DOSTOEVSKY'S GRAND INQUISITOR: THE DELEGATION OF PRACTICAL JUDGMENT AND THE LIMITS OF AUTHORITY

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ABSTRACT

All authority replaces some deliberation, and a critique that condemned replacement would condemn along with it the law and the epistemic division of labour. The pertinent question is therefore not whether replacement has occurred, but where the passage lies between authority that mediates reasons and authority that claims to determine exhaustively what may count as a reason. This article answers it in four moves, taking the episode of the Grand Inquisitor, in Book V of *The Brothers Karamazov*, as an exemplary case and not as an object of literary interpretation. First, the delegation of practical judgment is decomposed into elements that are not transferred in the same way, separating tasks from normative statuses and proposing justificatory closure as the operational marker of replacement. Second, it is shown that Joseph Raz's service conception makes it possible to establish the excess of the authority under examination without denying its anthropological premise, which is a substantive result, and that the failure does not lie in the dependence thesis, where the most immediate objection would place it: that thesis requires the objective applicability of reasons, not the subject's access to them. To this end, three levels are distinguished—objective applicability, knowability of legitimacy, and effective acceptance—closure being located in the second and third, with recourse to the independence condition added in 2006. Third, Rainer Forst's noumenal power is drawn upon to describe what authority becomes when it produces a space in which its own limits have ceased to be ascertainable. Fourth, the operation by which a human interpretation presents itself as the expression of divine will is examined, the critique being confined to the suppression of the interpretive step and not extended to the appeal to revelation. The historical contextualization of the Spanish Inquisition serves as a setting and rests on its own documentation, never serving as evidence for the character's anthropology.

Keywords: authority; practical judgment; justification; legitimacy; Dostoevsky.

INTRODUCTION

No critique of authority survives the first objection unless it recognizes from the outset that all authority replaces some deliberation. Whoever accepts the instruction of an air traffic controller, the report of an expert, or the norm of a legislator ceases to weigh for themselves considerations they would otherwise weigh, and does well to cease. A theory that condemned such replacement would condemn along with it the law, the epistemic division of labour, and the whole of institutional life. The pertinent question is therefore a different one: where does the passage lie between authority that assists agency and authority that comes to occupy its place?

The thesis defended here can be stated in a single sentence. Authority assists agency when it mediates reasons; it comes to replace agency when it claims the power to determine exhaustively what may count as a reason. The difference lies not in the amount of deliberation spared, but in the preservation or suppression of the addressee's position as a participant in the practice of justification.

The episode of the Grand Inquisitor, in Book V of *The Brothers Karamazov*, is taken here as an exemplary case of this passage, and its status in the argument should be declared at once: it functions as a case, and not as an object of literary interpretation. What is drawn from it is a structure of justification, and it is this structure, not the work, that the article analyses; the apparatus of literary criticism is reduced to the minimum needed to ensure the correct attribution of the voices. The choice is warranted because the character, unlike most of the examples available, himself articulates a theory of the conditions of justification, and not merely of the conditions of obedience.

The argument unfolds in four steps. First, a decomposition: to delegate judgment does not name a single act, and the elements transferred to an authority divide into tasks and normative statuses, which are not transferred in the same way; from this asymmetry the operational marker of replacement is drawn, here called justificatory closure. Second, a localization: Joseph Raz's service conception makes it possible to establish the excess of the authority under examination without denying its anthropological premise, but the failure does not lie where the most immediate objection would place it, and showing this requires distinguishing the objective applicability of reasons from the knowability of legitimacy and from effective acceptance. Third, a shift: once the excess has been described, what authority has become remains to be described, and for this Rainer Forst's noumenal power is drawn upon. Fourth, an application: the operation by which a human interpretation claims divine authorship is examined, this being the most economical form of closure.

The method is reconstructive and analytical-conceptual, and its neutrality must be declared. No argument is made for or against any creed, nor is the truth of the religious reasons invoked by the character examined; what is examined is the structure of a justificatory operation,

and what it produces and does not produce is measured. Likewise, the Inquisitor is treated as Ivan's philosophical-literary construction, and not as a historiographical portrait; the historical contextualization deliberately occupies few pages and serves the function of a setting, never of proof. It is on the plane of the relations between authority, justification, and imputation, and not on that of the acceptance or refusal of faith, that the conclusion must be judged.

THE EPISODE: TEXTUAL STATUS AND DISPLACEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The episode should be reconstructed before it is evaluated, and the first care is one of attribution. The Grand Inquisitor is not an essay by Dostoevsky but a prose poem that Ivan Karamazov claims to have composed in his head about a year earlier and that he narrates to Alyosha in a tavern, presenting it with irony and admitting its literary clumsiness. There are therefore at least four distinct instances—the author, the narrator of the novel, Ivan, and the Inquisitor—and confusing them is the quickest way to ruin the reading. The polyphonic structure of the novel, as Bakhtin (2010) described it, is not a critical ornament: it is the reason why none of the voices can be taken as the author's utterance, and the poem is precisely the case in which the temptation to do so is greatest. The reading of the episode as an inquiry in philosophical anthropology, and not as a piece of doctrine, has an early precedent in Sandoz (1964), and it is in this key, and not the exegetical one, that the work is carried out here.

The chapter is preceded by "Rebellion", in which Ivan sets out the suffering of innocent children and refuses any final harmony that would demand such a price, and this precedence is decisive. Ivan does not construct the Inquisitor as an external adversary of faith, but as the practical consequence of a premise that he himself formulated: if the order of the world is morally intolerable, someone will have to administer it, and the administration will demand exactly what Christ refused. The Inquisitor is the practical response to Ivan's metaphysical revolt, and not its refutation.

The relevant narrative elements can be gathered economically. Christ returns silently to Seville, in the sixteenth century, on the day after a great auto-da-fé, and is recognized by the people. The Grand Inquisitor, an old man of ninety, orders his arrest and, at night, visits him in his cell to deliver a long monologue. He accuses him of having overestimated human strength and of having refused, in the wilderness, the three means capable of conquering human conscience once and for all: miracle, mystery, and authority. He asserts that the Church has corrected that work and has long been working not with Christ but with the other spirit. He declares that he acts for the benefit of a weak humanity, to which he will give bread, order, and the peace of not having to choose, and announces that Christ will be burned the next day. Christ does not answer discursively: he approaches and kisses him. The old man shudders, opens the door, and sends him away; the kiss burns in his heart, but he remains faithful to his idea (Dostoiévski, 2008, Book V, ch. 5).

Three observations can be drawn from this reconstruction before any theoretical apparatus, and each of them corrects the target of the analysis. The first concerns the character's vocabulary. The Inquisitor does not speak the language of tyranny, but that of care. He describes himself as the one who suffers in the place of others, who bears the burden of knowledge, and who accepts the curse so that the multitude may remain happy; he is a man who has renounced his own salvation for the sake of the good of others, or at least so he understands himself. A reader who treats this discourse as hypocrisy misses exactly what is disturbing in it, and replaces a difficult problem with an easy adversary. The text demands that the possibility of a sincerely benevolent domination be taken seriously, and it is with this possibility, and not with cynicism, that the article is concerned.

The second concerns the triad of the wilderness. Miracle, mystery, and authority do not form a list of instruments of coercion, but three ways of grounding belief, that is, three devices that operate on the reasons someone may have for accepting something. Miracle produces evidence that dispenses with evaluation; mystery withdraws the content of the directive from the addressee's examination; authority converts the origin of the directive into a sufficient reason for following it. The Inquisitor therefore formulates, in theological language, a theory about the conditions of justification, and not merely about the conditions of obedience—and this is why the reading in terms of freedom, which remains on the plane of choice, does not reach what he says.

It is necessary, however, to specify the object of the refusal he attributes to Christ, lest the article adopt as its own a theological thesis that does not belong to it. The one who interprets the temptations as a refusal of the three instruments is the Inquisitor himself, and neither the narrative nor any Christian tradition holds that Christ refuses miracle, mystery, and authority *simpliciter*, since he performs miracles, reveals mysteries, and claims authority. What the scene in the wilderness allows one to attribute to him is the refusal to employ the three as means of compelling conscience. It is in this restricted form, and only in it, that the refusal is used here.

The third observation is formal and will be decisive further on. The Inquisitor refuses a reply: he warns Christ that he has no right to add anything to what he has already said. The monologue is constructed so as to admit no answer, and this property of the form, and not merely the content of the theses, is what will characterize the difference between mediating reasons and occupying their place.

With the target corrected, the question that organizes the remainder can be put precisely: when does authority assist human agency, and when does it come to replace the agent's practical judgment, offering not only a decision but also a justification capable of relieving the weight of answering for it?

SEVILLE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY: FUNCTION AND LIMIT OF THE CONTEXT

Ivan sets the poem in Seville, in the sixteenth century, and the choice calls for a twofold caveat: there was no single, homogeneous, and timeless Inquisition, nor can the character be identified with a particular historical figure. At least four institutional configurations must be distinguished, with different competences, procedures, and targets: the medieval inquisitions, of papal origin, organized from the thirteenth century onwards; the Spanish Inquisition, authorized in 1478, during the reigns of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, and operating in Seville from 1480; the Portuguese Inquisition, established in 1536; and the Roman Inquisition, of 1542 (Peters, 1989).

Recent historiography advises against monocausal explanations for the formation of the Spanish Inquisition and rejects both the Black Legend and its apologetic inversions (Peters, 1989; Kamen, 2014). Kamen (2014) substantially revised the estimates of executions, insisted on the social embeddedness of the institution, and showed that its effective power was more irregular and more dependent on local collaboration than the current image suggests; the anthology edited by Homza (2006) allows direct contact with edicts, procedural instructions, and testimonies, and brings out the heterogeneity of practices that the expression in the singular conceals.

Before any use is made of it, some documented data should be established, precisely so that the literary setting does not do evidentiary work. The command structure was consolidated rapidly: in 1483 Tomás de Torquemada was appointed the first inquisitor general, with powers over Aragon as well as Castile, and between 1484 and 1488 the councillors assigned to him formed the Council of the Supreme and General Inquisition. The hierarchy between the inquisitor general and the Suprema was never explicitly established, and the members of the latter were appointed by the king and could issue orders without the former's approval (Homza, 2006). The datum is significant in itself: the body that standardized doctrine was composed by royal appointment, and doctrinal competence and political competence were not distributed along clear lines.

The procedure was regulated by successive *Instrucciones*, issued by Torquemada, Deza, and Valdés, and was not arbitrary in the sense of lacking form. On establishing itself in a locality, the tribunal proclaimed an edict of grace, with a term of about a month, during which those who denounced themselves obtained reconciliation with mitigated penalties; self-accusation, however, was accepted only if accompanied by the denunciation of accomplices. Once the term had expired, the edict of faith followed, which imposed on the faithful the duty to denounce, on pain of excommunication.

The procedural feature most relevant to this article is another. The identity of the prosecution witnesses was withheld from the defendant. He had a defence and could challenge those who had accused him, but to do so he had to guess who they were, naming persons who had reason to wish him ill—an expedient technically called *tachas* (Homza, 2006). What this means should be noted: the tribunal's procedural law provided, as a regular institution, for a defence against an accusation whose origin the accused could not examine. This is not an occasional

abuse, but an established legal form. The closure of access to the reasons for an imputation was codified.

As to the extent of its activity, historiography has its own documentary basis. Contreras and Henningsen reconstructed, from the *relaciones de causas* preserved in the archive of the Suprema, a database of 44,674 trials recorded between 1540 and 1700, of which 826 resulted in execution in person and 778 in execution in effigy (Contreras; Henningsen, 1986). Two cautions accompany these figures and must be declared. The first is that the authors themselves pointed out gaps in the series, and later revisions considerably raised the estimate of trials for the period (Kamen, 2014). The second, more important, is that the series does not cover the initial phase: the activity between 1480 and 1530 was incomparably more lethal, and extrapolations to the institution's history as a whole vary substantially according to the rate attributed to that first period (Kamen, 2014).

A correction of chronology that philosophical reading tends to ignore is also in order. Ivan sets the poem in the sixteenth century, but the repressive peak of the Seville tribunal, with the first autos-da-fé in 1481, belongs to the preceding decades; by the middle of the sixteenth century, the proportion of executions had already fallen sharply. The setting of the poem is therefore historically loose. This does not invalidate it as a literary construction, and the anachronism is itself intelligible, for it is in the sixteenth century that the tribunal had become consolidated to the point of being legible as an institution—which is precisely what the poem requires of the setting. It confirms, however, that nothing can be drawn from it as a finding of fact.

It is necessary to declare, with the rigour the subject demands, what this contextualization provides and what it does not provide. Kamen and Homza provide the institutional setting and its correction: they oblige one not to take the singular for unity, nor violence for explanation, nor the character for a document. What they do not provide—and it is indispensable to say so—is any confirmation of the Inquisitor's anthropology. That real men built institutions capable of dissociating decision and imputation establishes nothing about the congenital weakness of the species, which is what the character asserts; historical erudition describes what happened, not what human nature requires.

A second structural feature matters to the argument, and it is equally modest. The institution combined papal authorization, monarchical appointment of the inquisitors, doctrinal competence, rule-governed legal procedure, and articulation with coercive mechanisms external to it. In this configuration, the ecclesiastical tribunal did not carry out death sentences: it declared the defendant's obstinacy and relaxed him to the secular arm, to which the execution belonged, accompanying the act with a formal plea for clemency. From the legal point of view, this is a distribution of competences, and the description holds as a structural illustration, not as a procedural reconstruction, since procedure varied by tribunal, period, and type of case. From the point of view of interest here, it is an arrangement whereby each participant can describe their own conduct as not being the relevant normative cause of the outcome: the tribunal does not kill,

it merely qualifies; the secular arm does not judge, it merely executes; the executioner does not decide, he merely complies.

Political science has named this structure. Thompson (1980) called the problem of many hands the difficulty of identifying who answers for an outcome produced by many agents, each of whom contributed a fraction insufficient to constitute it alone. What this formulation provides is the description of the difficulty from the observer's side: whoever imputes finds no one to whom to impute. What it does not provide, and what matters here, is the effect of the arrangement on the participant's side. The point is not only that it becomes difficult, from the outside, to attribute responsibility; it is that each agent has been handed, from the inside, a true description of their own conduct under which they do not figure as the normative cause of the outcome. The difficulty of attribution is the by-product; the available description is the product.

What this example establishes is only this: devices capable of dissociating decision, justification, and imputation are not literary inventions; they are legally describable and survive a change of context. It is this feature, and not the historical Inquisition, that the remainder of the article analyses.

THE ANATOMY OF DELEGATION: TASKS AND STATUSES

The expression "delegating judgment" misleads by suggesting a single act. In practice, what is transferred to an authority breaks down into distinct elements: obtaining information, interpreting the facts, weighing conflicting reasons, deciding what to do, carrying out the decision, the moral justification of the conduct, and responsibility for the outcome. Let this list be submitted to a simple test: is there a case in which one element is transferred and the others remain? If there is, what was called the delegation of judgment is a collective name for independent operations, and the question of its limits will have to be put element by element.

The test is easily met. Whoever consults a cardiologist transfers the interpretation of tests without transferring the decision to operate. Whoever accepts an expert report transfers the establishment of the facts without transferring the legal assessment. Whoever follows the instructions of an air traffic controller transfers decision and execution in a strictly delimited domain, without this affecting the understanding they have of themselves as a moral agent. In all these cases authority assists agency, in the precise sense that the agent ends up more capable of acting in accordance with reasons that already applied to them than they would be if they decided alone.

There is, however, an asymmetry internal to the list, and it is the finding of this section. Information, interpretation, weighing, decision, and execution are tasks: they can be distributed, outsourced, automated, and their transfer is a verifiable organizational fact. Moral justification and responsibility are not tasks but normative statuses. To say that they have been transferred does not describe a practical arrangement; it asserts a thesis about imputation, which may be true or false and which requires demonstration. Confusing the two groups is the error that makes the

Inquisitor's offer plausible, for it allows the uncontroversial transfer of the first five elements to lend verisimilitude to the transfer of the last two.

This is the place to situate the contemporary debate that bears most closely on the problem, and to state precisely where it helps and where it does not. The discussion of moral testimony and deference asks whether it is legitimate to form moral beliefs on the basis of what someone else says. The so-called pessimists hold that it is not, or that there are *pro tanto* reasons against it, and they disagree about why: deference would compromise the agent's autonomy (Driver, 2006), would not produce moral understanding, understood as grasping the relation between the proposition and the reasons that make it true (Hills, 2009), or would be incompatible with virtue and with morally worthy action (Crisp, 2014; Howell, 2014). The optimists reply that moral deference, when the informant is reliable, is rational and sometimes required, and that the objections prove too much (Enoch, 2014).

This debate provides the most rigorous formulation available of the question of what is lost in handing moral judgment over to someone else, and it also provides the catalogue of candidates for that loss—autonomy, understanding, virtue. What it does not provide is the treatment of imputation. The entire controversy is built around belief and its epistemic and characterological costs: it asks whether deferring is permissible, rational, or defective, and not whether deferring shifts what the agent has to answer for. Even the most robust defence of deference holds that it can be correct, not that it transfers to someone else the burden of answering for what has been done.

The asymmetry proposed above makes it possible to give something back to this discussion, and it is worth recording, since it delimits what the article intends to add. Since tasks and statuses are distinct things, the two questions are independent: one can grant optimism in full on the plane of decision—admit that deferring was rational, prudent, and even obligatory—and still deny that imputation has shifted. An agent may have done well to obey and still answer in full for having obeyed. It is because they do not separate the two planes that both pessimism and optimism leave untouched the phenomenon that the poem displays and that the following sections isolate.

Three neighbouring literatures must be mentioned, even though they are not surveyed here, for they delimit what the article can claim. Zagzebski (2012) developed a theory of epistemic authority that reconciles deference with autonomy through the subject's reflective self-trust, and she does so on the plane of belief, not on that of imputation. Kutz (2000) analysed responsibility for collective harms on the basis of intentional participation, and his contribution bears on the connection between agent and outcome, not on the moral description that authority supplies to the agent. And the experimental literature on obedience, initiated by Milgram (1974), documented the willingness to cause harm under instruction, although archival re-examinations have cast doubt on part of its procedures and on the current reading of its results (Perry, 2012); in any case, it measures what subjects do, and not the justificatory structure offered to them.

When the criterion usually applied to other works is applied to this article, the result is as follows: the observation that authority provides reasons, and not merely orders, is not new, nor is the observation that obedience produces relief; what is claimed as an addition is only the separation between tasks and normative statuses, the proposal of justificatory closure as the operational marker of replacement, and its location at the levels of knowability and acceptance, and not in the dependence thesis. This claim is modest and remains subject to revision in the face of literature that anticipates it.

With the asymmetry established, the distinction that will organize the rest of the text can be proposed. There is delegation when the agent entrusts certain tasks to an authority and preserves some capacity to assess the legitimacy, scope, and reasons of the directive, so that the authority operates within limits that the agent can recognize and, in principle, re-examine. There is replacement when the authority not only decides a given question but claims the right to occupy entirely the place of the agent's judgment, which includes determining what counts as a reason, defining in advance what is morally admissible, preventing the reassessment of the directive, and offering obedience as a complete justification of the action.

The operational marker of replacement is justificatory closure. A directive produces closure when the mention of authority functions as the final answer to the question "why did you do that?", in such a way that any further question is treated not as a request for reasons but as disobedience, infidelity, or culpable doubt. It should be noted that closure is a property of the justificatory practice, and not of the content of the order: a materially correct directive can be imposed under closure, and a debatable directive can be issued without it. This is why the assessment of the arrangement does not depend on knowing whether the Inquisitor is right about human weakness.

It remains to separate three questions that ordinary language confuses and that the analysis will need to keep apart. Normative justification asks whether there are genuinely valid reasons for the action or directive. Legitimation asks why an institution is socially recognized as authorized. Moral rationalization describes the psychological reconstruction by which the agent continues to perceive himself or herself as just, obedient, or benevolent. The three may coincide, and in the case of the poem they largely do, but none implies the others: the fact that a reason has been presented, accepted, and sincerely believed does not establish that it is valid.

RAZ AND THE SERVICE CRITERION

Any critique of the replacement of practical judgment must avoid a trap: that of supposing that authority and autonomy are inversely proportional magnitudes, so that all deference is loss. Raz (1986) offers the most precise instrument for escaping it, and it is indispensable to go through it before any diagnosis, lest the article condemn, together with the Inquisitor, the law, the epistemic division of labour, and the whole of institutional life.

On the service conception, legitimate authority is not that which imposes itself in spite of the subject's reasons, but that which helps the subject conform better to the reasons that already apply to them. Three theses articulate it. The dependence thesis requires that directives be based on reasons that already apply independently to the addressees in the circumstances covered, so that authority does not create reasons but mediates them. The normal justification thesis holds that one shows someone's authority by demonstrating that the alleged subject will better conform to the reasons that apply to them if they accept the directives as binding than if they try to follow those reasons directly. And the pre-emption thesis holds that the directive is not added to the other reasons but replaces some of them, functioning as a second-order, or exclusionary, reason whose function is to remove from practical reckoning considerations that would otherwise be pertinent. The three were reaffirmed and refined in response to objections (Raz, 2006), on which occasion Raz added an independence condition: normal justification is ordinarily not sufficient in matters in which it is more important that people decide for themselves than that they decide correctly.

Two consequences matter. The first is that Raz expressly admits the replacement of part of first-order deliberation—that is what pre-emption means—and, therefore, the boundary being sought does not separate no replacement from some replacement. The second, and decisive, is that the service conception imposes severe internal limits, and it is these limits, and not a generic hostility to authority, that provide the criterion sought. Normal justification is piecemeal and domain-relative: an authority may be legitimate as regards air traffic and illegitimate as regards the pilot's married life.

The dependence thesis requires that there be independent reasons to which the directive can be referred—a requirement that bears on the existence and applicability of those reasons, and not on the addressee's access to them, a distinction that the next section will make decisive. At this point it is necessary to separate three levels that the current discussion confuses and whose confusion would compromise everything that follows.

The first is that of the objective applicability of reasons. The dependence thesis requires that there be reasons that already apply to the addressee in the circumstances covered by the directive, and this requirement bears on the existence and applicability of the reasons, not on the subject's access to them. The second is that of the knowability of legitimacy: whether, and to what extent, the subject can know that the authority satisfies the conditions. The third is that of effective acceptance: whether the subject in fact recognizes the authority and acts for that reason.

That Raz requires the first is uncontroversial. That he does not require the third is also uncontroversial: legitimacy does not depend on actual consent, and an authority may satisfy the conditions without being recognized, just as it may be recognized without satisfying them. The intermediate level is the contested one, and it is better not to settle it here. Kirby (2017) showed that the service conception seems to presuppose a fourth condition, which he called the reliable belief condition, according to which the subject must reliably believe that the authority satisfies the other conditions, and that different passages of Raz's work point in opposite directions regarding it.

For the argument of this article, it is enough to record that knowability constitutes a question of its own, distinct both from objective applicability and from acceptance, and that the mature discussion of the service conception preserves it as an open problem. The form of the argument that will make use of it should be anticipated, so that the indecision is not taken for a gap: it is disjunctive and does not depend on the answer. If knowability is part of the service conception, the arrangement examined violates it by construction; if it is not, the excess is already established by scope and by the independence condition, and knowability enters as a declared addition of this article, and not as a requirement attributed to Raz.

Once the criterion is applied, the result is more interesting than simple disapproval. The notable aspect of the Inquisitor's discourse is that it speaks the language of the service conception. His claim is not that the Church has a right to command, but that human beings will be better off, even by their own standards, if they accept its directives instead of trying to conduct themselves alone; he invokes weakness, anguish, and the inability to bear choice, and maintains that institutional mediation will do better than direct deliberation. Formally, it is an argument of normal justification, and that is why it resists the easy objection.

The argument fails, however, at decisive internal limits of the very conception it invokes, and it fails cumulatively. It fails as to scope, for the claim is not one of competence in determinate domains, but over the whole of the moral and religious life of the subjects, including what they must believe, fear, hope for, and regard as sinful. It does not fail, contrary to what the most immediate objection would suggest, as to the dependence thesis. That thesis requires that the reasons exist and apply independently to the addressee, and nothing in the poem establishes that they do not exist; if the character's anthropology were true, they would exist. Mystery does not suppress the underlying reasons; it suppresses access to them, which is a problem of another order and belongs to the second level distinguished above. Recording this does not weaken the critique; it prevents it from relying on an attribution that Raz would reject. It fails as to the independence condition, for the matters claimed—what to believe, what to fear, what to hope for regarding one's own salvation—are precisely those in which deciding for oneself has a weight of its own, and not a merely instrumental one in relation to deciding correctly.

There remains the informational asymmetry, and it is at the second and third levels that it produces its effect. At the level of knowability, the deliberate withholding of the underlying reasons makes the satisfaction of the conditions unascertainable not only by the subject, but by third parties, by the historian, and by the critic; and if the reliable belief condition is in fact part of the service conception, the arrangement violates it by construction. At the level of acceptance, disagreement is requalified as a moral fault, so that recognition ceases to be a judgment the subject forms and becomes a conduct required of them. It is here, and not in the dependence thesis, that justificatory closure sets in—and that is why its adequate analysis will require the vocabulary of the next section, and not that of the service conception, whose resources are exhausted in the finding that something has become unascertainable.

As to the interlocutors: Raz provides the criterion that separates legitimate mediation from replacement, and he provides three resources that no other available theory brings together—the requirement of independent reasons, limitation by domains, and the independence condition. With them it is established that the Inquisitor's arrangement exceeds legitimate authority, and this is established without denying the character's anthropological premise, which is a substantive and not a preliminary result. What Raz does not provide is the vocabulary for the remaining phenomenon. Once it is established that authority has exceeded its limits, it remains to describe what it has become by producing a space in which its own limits have ceased to be ascertainable; and this description is not the task of a theory of legitimacy, which pronounces on conditions, and not on the justificatory structure that makes them inaccessible. So that the division of labour is clear, what follows should be declared: what the next section adds is description, and not a second criterion of legitimacy. The criterion that condemns the arrangement is Raz's; the vocabulary that makes it possible to identify, in justificatory practice, the feature through which the condemnation becomes operational is Forst's. Whoever maintains that the independence condition was already enough to condemn it will be right as to the condemnation, and not as to the marker.

FORST AND THE SPACE OF JUSTIFICATIONS

The sociology of domination had already indicated the path of the shift. Weber (1978) observed that no enduring domination is content with force or with material advantage, and that every domination seeks to arouse and cultivate belief in its legitimacy. The observation is correct and remains indispensable, but what it provides is limited: it describes what is held to be legitimate, not what is justifiable, and it records the phenomenon of belief without offering a criterion for evaluating it. It is a sociology of legitimacy, and the problem here is normative.

Forst (2015) provides the missing step. His thesis is that power is a noumenal phenomenon, that is, that it operates in the space of reasons: someone exercises power over another when able to influence, occupy, or determine that other's space of justifications, so that the latter acts for reasons the former has supplied. Power is not the opposite of reason; it is realized through it. Where there is mere physical force there is violence, and violence is precisely the case in which power has failed. Domination, in this vocabulary, is the exercise of power without adequate justification, and its most stable form is the one in which the very capacity to demand justification has been neutralized—hence the requirement that Forst formulates as the right to justification, the right not to be subjected to norms whose reasons are not reciprocally and generally justifiable to those affected.

Two consequences guide the reading of the episode. The first is that the most effective exercise of power is the one in which the subordinate moves of their own accord: an order obeyed out of fear requires permanent surveillance and produces latent resistance, whereas an order obeyed because it has been incorporated as one's own reason dispenses with surveillance, for the agent carries it out and, more than that, spontaneously upholds the description under which they carried it out. The second is that the relevant distinction ceases to be between acting on one's own

and acting on orders, and becomes one between participating in the practice of justification and being merely its addressee.

With this instrument, the Inquisitor's project receives its precise description. He does not aim to control behaviour, but the space in which subjects identify, receive, and evaluate reasons, and this control is carried out through identifiable operations. He defines which reasons may be presented and which are inadmissible in advance. He determines who is authorized to interpret them. He removes from the subject the position of participant in the practice of justification, keeping them only as an addressee. He converts disagreement into guilt, disobedience, or infidelity, requalifying an epistemic act as a moral fault. And, finally, he presents submission not as an external imposition, but as the conclusion of the subject's own moral reasoning.

The fifth operation is the one in which the diagnosis is concentrated. The first four could describe any censorship, and censorship is an ancient and comparatively crude phenomenon. The fifth describes something rarer: an arrangement in which the subject, questioned about their reasons, offers reasons that are genuinely their own, that they feel as their own, that they are able to defend sincerely, and that were supplied in their entirety by whoever benefits from them. This is the point at which control ceases to need surveillance, because it has acquired the form of conscience.

An inflation of the concept is resisted, however, and the resistance is necessary for the category to remain useful. All education, all argumentation, and all moral formation influence the space of reasons of others; if any influence were domination, the only non-dominating relation would be isolation. The criterion lies not in the existence of influence, but in three features: whether the reasons offered are presented as assessable by the addressee; whether their acceptance depends on revisable recognition or on devices that make revision impossible or culpable; and whether the addressee remains entitled to demand justification. A teacher who argues may profoundly transform a student's reasons without in any way removing the student's position as a participant; the Inquisitor does the reverse, for he preserves the appearance of persuasion and eliminates the position.

As to the interlocutors: Forst provides the shift from behaviour to reasons and the criterion of reciprocity that makes it possible to distinguish influence from domination, and he provides, with the notion of noumenal power, the explanation of why the deepest obedience is the one that feels like autonomy. It should be recorded that the conception is contested, and by objections that this article need not settle: it may be objected that it intellectualizes the phenomenon, treating as an operation in the space of reasons what is often material constraint, and that it poorly reaches the structural forms of domination, which pass through no directive at all. Both objections lose force in the case examined here, in which domination is exercised through explicit directives and accompanied by declared justification—which makes the episode, incidentally, the case most favourable to the theory, and recommends caution as to its generalization.

DIVINE AUTHORSHIP CLAIMED BY HUMAN AUTHORITY

The operation examined in this section requires conceptual precision, lest the argument turn into a generic critique of religion, which is neither its object nor its conclusion. Three levels must be distinguished: a possible divine authority, that is, the hypothesis that there are reasons of transcendent origin; a human authority that interprets a religious norm, an unavoidable activity in any tradition that has texts, rites, and rules; and the institutional claim that a given human interpretation has a divine origin or guarantee, so that contesting it amounts to contesting the source itself.

The critique bears exclusively on the passage from the second to the third level. It is not argued that religious reasons are false, irrational, or manipulative, nor that deference to a tradition is in itself an abdication of judgment. The question is not whether God can offer reasons, but how human agents claim the exclusive power to identify the content of those reasons and, thereby, to withdraw their own determinations from the field of human contestation.

What makes the operation especially potent is the combination of two attributes that rarely coexist: maximal normative weight and nil epistemic accessibility. A directive presented in this way claims unconditional bindingness and, at the same time, immunity from verification. In terms of the service conception, it does not violate the dependence thesis, which requires the existence and applicability of the underlying reasons and not the addressee’s access to them; what it does is place them where such access is impossible, and the failure lies, once again, in knowability and not in dependence. In terms of noumenal power, it achieves the closure of the space of justifications in the most economical way possible, for it converts any request for justification into an act of infidelity.

The operation fulfils two simultaneous and complementary functions. For the side that controls, it justifies control as care, protection, or salvation. For the side that obeys, it justifies obedience as fidelity, duty, or submission to the transcendent. A circuit is formed with two symmetrical displacements: whoever controls ceases to understand himself as a dominator and comes to understand himself as a caregiver; whoever obeys ceases to understand himself as the author of the action and comes to understand himself as the fulfiller of a duty. Neither needs to lie for the arrangement to work, and the analysis remains valid even if both sincerely believe the description they offer of themselves.

The contrast should be made explicit, for it delimits the critique better than any generic caveat. What is censured is not the appeal to revelation, but the suppression of the interpretive step that mediates between it and the directive. An argument that declares which of its transitions is received rather than demonstrated, and that acknowledges that it is illegitimate to present as rational deduction what is received from revelation, does exactly the opposite of the operation analysed here, for it exposes the seam that justificatory closure needs to conceal (Dietrich; Dietrich, 2026).

The difference lies not in the content of the beliefs nor in their origin, but in whether the interpretive step appears or disappears. An authority that says *I received this and I interpret it thus* preserves the addressee as a participant, because it hands over precisely that about which the addressee could disagree; an authority that says *this is what God wills*, without more, has taken the addressee's place. It is for this reason that the critique formulated here does not touch the appeal to revelation as such, and touches with precision its use as a device of immunization.

Three observations prevent this section from being read as an external critique of religion, and all are internal to the material analysed. The first is that religious traditions themselves contain resources against the operation described: the distinction between the norm and its interpreters, the possibility of error on the part of ecclesiastical authority, the prophetic critique of institutionalized worship, and the doctrine of conscience are not secular imports, and a tradition which affirms that God also judges the institutions that speak in his name has a criterion against the identification of interpretation with source. The second observation follows from the first and is the most demanding, because the criterion proposed here admits of no selective application. If the mark of replacement is justificatory closure, then it applies to any instance that supplies at once the directive and the moral description under which it is to be understood, and the confessional, secular, political, or scientific nature of that instance is irrelevant.

The criterion therefore also reaches the traditions that subscribe to it, and reaching them is a sign that it works, not that it has turned against itself. It should be noted, moreover, that the confessional traditions that declare their own councils fallible, that reserve conscience to divine judgment, and that distinguish the norm from whoever interprets it already possess the criterion internally, and state it more forcefully than any external analysis could. An institution that affirms that it can err preserves, by that very affirmation, the addressee as a participant in the practice of justification.

The third is that the poem itself places the critique within the tradition, for the Christ of the poem refuses to employ miracle, mystery, and authority as means of compelling conscience, that is, he refuses exactly the three expedients by which a human interpretation would present itself as incontestable—without this entailing any refusal of the three realities as such. Van den Bercken (2011) warns, in the same sense, against reducing the episode to an accusation directed at a particular confession, and highlights its scope as a critique of institutionalized and collectivist forms of religious ideology. The warning is textually well founded and avoids turning an argument about structures of justification into a confessional polemic.

OBJECTIONS AND DELIMITATION OF SCOPE

The most serious objection is that all authority replaces some deliberation, and therefore the proposed criterion would separate nothing. The answer is a frank concession followed by a delimitation. It is conceded in full: the pre-emption thesis asserts exactly this, and the article subscribes to it. The critique does not bear on the replacement of part of first-order deliberation,

which may be rational and legitimate, but on three joint features—the unlimited extent of the competence claimed, the withdrawal of the matters in which deciding for oneself has a weight of its own, and the suppression of the conditions under which the limits of authority could be ascertained by anyone. None of them on its own is enough; their conjunction is what defines replacement, and justificatory closure is the marker through which the third feature becomes observable in practice. To insist on the indispensability of the criterion outside this conjunction would be to feign a difference where there is none.

It is objected that the critique of the Inquisitor's authority depends on denying his anthropology, which would be too convenient. It does not. Suppose the character's premise true and normal justification in fact satisfied: the arrangement still exceeds the internal limits of the conception it invokes, through scope, which is not delimited by domains, and through the independence condition, which withdraws from authority precisely the matters claimed.

It is objected, next, that the agent may legitimately trust experts, and the objection is sound, but it was anticipated by the decomposition proposed above. Epistemic trust does not amount to normative abdication: trusting someone about the facts, about the technical interpretation of a situation, or about the probability of an outcome is distinct from conferring on them the competence to determine what ought to be done and under what moral description what is done is to be understood. It is precisely because the two groups of elements are confused that the Inquisitor's offer acquires verisimilitude.

It is objected that a sincerely religious person is not merely rationalizing, and this is correct; the article does not maintain the contrary and, on the contrary, makes sincerity a condition of the problem. Sincerity and validity are independent questions: a belief can be sincere, socially legitimated, and false; it can be sincere and true; and it can be sincere and yet institutionally mediated in such a way that the believer has no access to the reasons that support it. The object of the analysis is not belief, but the device that mobilizes it and suppresses the conditions for its evaluation.

It is objected that the Inquisitor is fictional and does not represent the historical Inquisition, and the objection is accurate. The historical section was kept brief and avowedly contextual: it describes the configuration that Ivan chose as a setting and draws from it a single structural feature, that of the legally organized dissociation between decision, justification, and imputation. It provides no empirical evidence for the character's anthropology, which remains Ivan's philosophical-literary construction.

Finally, the scope of the conclusion must be delimited, so as not to claim more than has been established. Nothing here demonstrates that deference to authority is in general illegitimate, that religious institutions typically operate through justificatory closure, or that the structure described is more frequent in some traditions than in others; such claims would require evidence of another order, which the article neither produces nor invokes. Nor does anything here pronounce on imputation: showing that an authority has occupied the justificatory space of its

addressees does not by itself determine what each of them has to answer for, and that question remains entirely open.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim has been to establish where the passage lies between authority that mediates reasons and authority that claims to determine what may count as a reason. The result is that it does not lie where the most immediate objection would place it. Replacement is characterized neither by the amount of pre-empted deliberation, which may be large and legitimate, nor by the violation of the dependence thesis, which requires the objective applicability of reasons and not the subject's access to them. It is characterized by the conjunction of three features: the unlimited scope of the competence claimed, the withdrawal of the matters in which deciding for oneself has a weight of its own, and the suppression of the conditions under which its own limits could be ascertained by anyone.

It is worth bringing together what each interlocutor provides and does not provide, for it is from this accounting that the article's position emerges. Kamen and Homza provide the institutional setting and its historiographical correction; they provide no confirmation whatsoever of the character's anthropology, and taking them as doing so would convert context into proof. The literature on moral deference provides the most rigorous analysis of what is lost in handing moral judgment over to someone else; it does not provide the distinction between tasks and statuses, because it discusses the permissibility of deferred belief. Thompson provides the structure of many hands; he does not provide its effect on each participant's self-understanding. Raz provides the criterion that separates legitimate mediation from replacement, making it possible to establish the excess without denying the anthropological premise; he does not provide the vocabulary for the remaining phenomenon, for a theory of legitimacy pronounces on conditions and not on the justificatory structure that makes them unascertainable. Kirby provides the formulation of knowability as a condition in its own right; he does not decide whether it is part of the service conception. Weber provides the observation that enduring domination seeks belief in legitimacy; he does not provide a criterion for evaluating it. Forst provides the shift to the space of reasons and the criterion of reciprocity; he does not provide the treatment of the case in which justification is presented as received from a transcendent source.

It remains to indicate where this points, even though its development exceeds the limits of this article. Once it is established that closure lies in knowability and acceptance, and not in the applicability of reasons, the question of its effects on imputation remains open. An authority that occupies the justificatory space of its addressees offers them, together with the directive, a moral description of the conduct; and whether, and to what extent, this description alters what each of them has to answer for is a question distinct from the one treated here, which requires the vocabulary of the philosophy of responsibility and an examination of its own. What this article establishes is only the precondition of that examination: that there is, in fact, a form of authority

that does not confine itself to deciding for the agent, and that its mark is the suppression of the position from which it could be contested.

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