including Hobbes and Kant have authority coming from the top to bottom. That is the authority originates in God, The State or the King, is then delegated, (for example through divine right from God to King) and from there down the chain of command to 'we the people'.

Max Weber, considered to be one of the fathers of sociology claimed there are three types of 'legitimate authority': legal authority, traditional authority and charismatic authority

Legal Authority: authority based on rules, leaders also fall under these rules. The authority is legitimate because it stems from the rules that are agreed upon. Sometimes referred to as rational-legal authority, it is embodied in formal bureaucracy, the rule of law, the appeal to efficiency, and the rational fit between means and intended goals.

Traditional Authority: authority based on precedent, the authority is typically inherited. Traditional authority, which includes patrimonial, feudal, and monarchical-bureaucratic regimes, has held sway over a large part of human history and of the earth's surface. "As the ancients taught us," "As our originating sacred document declares," "As the founding fathers saw" are typical motifs that appeal within traditional authority systems.

Charismatic Authority: authority based on the charisma of the leader. The charismatic leader breaks with tradition: "You heard it said of old, but I say unto you." From the vantage point of the beliefs of the charismatic leader and his or her followers, charismatic authority does not derive from the consent of the governed. The charismatic leader's unusual gifts or direct conduit to God are seen as compelling and self-justifying. In that sense charismatic authority is non-rational.

Most always authority is a combination of these three types. Weber assumes though that any one given situation is dominated by one of the three.

An example of legal authority is the traffic stop. I may have never have met any particular patrolman before, but the lights, the uniform, the badge, the consequences of not respecting his authority force me to stop the car, give him what he asks for. I know more or less what to

expect and there are some things I would not comply with, those things which he may do that would be beyond his legal authority.

An example of a charismatic and traditional authority combination: The Papal visit of John Paul II to Poland in 1979. The pope had no legal authority but, in this Catholic country he had plenty of traditional authority and he was also quite charismatic. This visit is considered a turning point in history.

Finally examples of leadership that are based purely on Charisma include William Wallace as depicted by Mel Gibson in 'Braveheart' or Spartacus in the form of Kirk Douglas.

I haven't seen this anywhere in preparing for this presentation but I am inclined to say that Legal and Traditional Authorities share a sense of passive conservatism, while the charismatic authority is able to produce a more active response from those who are under its influence. So, an authoritative figure of any kind would have to dig into the 'charismatic toolbox' in order to lead people in the flesh to achieve great feats. I already stated that any real example of authority is a combination of the three types but let's say that the purely Legal or Traditional authority types of presidents tend to be the Van Burens and the Chester Aurthurs while those who are more consequential almost have to be charismatic as well.

A few weeks ago I examined David's evolution with respect to cultural barriers. As David is probably a historic figure and his character is perhaps the most well developed in the entire Bible, spanning multiple books and genres, I thought it might be interesting to follow his sources of authority, as they are presented in the Bible.

First his Legal Authority: I Sam 16: He is anointed by Samuel who is told directly from God to pass over Jesse's other seven sons. Delegation of authority through the concept of 'Divine Rule' par excellence from God to David.

Second his Charismatic Authority, by defeating Goliath he had catapulted into the A-celebrity list of Israel. His actions and his looks were in fact so charismatic that Saul feels threatened by David, this being almost an admission by Saul that David is a 'born leader'.

Finally, Traditional Authority: II Sam 5:³ **When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.** The elders here are tradition incarnated. So we see how the narrator has effectively crowned David three times each time under the influence of a different form of authority.

I'm now going to present what leaders, real or fictional have said just before or as they are about to assume leadership, attempting to justify their authority.

Charisma

May 13, 1940 Churchill's Speech to the House of Commons three days after becoming the Prime Minister: "I would say to the House, as I said to those who have joined this government: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat."

"But I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, "come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."

A second example is from Shakespeare's 2 Henry VI Act 4 Scene 2:

Jack Cade is a low-born leader of a 15th century uprising, speaking to a crowd of his followers.

Be brave, then; for your captain is brave, and vows reformation. There shall be in England seven halfpenny loaves sold for a penny: the three-hooped pot; shall have ten hoops and I will make it felony to drink small beer: all the realm shall be in common; and in Cheapside shall my palfrey go to grass: and when I am king, as king I will be,--

Here his acolytes interrupt him

ALL: God save your majesty!

I thank you, good people: there shall be no money; all shall eat and drink on my score; and I will apparel them all in one livery, that they may agree like brothers and worship me their lord.

The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

Traditional Authority:

Let's stay in Tudor England, Queen Elizabeth I upon hearing she was to ascend to the throne

This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. (Psalm 118:23)

Of course this was said in Latin as the official translation had not been made yet. It is appropriate as it is already in the royal plural. It is also interesting if we consider the line before it:

The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

She didn't mention the rejection part.

Elizabeth the first was such a vaunt of traditional authority quotes I had to include a few more:

He who placed me in this seat will keep me here.

It is monstrous that the feet should direct the head.

A second example of a fresh ruler invoking traditional authority,

I Kings 10:14:

The Israelites ask King Rehoboam for a tax cut following the death of King Solomon. Rehoboam consults the old advisers and his own young friends. He follows the advice of the latter.

'My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.'

The Kings authority is clearly his because he is his father's son.

Legal Authority

I will now weave the words of Jefferson Davis (gray flag) and Abraham Lincoln (blue flag) both from their inaugural addresses given two weeks apart in February and March, 1861. I'm just going to point out that Davis invokes traditional authority as well as the legal authority, Lincoln relays entirely on legal authority.

Jefferson Davis's first inaugural February 18, 1861

Lincoln's first inaugural, March 4, 1861

Our present condition, achieved in a manner unprecedented in the history of nations, illustrates the American idea that governments rest upon the consent of the governed, and that it is the right of the people to alter or abolish governments whenever they become destructive of the ends for which they were established.

I hold that in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments.

We have changed the constituent parts, but not the system of our Government. The Constitution formed by our fathers is that of these Confederate States, in their exposition of it, and in the judicial construction it has received, we have a light which reveals its true meaning.

It follows from these views that no State upon its own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union; that resolves and ordinances to that effect are legally void, and that acts of violence within any State or States against the authority of the United States are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances.

The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.

Now you know why no one ever quotes Lincoln's First Inaugural Address. This from a man who is able to keep it short and sweet, who gave us the Second Inaugural and the Gettysburg Address?

So Max Weber had three sources of Legitimate Authority. If you will recall the car analogy I made earlier, where authority was the power source. In the words of Lord Acton: "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

Authority is a manifestation of power, it therefore has a tendency to morph into illegitimate authority.

I would like to now introduce you to Robert Tilden's source of Illegitimate Authority. Actually I shouldn't take credit for this myself. I was taught these by Mrs. Schotz in the 10th grade. I consider her class to be the most important of all my formal education.

To depend upon a tall tree.

This is a translation from the Hebrew. In English we may say: 'we stand on the shoulders of giants'. So, you take a well-respected figure to the audience you are targeting and say for example:

"Our republican system was meant for a homogeneous people. As long as blacks continue to live with the whites they constitute a threat to the national life." Abraham Lincoln.

I am implying 'who are you to argue with Abraham Lincoln? Even though the argument is not legitimate I am using Lincoln's prestige to assume authority on an issue. Just because Lincoln said it doesn't make it so.

I like to quote and indeed today's talk is full of attributed quotes but I am not resting my argument on who is being quoted. Except for the first one, the Eisenhower quote.

In preparing for this talk I wanted to find out where the term hanging from a tall tree came from and I found it:

(Talmud Psachim 112a)

A student came to one of the most renowned rabbis who was incarcerated in a Roman prison demanding to learn, the rabbi told him "If you wish to be hanged be hanged from a tall tree"

The origin of the saying was a warning not a recommendation. Indeed it may be suicidal to rely on experts without thinking through the argument for yourself. Standing on the shoulders of giants exposes you to great dangers and you should always inspect the footing of your arguments for yourself.

I have just now been elected president of this congregation. I don't have any really good quotes to share with you about how humbled I am . At this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, "come then, let us go forward together with our united strength."

Thank you