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Authority relationships between obedience and disobedience

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ABSTRACT

Recent episodes of public dissent (such as the demonstrations against G8 policies) raise the issue of the psychological processes triggered in obeying and disobeying the authority. Even if obedience to authority is an important aspect of social life and it plays a key role in maintaining social order, the concept of obedience has been studied in social psychology mainly in terms of its destructive aspects. Besides, most of the studies have overlooked the role of disobedience in the authority relationship. Disobedience may be conceived of as a protest that undermines the legitimacy of the authority or it can represent an instrument for controlling the legitimacy of the authority's demands, becoming a factor protecting against authoritarianism. In this article, a new perspective on the study of the relationship between the individual and the authority is put forward, considering obedience and disobedience as parallel concepts, each having constructive and destructive aspects.

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Recent episodes of public dissent, such as demonstrations against the G8 policy over the last 10 years and the 2005 riots in the Paris suburbs, have staked their claim to a more profound focus on the meaning of disobedience within democratic systems. Are these acts of disobedience a form of non-institutionalized political action or some form of social deviance? Indeed, on the one hand, such disobedient actions are the expression of dissent arising from citizens, who want to be part of the decision-making process concerning global issues. On the other, protests often turn into urban guerrilla warfare causing damage to people and objects that are difficult to curtail.

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From a social-psychological standpoint, these phenomena raise relevant questions concerning the psychological processes set off in obeying and disobeying the authority, and on the role that disobedience has in the relationship between individuals and society.

In Section 1 of this article, the main psychological studies on obedience to authority are discussed. Then, in the following sections, a new perspective on the study of the relationship between the individual and the authority is suggested, considering obedience and disobedience as parallel – rather than complementary – concepts, each of which having constructive and destructive aspects. Finally, some implications for theoretical developments on this issue are considered.

1. Obedience to authority

The concept of authority has pivotal importance within the social sciences, being a fundamental element in the organization of social life. Although this concept is pervasive to many aspects of everyday life, in this article we will take into account those aspects regarding the regulation of social life in the context of social groups, in terms of social control and social change. From a social-psychological perspective, the use of authority is one form of social influence (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Levine & Pavelchak, 1984; Martin & Hewstone, 2003), which serves the purpose of either maintaining group norms (social control) or changing group norms (social change). Thus, every type of collective life is based on a system of authority, which can be more or less institutionalized or hierarchicalized. Some levels of responsibility and obedience to authority are essential for the existence of every social community (Cialdini, 1993; Milgram, 1974; Modigliani & Rochat, 1995). Yet history teaches us that people can commit illegal or immoral acts in response to orders imparted by authority (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Hamilton & Sanders, 1999). In other words, “under orders from an authority, it appears that many normal people respond with obedience, despite their own scruples and discomfort about actions that they and others would usually regard as illegal, immoral, and even unthinkable” (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989, p. 23). It is important to observe that orders may either be explicit or implicit. For instance, Nazi leaders usually did not issue specific orders to subordinates and it was indeed this absence of orders that made the Nazi movement so dynamic (Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Kershaw, 1993; Latané, 1981; Rees, 1997).

For that reason, since Reich’s studies on authoritarianism (Reich, 1933), social psychology has studied obedience phenomena as a danger for the human being. Classical works on obedience have concentrated either on a contextual level (Bauman, 1989; Browning, 1992; Milgram, 1974) or on a personality level (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levenson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1981, 1988). Attention has mainly been addressed to the processes of disengagement that are enacted in order to avoid feelings of accountability for the actions one may commit in response to the demands of an authority.

Although the dual nature of obedience (i.e. constructive and destructive) has been evident since the earliest studies on this subject (Fromm, 1963; Milgram, 1965), the exclusive study of a connection between obedience and crimes of obedience has, over the years, produced a distorted epistemological assumption. In fact, on the one hand, psychology risks legitimising uncritical obedience (Baumeister, 1997; Darley, 1992; Miller, Gordon, & Buddie, 1999). On the other, framing the authority relationship only within its darker side provides a restricted explanation of the phenomenon. It is worthwhile recalling that social psychology produces explanations for social phenomena that are commonly adopted by a number of other social disciplines. This requires social psychology to assume the responsibility for the explanations that it produces. A number of political studies use the concept of obedience exclusively in its destructive connotation, mainly referring to the outputs of the Milgram’s studies. For instance, Dalton and Ong (2005) and Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have stressed a negative correlation between the attribution of importance to obedience and democratic values. That is, obedience is more linked to an authoritarian orientation and moves away from democracy. Their analysis evidenced that there is a general negative correlation between obedience to authority and support for democratic regimes. Although we do not disagree with their analysis, we think the multidimensional conceptualization of obedience could lead to a more accurate picture of the authority relationship. Indeed, blind obedience, harmful obedience or, as we would rather call it, ‘destructive obedience’ is just one of the many facets of the relationship subsisting between the individual and authority. As has already been

said, obedience is an important aspect of social life and it plays a key role in maintaining social order and stability.

Moreover, it is important to analyze both constructive and destructive obedience as being related to personal agency and choice of subordinates. As [Kelman and Hamilton \(1989\)](#) pointed out, in all crimes of obedience, “the motives and nature of the actions make it difficult to conceive of the defendants as reluctant participants in crime who were merely following orders because they saw themselves as having no other choice” ([Kelman & Hamilton, 1989](#), p. 49). Obedience is linked to an explicit or implicit order of an authority, which may serve to justify actions corresponding to the subordinates’ own preferences and which they promptly identify with. Thus, we assume that obedience is never blind, although it may be destructive. In this sense, following [Haslam and Reicher’s \(2007\)](#) and [Reicher and Haslam’s \(2006\)](#) analyses, the *banality of evil* ([Arendt, 1964](#)) is not supporting the idea that ordinary people commit atrocities without awareness or choice. Rather, destructive obedience is perpetuated by people acting thoughtfully and with conviction. For all those reasons, it is worthwhile distinguishing between the destructive and the constructive aspects of obedience.

2. Constructive and destructive obedience

According to [Milgram \(1974\)](#), the socialization processes of obedience are highly significant. Since early childhood, we have learned to *value* obedience, even if what ensues in its name can at times be unpleasant, and to *trust* the legitimacy of the authorities, even if abuse of this trust may occur occasionally ([Miller, Collins, & Brief, 1995](#)). The issue of legitimacy may help us to distinguish what results in constructive and what results in destructive obedience.

As [Kelman and Hamilton \(1989\)](#) have pointed out, the use of authority should be understood as a specific form of social influence, which they call *legitimate influence*. It is based on the attribution of legitimacy to a person, who is then in the position to exert influence. This influence is perceived of as being legitimate by virtue of the different status enjoyed by whoever exerts it, and everyone expects each member of the group will abide by the authority’s rules and demands ([Kelman, 2001](#); [Tyler, 1997](#)). The members of the group obey the authority to the extent that they perceive its legitimacy. According to [Kelman \(2001\)](#), and [Kelman and Hamilton \(1989\)](#), this attribution of legitimacy is processed at three different levels: (i) the legitimacy of the *system* where the authority relationship takes place; (ii) the legitimacy of the *authority* itself and the forms it assumes (i.e. bureaucratic authority, institutional authority; professional authority, etc.); (iii) the legitimacy of the *demands* that the authority issues to the members of the group. The influence that the authority has on the subordinates depends on the legitimacy of each of these three levels.

When influence is totally perceived of as being legitimate, people give the authority the right to make demands and to regulate the behaviour of its underlings. In this way, the authority relationship is a ‘voluntary’ (in the sense of not necessarily coercive) submission to a collective and common will which any member of the group is asked to respond to ([Tyler & Degoey, 1995](#)). Many scholars ([Hoffman, 2005](#); [Paternoster, Brame, Bachman, & Sherman and, 1997](#); [Shestowsky, 2004](#); [Tyler, 2006](#); [Tyler & Huo, 2002](#)) have shown that people are more willing to submit to the orders of the authority (such as judgments, punishments and sanctions) when they perceive that those decisions are made by the authority on the grounds of principles of justice and equity. In other words, they are more willing to obey if they perceive the legitimacy of the request. [Turner \(2005\)](#) highlights that the legitimacy of the authority largely depends on the identification with ingroup norms, goals and values. That is to say, authority is based on social norms and is not a top-down dependence process, where the subordinates are passively influenced by the leader. Indeed, legitimacy is negotiated between group members and it depends on the specific context and group. This approach allows us to contextualize the authority relationship, taking into consideration the ideologies and goals of group, the social comparative context, the history of the group, and the degree of prototypicality of authority ([Turner, 2005](#)). However, it still does not explain why, in the same group situation, some members obey while others fail to do so.

[Kelman \(2006\)](#) proposes an interesting interactionist model that considers both contextual and inter-individual differences, focusing on the relationship between the individual and the authority. He highlights that the principal function played by the authority, thanks to its influence, concerns the modification of individual behaviour, enforcing respect for social rules or obedience of the

authority's demands. In order to induce a certain kind of behaviour, authority systems use different processes and instruments of influence. First of all, rules and laws defining obedience and disobedience are established and a system of sanctions is provided. Secondly, the role of each member is regulated by means of the establishment of a symbolic system. Lastly, group values justifying the demands of the authority are listed. As a consequence, people feel obliged at different levels to behave as demanded by the authority, depending on what they base the authority relationship on: i.e. *rules, roles* or *values*. The authority relationship will be different if people base it on the compliance with rules and the fear of punishments, if they establish it on the identification with the authority's behavioural proposal, or if they set it up on common and internalized values. Both rule- and role-oriented citizens see obedience as following rules and the authority's demands irrespective of their legitimacy. Instead, value-oriented citizens are committed to the authority because they share the values on which they believe the authority to be founded. They obey the authority's demands, but they only support the policies that are in keeping with what they see as the society's fundamental values. That is, they oppose policies that violate these values.

Thus, when a legitimate authority issues a legitimate and acceptable demand, all three types of citizens are inclined to obey. On the other hand, when an apparently legitimate authority issues a seemingly illegitimate request, value-oriented citizens are more likely to oppose the authority in respect to that demand.

It is worth underlining that [Kelman and Hamilton \(1989\)](#) stress how it is more appropriate to evaluate the legitimacy of the request rather than the legitimacy of the authority, because in this case it is only the demand that is to be questioned and this does not threaten the whole authority relationship. In this sense, constructive obedience means disobeying an illegitimate request. People disobey the authority's request and obey common values released from the specific situation. Thus, obedience and disobedience are not in contrast with each other but are simultaneously present and refer to different facets of the authority relationship. Disobedience should be referred to the demand or to the authority; obedience to the authority relationship and to values. This kind of obedience avoids becoming destructive by being always critical, while this kind of disobedience does not threaten the authority relationship but actually improves it.

Thus, if destructive obedience is usually conceived of as a displacement of responsibility from the person to the authority – so that the person does not evaluate the legitimacy of the authority's request because he/she places his/her trust in the authority's legitimacy – we can consider constructive obedience as a self-account of responsibility. The person evaluates the legitimacy of the demand and takes on the responsibility of his/her decision to obey or disobey it.

Furthermore, it is worth assuming an interactionist stance on the issue of the individual-authority relationship. [Haslam and Reicher \(2007\)](#) have criticized the classical view of crimes of obedience as acts made by "amoral automatons". They show that people commit atrocities acting thoughtfully, creatively and with conviction. These people do not lose their individuality but behave in accordance with their community's values. However, as [Marková \(1997\)](#) pointed out, when we refer to community, what is it we think of? Who is included and who is excluded from the community? Going back to the three citizens' orientations, if rule- and role-oriented citizens tend to adhere to a restricted view of the community – by which they act only according to their own group's values in opposition to another's – value-oriented citizens tend to abide by a more inclusive view, considering "community" in a broad and extensive sense. Thus, we can identify two points that distinguish constructive and destructive obedience: (i) the awareness and the self-account of responsibility for the ordered action; (ii) the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the advantages of the ordered action. Indeed, destructive obedience presupposes that the identification with the authority prevails over the evidence of the legitimacy of the authority's demands and that the consequences of the action provides advantages only to a restricted community. We should note that the concept of community is contextually defined. According to the self-categorization theory ([Turner, 1985](#); [Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987](#)), it is important to consider how people represent themselves and others and how these representations influence their relationships with authority. For instance, as [Reicher, Haslam, and Hopkins \(2005\)](#) pointed out, obedience may be a function of how people and groups are defined by leaders who are 'entrepreneurs of identity'.

In short, the issue of obedience also concerns the role of disobedience. Disobedience may be conceived of as a protest undermining the authority's legitimacy. Alternatively, it may represent an

instrument for controlling the legitimacy of the authority's demands, becoming a protective factor against authoritarianism and the loss of democracy (Passini & Morselli, 2007). Indeed, if some studies have highlighted that protests and disobedience *vis-à-vis* institutionalized authorities may represent a threat to a country's democratic governance (Crozier, Huntington, & Wazanuki, 1975), recent studies have encouraged a more positive interpretation, considering protest as a constitutive concept of democracy itself (Inglehart & Abramson, 1999; Norris, 2002; van Sickle & Dalton, 2004).

3. The role of disobedience

From the many instances of obedience *vis-à-vis* unjust and destructive authorities (from the experiences of Nazi Germany but also Milgram's laboratory), it can be argued that individuals differ in their reactions to these situations. Although many people obeyed, thereby disengaging from their personal responsibilities, many other men and women risked their lives by defying authority. According to Kelman and Hamilton (1989), disobedience plays a significant role in avoiding crimes of obedience. In their opinion, it becomes relevant to strengthen norms that prescribe disobedience when people deal with orders and demands that they deem to be illegitimate, mainly on the grounds of a moral judgement. In that sense, disobedience becomes not just a right of the citizen that a democratic system should provide but also a duty of citizenship. Thus, disobedience promotes social change (Moscovici, 1976; Nemeth, 2003) and helps to prevent the degeneration of authority by controlling the legitimacy of its demands.

For these reasons, obedience and disobedience are not mirror opposites of each other, but they should be inserted within a multidimensional framework that could better account for the complexity of this phenomenon. Indeed, Fromm (1963) had already underlined the importance of considering the authority relationship within the constructive and destructive aspects of both obedience and disobedience; yet very few empirical studies have addressed this (Billig, 1976; Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Passini & Morselli, 2005, 2007).

On a theoretical level, Fromm applied and developed Piaget's definition of heteronomous and autonomous orientations (Piaget, 1932). In Piaget's theory, moral development is expressed as a movement from anomy (i.e. non-regulation by others or the self) to heteronomy (i.e. regulation by others) to autonomy (i.e. self-regulation). The heteronomous morality is a morality of obedience. In other words, the individual does not regulate his or her behaviour on the instance of personal convictions. In contrast, the morally autonomous individual follows moral rules that are self-constructed, self-regulating principles. As is well known, Piaget's theory of moral development has been expanded upon by Kohlberg, who reinforced the idea that heteronomy and autonomy were placed within a hierarchical system, where heteronomy represents a lower moral development level than autonomy (Kohlberg, 1969). Although Kohlberg's approach became the mainstream theory on moral development, in those years Fromm (1963) suggested that heteronomy and autonomy were not distributed on a hierarchical scale. One person can obey contemporaneously in both a heteronomous way an external authority and his own conscience autonomously. As a matter of fact, this approach fits Piaget's (1932) original theory, according to which a person can manifest a heteronomous orientation within a hierarchical context and an autonomous orientation in a situation of peer-cooperation (Carpendale, 2000). In recent years, Leman and Duveen (1999) have empirically studied this co-presence of heteronomous and autonomous moral reasoning in 10-year old children. By analyzing the orientation of children to different types of authority (*epistemic* and *status*), the authors have found that children could switch from heteronomy to autonomy in response to the kind of authority they are relating. This is a disconfirmation of Kohlberg's hypothesis of pervasive and one-dimensional moral orientations.

Thus, disobedience may be linked to precise moral issues and may be brought back to what Modigliani and Rochat (1995) had called the *ordinary quality of goodness* in opposition to Arendt's *banality of evil*. As they put it, "the chances that evil will be perpetrated are increased when it is rendered banal, but goodness does not disappear in the process of making evil commonplace" (Rochat & Modigliani, 1995, p. 198). Besides, their "conception of the ordinariness is not intended to imply that goodness is commonplace so that it will be readily observable in encounters between authorities and

subordinates. Rather, it is meant to suggest that goodness (...) can be expressed in quite ordinary ways that are mere extension of common civility or basic decency” (Rochat & Modigliani, 1995, p. 206).

Kelman and Hamilton (1989) and Kelman (2006) have accounted for disobedient behaviour as a condition of autonomy acquired by the individual and as the consequence of perceiving alternatives to the dominant social context. When the *status quo* is not accepted as the sole interpretation of reality, the legitimacy of the authority’s demands is constantly questioned. This means that, in case of harmful demands, individuals can recognize their illegitimacy and disobey them. Moreover, the exposure to multiple viewpoints suggests that disobedience ought not to be considered an individual “heroic” act. From an intergroup perspective, disobedience has to be analyzed as a social movement actively created through arguments (Reicher, Cassidy, Wolpert, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006), based on the sharing of different values to those of the *status quo*.

However, having stressed above the dichotomous aspect of obedience, it now ought to be argued that disobedience has a destructive side, too. In some cases, disobeying authority can develop into a more authoritarian system. For instance, an authoritarian *coup d’etat* could be considered a disobedient act. In addition, there are non-political forms of disobedience, such as social deviance, that cannot be unconditionally considered constructive. What are, then, the distinguishing aspects of constructive and destructive disobedience? And, above all, is it possible and useful to define a psychological threshold between them?

4. Pro-social and anti-social disobedience

In order to understand the characteristics of constructive disobedience, we have analyzed the autobiographic narratives of Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi, as three men who are recognized for their civil disobedience (Passini & Morselli, 2005). Although they cannot be considered to be representative of disobedience in general, they were leaders of important disobedience movements for the extension of rights in the past century. Consistent with Modigliani and Rochat (1995), our findings suggest that the capability to disobey and withstand the demands and persecution of authority is not a personal characteristic of the individual, but a social construct made from shared meanings and social relations. In other words, Gandhi, Mandela and King are not to be considered heroes, but *common people* who, given their life experiences and their social and situational context, could elaborate alternatives to the *status quo*, questioning the authority’s legitimacy, disobeying its demands and withstanding its persecution. As we have already seen, according to Kelman and Hamilton’s theory, an autonomous and alternative view of reality is the most important step towards developing a critical view of authority’s demands and eventually fostering disobedience. This conception is close to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in which the awareness of cognitive alternatives to the *status quo* is an important issue in supporting resistance to domination when people consider inequality as both illegitimate and unstable (Reicher & Haslam, 2006). Gandhi, Mandela and King’s critical stances developed from the interaction of their moral development with the exploration of the alternatives experienced in adolescence. School studies, interaction with significant adults and peers drove the subjects, during adolescence, to a progressively greater awareness of alternatives to the *status quo* and different and unexplored behavioural styles.

Moreover, it is important to underline that the awareness of alternatives to the *status quo* is necessary but not sufficient. In order to foster social change, oriented towards social equality, the disobedient person should take on a socially-oriented responsibility and should include the whole social structure (including outgroups) within the scope of his/her action. Thus, constructive disobedience is characterized by both a sense of responsibility towards others and attitudes of moral inclusion. Moral inclusion is the counterpart to moral exclusion, that is, excluding other individuals or groups from one’s own “moral community” (Staub, 1989). In other words, viewing others as lying beyond the boundary within which moral values and rules of justice and fairness apply. This captures the dynamics underlying destructive conflicts, whereas moral inclusion captures the dynamics of peace-building in its emphasis on equality, justice and a concern for universal wellbeing (Opatow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005).

Thus, moral inclusion and social responsibility contribute to distinguish between what we can define as anti-social (destructive) and pro-social (constructive) disobedience. Disobedience becomes pro-social when it is enacted for the sake of the whole society, including all its different levels and

groups. Pro-social disobedience promotes social change addressed to everyone. On the contrary, anti-social disobedience is enacted mainly in favor of one's own group, in order to attain individual rights. We have defined this disobedience as *anti-social* to stress that, although it may promote a certain social change, it is not directed to society at large and it preserves or reproduces social inequality (Merton, 1968). For instance, if we think about African American civil rights movements of the 1950s, one may say that these activists were probably perceived as antisocial by the majority of the members of their immediate community. On the other hand, the vigilantes and racist lynch-mobs of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) thought of themselves as pro-social, acting in order to achieve a better society. However, if we think in terms of moral inclusion/exclusion, what really differentiates actions of the two groups was that in the case of KKK the social change was addressed to advantage the whites over the blacks. Instead, in the case of Civil Rights movement, actions were neither conducted against other people's rights nor intended to create an intergroup conflict. Their actions were targeted to extend some rights to all groups of the American society. Their acts were not made for one's own group, but for all the groups. In that sense, they are to be defined as pro-social, whereas the KKK were anti-social, giving privileges to their own group as opposed to the others.

Social psychology may prove useful in tracing a distinction between anti- and pro-social disobedience, highlighting the differences between underlying psychological processes. The moral disengagement theory of Bandura (1990, 1999) stresses, for instance, how deviant people adopt processes of exclusion in order to disengage from moral rules and to have a positive perception of their own behaviour. On the contrary, studies on pro-social disobedience (Passini & Morselli, 2005) underline that people who disobey the authority in order to promote democratic social change include others, instead of excluding them. From the social theory perspective (Turner et al., 1987), we may say that people enacting pro-social disobedience use processes of inclusive self-categorization (Reicher et al., 2006), whereas people enacting anti-social disobedience categorize the others as outgroups set apart from themselves.

Yet philosophical works by Arendt (1973) and Fromm (1963) stressed that pro-social disobedience differs from anti-social disobedience in relating to the authority. Anti-social disobedience tends to reject the authority relationship and obedience to authority. Instead, pro-social disobedience recognize the importance of obeying for the functioning of society whilst, at the same time, recognizing the limits of authority and their demands (Passini & Morselli, 2007). In other words, people enacting pro-social disobedience do not consider obeying the authority as negative at all; they disobey within particular contexts and the authority's requests that are not considered democratic and egalitarian. Thus, people enacting anti-social disobedience try to elude sanctions, whereas people enacting pro-social disobedience accept them as part of the protest process. Indeed, disobedience that simply undercuts the authority's legitimacy would only achieve anarchy and social chaos; obedience to authority is far too pivotal to our way of life (Modigliani & Rochat, 1995). Table 1 summarizes the differences between anti- and pro-social disobedience.

To sum up, the dynamic relationship between obedience and disobedience may also provide some clarification as to the movements of public dissent. Anti-social disobedience is more likely to involve advocating for one's own group in achieving specific and restricted rights and encouraging policies that do not erase inequality, but change the distribution of inequality. Indeed, claiming individual rights against other groups' rights may preserve or enhance intergroup conflict, without solving it. On the contrary, pro-social disobedience promotes a social change addressed to society as a whole.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the study of destructive obedience has to be integrated with the analysis of both constructive and destructive aspects of obedience and disobedience to authority. Many theoretical implications could stem from considering the dynamic aspects of the relationship between obedience and disobedience.

First of all, it may provide a contribution to the development of the study of authoritarianism. In recent theories, authoritarianism has been conceptualized in terms of the identification individuals develop toward their social groups (Duckitt, 2001) and in terms of preference for social conformity over individual autonomy (Feldman, 2003). In line with Kelman and Hamilton (1989) and Tyler

Table 1
Characteristics of anti- and pro-social disobedience

	Anti-Social Disobedience	Pro-Social Disobedience
Representations of authorities	General refusal	Acceptance of their limits
Representations of obedience to authorities	General refusal	Acceptance of the importance of obedience
Rules and sanctions	Not following rules in general and trying to elude sanctions	Not following illegitimate rules and illegitimate orders, but acceptance of responsibility for one's own actions (in terms of sanctions)
Moral boundaries	Overriding the moral boundaries without proposals for changing them	Broadening of moral boundaries
Conditions for protest	Threat to one's own group values (exclusive)	Threat to the extended community's values (inclusive)
Target of the action	Benefits for the individual and his/her own group	Benefits for the community in a broad sense
Rights	Claim for rights of one's own group versus other groups' rights	Claim for an equalization of rights
Social responsibility	Toward one's own group	Towards the community in a broad sense

(1997, 2006), above we have underlined the importance of considering the processes through which people legitimate the demands coming from the authority. Altemeyer (1996) has already stressed how authoritarian attitudes may be growing among democratic people who uncritically follow a democratic system. Thus, it may be relevant to shift from the study of people's adherence to antidemocratic values and ideologies to the analysis of the interaction between the individual and the authority in the specific case of an authority's request. Indeed, whenever the legitimacy of the demand is not questioned, the authority relationship risks degenerating: the more a person fails to have a critical and active role in controlling the actions of the authorities, the more the authority is likely to use coercion and persuasion to enforce its power (Lincoln, 1994). Thus, as suggested by Haslam and Reicher (2007), authoritarianism ought not to be considered a stable, individual difference but as an emerging product of the dynamics of group life.

Secondly, the obedience–disobedience dynamic suggests that, from a psychosocial perspective, the analysis of protest movements and traditional politics should consider the issues of responsibility and moral inclusion. Analysing the aims of politics (in a broad sense) from this standpoint may help to understand whether they propose a societal change and the direction of this change. Indeed, discussing the relationship between the individual and the community in terms of moral inclusion explains the limits and the potentialities of the notion of societal change. As Marková (1997) asked, what do we think of when we refer to society and the community? Society as our country, as Europe or society as the whole world? In the era of globalization and multicultural relationships, thinking in terms of a bounded and restricted community could imply a restriction of changes to some community's own privileges. Instead, a more inclusive community concept may be the basis for a societal change promoting respect for the rights of each community.

At least, the obedience–disobedience dynamic bears some implications for the concepts of authority and democracy. If we assume that institutions are co-constructed and negotiated among members of a society (Almond & Verba, 1963; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), then we can imagine a common shared concept of authority underlying any political institution. Thus, the relationship of authority is to be conceptualized as a shared representation of society and as a normative principle (Doise, 2003; Spini & Doise, 2005) for social and societal settlement. Social representations are systems of interpretations which are shared inside a social group and organize communications and behaviours of the group members (Jodelet, 1989; Moscovici, 1984). Such interpretations are used in order to define the relationships between social groups. In this sense, social representations regulate the behaviour of people, but they also have a cognitive function representing a process of interpretation and reconstruction of the reality (Moscovici, 2001). For these reasons, the social representation of the authority has an influence on social interactions and is influenced in turn by the meanings negotiated during these interactions. That is, individuals do not passively accept the *status quo*, but they concur in shaping its meanings through a dialogical process that goes from the social to the individual moral and cognitive

development and *vice versa* (Carpendale & Müller, 2004; Müller & Carpendale, 2000; Piaget, [1977], 1995). Hence, the social construction of the authority relationship has an influence on the importance that people daily attribute to social justice and to the dynamic between social stability and social change. Such a social representation of the authority is in fact anchored to different value-orientations concerning social order and social responsibility. Thus, we can guess that different representations of authority can exist and that these are linked to different modalities of accountability. For instance, we could have a representation of the authority where the individual totally delegates the responsibility for the proper functioning of the society to the instituted authority, and a representation of the authority where the individual feels co-responsible with the authority. Those two representations of the authority could be considered as the extremes of a continuum where there are different and mixed representations in between. In those representations, part of the responsibility is delegated to the authority and part is shared among citizens. These assumptions are in line with Marková (2000), which described the obedience–disobedience dyad as one of the constitutive cores generating the social representation of democracy. Within Marková's framework, social representation of democracy is generated by a range of socially relevant concept dyads (*themata*), regulating interactions between groups and individuals. Rights and duties (Doise, 2001; Spini & Doise, 2005), freedom and control, obedience and disobedience become normative theories that regulate social life at group level. Moreover, at individual level, these oppositions also refer to the way people define themselves, their social positioning and their need for social recognition (Marková, 2000). Thus, the study of democracy and the relationships between individuals and authorities has to consider that the concepts of obedience and disobedience are not simply opposed to each other. They are mutually dependent and, for this reason, they should both be considered as indispensable components of the authority relationship.

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