

John A. Coleman, S.J.

Authority, Power, Leadership: Sociological Understandings

The first thing to say about the sociological usage concerning authority is that there is no consensus among sociologists about its conceptualization and meaning. For some, it is always a sub-set of the larger concept, power. Authority, on this reading, is *legitimate* power. Other forms of power, even if not *per se* illegitimate, can be exercised but lack social justification. Some sociologists, however, include both power and persuasive influence as elements of authority. On this second reading, authority and leadership (even informal or purely personal leadership) become conflated.¹

AUTHORITY DEFINED

Yet, most sociologists, even if they differ from them, begin any discussion of authority with Max Weber's classic definitions of power and authority. For Weber, power is the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests." Authority (*Herrschaft*), for its part, is the "probability that a command with a given content will be obeyed by a given group of persons."² The major difference between power and authority rests in the fact that power is essentially tied to the personal characteristics of individuals or groups, whereas authority is always tied to social positions or roles. Weber notes that while power is a *merely* factual relation, authority is a legitimate relation of domination and subjection.

¹Robert Peabody, "Authority," *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Crowell Collier-MacMillan, 1968) vol. 1, 473.

²Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Grundrisse der Sozialökonomie, 1947) 4th ed., 28.

Power need not be consensual; authority must be. A demagogue may, in fact, exert power over groups of individuals whose motivations he manipulates or actions he controls. A dictator may cow (or even physically coerce) people into acquiescing in his commands. But the control of a manager over workers, of the civil servant over her clientele, or of an army officer over her soldiers is authority. In authoritative relations, the right to command (and the probability of obedience) exists as a settled mutual expectation, independent of any specific person who occupies the office of manager, civil servant, or army officer. Authority, for Weber, is *legitimate* power. It rests on a voluntaristic understanding and is intertwined with notions of imposition of will, obedience, and assent to commands.

As we will see, the radical source of disagreement among sociologists about how to define authority stems from their prior differences about how to define power. Indeed, as British sociologist, Steven Lukes, has persuasively argued, power (like justice) is “an essentially contested concept.” Power is one of those concepts which “inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of users.”³ To engage in disputes about the meaning and locus of power is, itself, to engage in politics.

Those who follow Weber’s definition of authority note, first, that “wherever there is organization, there will be authority and authority will become enmeshed in traditions.”⁴ Ralf Dahrendorf draws out the implications of Weber’s understanding of authority as legitimate power:

- (1) Authority relations are always relations of super- and subordination.
- (2) Where there are authority relations, the superordinate element is expected to control, by orders and commands, warnings and prohibitions, the behavior of the subordinate element.
- (3) Such expectations attach to relatively permanent social positions rather than to the character of individuals; they are in this sense legitimate.
- (4) By virtue of this fact, they always involve specification of the persons subject to control and the spheres within which control is permissible. Authority, as distinct from power, is never a relation of generalized control over others.
- (5) Authority, being a legitimate relation, non-compliance with authoritative commands can be *sanctioned*; it is indeed one of the

³Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: MacMillan, 1974) 26.

⁴Edward Shils, *Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 148.

functions of the legal system (and of course of quasi-legal customs and norms) to support the reflective exercise of legitimate authority.⁵

The distinction between authority and power can be illustrated by an industrial manager who would try to control people outside his factory or the private lives of those who work inside the firm. These actions would trespass the borderline between authority and power. Although the manager has authority over defined aspects of the work-life of people in the firm, his control would assume the form of *mere* power as soon as it goes beyond the specified persons and spheres of legitimate control. But, of course, just this kind of trespassing is ubiquitous in almost *every* authority relation because power, even legitimate power, is never simply neutral or totally benign. There takes place, almost universally, a fusion of authority and *mere* power which can lead to or intensify intra-group conflicts. This fusion also serves to delegitimize authority when it is seen to exceed its bounds of legitimacy.

As a second stab at defining authority, we can look at Roberto Michels definition in *The Encyclopedia of Social Science*. Note how closely it parallels Weber's insistence that authority is a sub-set of power and involves hierarchy, obedience, and command:

Authority is the capacity, innate or acquired, for exercising ascendancy over a group. It is a manifestation of power and implies obedience on the part of those subject to it. One principal means of exercising authority is the dispensation of rewards and punishments.⁶

A final definition comes from sociologist Robert Bierstedt who defines it as "sanctioned power, institutional power."⁷ Bierstedt insists, however, in reaction to Michels, that authority is not a capacity or innate. It is relational and exists even when it is not being explicitly exercised.

SCOPE OF AUTHORITY

Almost every socially recognized group or institution in society (e.g., the family, schools, churches) has its own appropriate set of authoritative offices and legitimated sanctions. Parents may legitimately

⁵ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Societies* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1959) 166–67.

⁶ Roberto Michels, "Authority," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: MacMillan, 1930) vol. 1, 319.

⁷ Robert Bierstedt, "The Problem of Authority" in Morroe Berger et al., *Freedom and Control in Modern Society* (New York: Octagon Books, 1964) 79.

exercise power (and not just persuasion) over underage children; bishops over priests; teachers over students. But society, itself, exercises a wider authority. It alone, on Max Weber's account, may legitimately resort to coercive violence or use of force. In that sense, society exercises *sovereignty*.⁸ Sovereignty refers to the ultimate right of command in society (the right to which other rights must, in cases of conflict, yield).

Historically, theories of sovereign authority in society appeal either to God or to the people to ground ultimate authority. The sovereignty of the people means they must assent to legitimate authority because they consented (through some variant of a social contract) to set it up for the common good. In obeying legitimate authority or laws, the people are really obeying themselves. Sovereignty of the people implies that they, ultimately, authorize all authorities. They originate and authorize those who represent authority over them. So, authority is always intrinsically limited by the purpose of the original social compact: i.e., a proposed common good.

Theories of sovereign authority which appeal to God (as in Romans 13) can vest authority in the rulers directly from God (as in divine right theories of government) or, indirectly, through the people. Here, too, sovereign authority may be limited by higher appeals to the common good or the natural law. No true authority involves *generalized* power over other persons. It is always specified in scope and range. Some variants of theories about God-given sovereign authority, however, have made the ruler responsible only to God.

Societal authority is implicated in the authority structures of sub-systems of society and vice versa. "Just as the traditions of the state derive some of their efficacy from the traditions transmitted in family, school and church, so the traditions within each of these three institutions are helped to maintain their internal efficacy by their acceptance of the traditions of legitimacy of the state and its government."⁹ Again, "The phenomenon called 'authority' is at once more ancient and more fundamental than the phenomenon called 'state.' The natural ascendancy of some men over others is the principal of all human advances."¹⁰

BASES OF LEGITIMACY

Weber postulated three major sources to legitimate authority (either societal-wide or within smaller groups or traditions within society).

⁸ Bertrand de Jouvenal, *Sovereignty: An Inquiry into the Political Good* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

⁹ Shils, *Tradition*, 186.

¹⁰ de Jouvenal, *Sovereignty*, xiii.

These are captured by Weber's three "ideal types" of authority-relations: (1) traditional authority; (2) charismatic authority; (3) rational-legal authority.¹¹ Each form of legitimate authority rests on consensual beliefs, shared in by subalterns as well as authorities, about the grounding, scope, and purpose of authority. When assent to these beliefs corrodes, authority loses its credence. Weber tended to imply an evolutionary scheme by which traditional authority shifted, over time, to rational-legal authority (which Weber saw as the typical form of authority in modernity).

TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY

Weber devoted a large section of his analysis of legitimate authority to traditional legitimate authority. This type of authority grounds its legitimacy by reference to its connection to the past and justifies its actions by claiming that they conform with precedents. Traditional authority tends to be conservative and lacks, intrinsically, any inner motor for social change. Traditional authority, which includes patrimonial, feudal, and monarchical-bureaucratic regimes, has held sway over a large part of human history and of the earth's surface. "As the ancients taught us," "As our originating sacred document declares," "As the founding fathers saw" are typical motifs and appeals within traditional authority systems. Sometimes, traditional authority relies on strong origin myths to which appeal is frequently made. Current actions are to conform to the pattern of the originating myths. As we will see, traditional forms of authority never fully fade away. All authority rests on some variant of tradition or gets related back to it.

CHARISMATIC AUTHORITY

By charismatic authority, Weber points to authority which rests on the wisdom or, even, sacred gifts of an extraordinary individual and his followers. The charismatic leader breaks with tradition: "You heard it said of old, but *I* say unto you." From the vantage point of the beliefs of the charismatic leader and his or her followers, charismatic authority does not derive from the consent of the governed. The charismatic leader's unusual gifts or direct conduit to God are seen as compelling and self-justifying. In that sense charismatic authority is *non-rational* (which does not mean *irrational*).

The charismatic authority is able to break with authority based on traditions by an appeal to a higher power (either within the great genius

¹¹ Weber treats of the three forms of legitimate authority in *Economy and Society*, Guenter Roth and Claus Wittich, eds. (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968) vol. 1, 212-301.

or from God). Charismatic authority represents the major carrier or motor for discontinuity and change in systems of traditional authority. While many of the examples Weber presents of charismatic authority derive from the religious realm, *charisma* need not be specifically religious. Weber applies the concept to the realm of law (e.g., *khadi* justice in Islam, the justice of Solomon) and politics. Charles de Gaulle was charismatic by force of his personality and his claims to embody the ideals of France. Nietzsche's Superman involved an appeal to charismatic authority. Charismatic authority can be malevolent (Caesarism, Hitler) as well as benevolent (Jesus).

The followers of the charismatic leader do not think that they have a choice in obeying her command ("You have the words of eternal life—to whom else *could* we go?"). They never imagine that they author her authority. The belief is that a charismatic leader by force of heroic personality, holiness, or direct intervention of God deserves adherence. But, in fact, a charismatic leader who lacked followers would remain unknown to history and incapable of social impact. In that sense, even though their belief system does not endorse this truth, followers always create and author the authority of charismatic personalities.

Weber thought *charisma* to be an inherently instable form of authority. It could only with difficulty live on after the death of the original charismatic personality. *Charisma* tended to get tamed, "routinized" and transferred to what Weber called "the *charisma* of office." *Charisma*—if it is to leave any permanent legacy—must pass over into institution. *Charisma* either lapses back, itself, into a form of traditional authority (the new myth of origins and sacred precedents being the originating actions of the charismatic personality and his followers) or passes over into a form of rational-legal legitimate authority.

RATIONAL-LEGAL AUTHORITY

The final ideal-type of authority Weber proposes is rational-legal authority. It is embodied in formal bureaucracy, the rule of law, the appeal to efficiency, and the rational fit between means and intended goals. Procedures properly followed displace the personal rule of charismatic authority (based mainly on witness and virtuosity) or the substantive traditions of traditional authority. Like charismatic change, rational-legal authority systems allow for social change but, unlike charismatic change, in rational-legal authority systems change is orderly, incremental, and constrained by procedure, law, and scientific calculation.

Indeed, Weber feared that this modern form of authority might become a kind of iron cage, devoid of spirit and radical possibility.

Method replaces vision. Charismatic authority can yield revolution or a major paradigm change. Rational-legal authority only yields progress within a received paradigm. Weber saw the shift from charismatic to rational-legal authority exemplified, *inter alia*, by the shift from Jesus and the first apostles to the church of offices) as a kind of de-mystification which took the magic out of life. Reason was increased, wonder reduced. While Weber partially hoped (it seemed, almost against any rational hope) that some new charismatic outbreak in modernity might renew modern rational-legal authority, he mainly remained pessimistic about its possibility.

IDEAL-TYPES

Weber worked with “ideal-types.” These were thought-experiments about logically possible diverse forms or types of social organization. They were meant to serve as heuristic devices for research purposes, to be tested against data and experience. In real life, no pure types existed. Thus, every type of authority-system included, for example, elements of traditional authority. None totally eclipsed the charismatic form of authority:

The other types of authority were also bound by tradition. Weber gave much attention to the transformation of charismatic authority into traditional authority. The rational-legal type of authority—bureaucracy—was encased in the tradition of its own particular form of legitimacy. In a rational-legal order, as understood by Max Weber, rules are derived from and subsumed under other rules, in an ascending pyramid. At the pinnacle stand the most general laws, written constitutions, fundamental principles, unspoken postulates—the things which are unquestioned. These fundamental principles and postulates of any legitimate political order, even a rational-legal order, are ultimately charismatic, but they are transmitted and received as traditions compelling respect both for their sacred properties and for their traditional givenness.¹²

Rational-legal authority (modern methodical science, capitalism, the bureaucratic state-apparatus) derived, in part, from charismatic breakthroughs. Thus, Weber tied the rise of methodical capitalism to the Puritan ethic and also saw connections between the rise of modern science and beliefs that God worked in both the book of scriptures and the “book” of nature. To the extent that these originating charismatic moments get remembered, they serve as dangerous residues. As Bacon, Einstein, Galileo, and Freud forged new scientific paradigms in

¹²Shils, *Tradition*, 186.

their time, their example for science can inspire new originators of new paradigms. Jefferson and the founding fathers' revolution toward a form of the modern democratic state based on constitutional government remains as an exemplar for new radical breakthroughs, what Jefferson saw as the necessary new revolution every new generation.

Religions (e.g., Christianity) can least of all totally tame their charismatic origins. Thus, one speaks—despite every rational-legal bureaucratic method of governing the Church—of the dangerous memory of Jesus. Still, despite the fact that all three forms of authority intermingle to some extent in any concrete organization or societal institution, Weber thought that one ideal-type always predominates and tends to subvert or subordinate the competing forms of authority. The rational-legal looks askance at charismatic authority as non-rational, even if it can never totally tame or routinize it. The logics behind each type of authority are, in the main, incompatible. You can not, simultaneously, *predominantly* follow more than one type. The hegemonic or regnant form tends to drive out the alternative types.

RE-THINKING THE WEBERIAN PARADIGM OF AUTHORITY AND POWER

Sociologists have engaged in revisionary work on this Weberian paradigm of authority and power along three main lines. First, some question whether Weber has a strong enough notion of conflict ingredient in any authority system and of the inherent ambiguity of *all* forms of authority. Second, some sociologists radically redefine the notion of power which Weber employs, thus changing, in turn, the definition of authority which is seen as a sub-set of power. Finally, some sociologists question whether seeing authority as uniquely a sub-set of power does justice to the wider lens by which to view authority when it is related both to power and influence and includes leadership as a sub-set of the definition. I want to explore, briefly, each of these three revisionary moves.

THE INHERENT INSTABILITY OF EVERY AUTHORITY SYSTEM

As we saw, Weber thought that charismatic authority was inherently instable and needed to pass over into more secure institutionalizations. But he dealt with traditional and rational-legal authority systems as if they were very stable, difficult to deflect or change. Radical changes in either pattern were the exception rather than the rule. He saw these two authority-patterns as having massive inertial powers against disruption. We need to question this assumption.

The heart of this critique of Weber rests on a suspicion that any authority is ever purely legitimate, ever without a messy admixture of

legitimate power with *mere* power. The French political scientist, Bertrand de Jouvenal, for example, tends to approach every authority with some suspicion. He shares the opinion of Lord Acton in his famous dictum that “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Since authority is regularly seen as a sub-set of power, there is no reason to believe it is any more innocent:

These non-governmental authorities, to which we give the name social authorities, are no more blessed with an angelic nature than is Power itself. If they all were so blessed, there could be, depend on it, nothing but perfect harmony and cooperation between them. But it is not so: however altruistic one of these authorities, such as the paternal or the ecclesiastical, is intended by nature to be, human nature imparts to it a measure of *egoism*: it tends to make itself its end. Whereas, conversely, an authority which is by nature egoist, such as the employer’s or the feudal lord’s, is sobered by time . . . *Every authority is, by the law of its nature, essentially dualist.* Being ambitious, each separate authority tends to grow; being egotistical, to consult only its own immediate interest; being jealous, to pare down the role of the other authorities. There thus ensues an increased strife of authorities. And this strife provides the state with its main chance [to grow in centralizing power and to extend its authority].¹³

In de Jouvenal’s view, all power (legitimate or not) is expansionary by nature. Those robed with power, even legitimate power, bring to it their own vested interests, narrow perspectives, and insecurities. At least at times, every legitimate power succumbs to the temptation to expand power beyond its legitimate spheres. In this view, every form of empirical *legitimate* power is inherently unstable since insecurity, interest, and special perspective will tempt the holders of it to move beyond legitimate power to an exercise of *mere* power not within their domain and right. In order to justify this expansion, they will also seek to expand the writ of legitimacy for their authority beyond its domain. Beliefs in legitimacy will spill over into distortive *ideology*. As de Jouvenal sanely notes: “That is not political science which does not recognize the essential duality of Power: the egoist principle cannot be purged out of it.”¹⁴

Subalterns also have mixed motives for submitting to the commands of legitimate authority. Authority rests on more than just consensual belief. It also flows from force and benevolence. Subalterns

¹³ Bertrand de Jouvenal, *On Power* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962) 130.

¹⁴ de Jouvenal, *On Power*, 127.

submit to authority because it does have power and force and non-submission carries consequences of sanction; just as obedience may be rewarded. Like authorities, subalterns also adhere to belief systems grounding the legitimacy of particular exercises of power. But they can, frequently, see through the ruse by which authorities expand these beliefs into ideology. Subalterns can greet this expansion either with direct revolt and contestation or with cynical non-compliance.

Finally, every authority system must, in some sense, reward subalterns, deliver real goods to them, be seen as benevolent. Otherwise, it lacks credibility. In that sense, when, in fact, an authority system ceases to deliver rewards, belief and adherence in it corrodes. Sociologically, a well-functioning authority is best seen as deriving from an amalgam of force, credence, and benevolence. That is no authority *informed by political science* which does not expect resistance, non-compliance and opposition. Conflict is built into any system of legitimate authority because every system of legitimate authority tends to transgress its legitimacy and use *mere* power.

RE-IMAGINING THE CONTOURS OF POWER

A second frontal assault on the Weberian paradigm for authority and power comes from authors who reject two essential assumptions in the Weberian paradigm of power. The first assumption is that power is a kind of zero-sum reality: the more one has of it, the less others can have. In zero-sum realities, hierarchy is essentially an ingredient in the relationship. Ralf Dahrendorf reflects this zero-sum view of power and authority when he remarks: "If either nobody or everybody had authority, the concept would lose its meaning. Authority implies both domination and subjection, and it therefore implies the existence of two distinct sets of positions or persons."¹⁵

The zero-sum view of power has come under attack from two different directions. The late Harvard sociologist, Talcott Parsons, in a widely-influential article on power, suggests that we conceive of power as a system property and as, essentially, relational. He refers to power as "the generalized medium of exchange" for political and social systems which mirrors money as the generalized medium of exchange in the economy. Just as wealth need not be a zero-sum reality, neither need power. Thus, the whole economy may increase in such a way that not only do the rich get richer but the poor get richer too. Some rising tides lift all boats. My increased wealth need not be at the expense of yours. In a similar way, in political systems, the whole system may increase its units of power such that an increase in power for

¹⁵ Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict*, 173.

one person or group need not imply a decrease in power for others. All may experience an expansion of power. Parsons argues that the use of power, as when the ruled have justified confidence in their rulers, may achieve objectives which all desire and from which all benefit. Parsons mainly (and too exclusively) focuses on forms of power which are authoritative, consensual, and which further objective communal goals.¹⁶

Some have seen Parsons' view of power as something essentially neutral as, itself, ideological—a defense of the currently operating political system. Yet he seems to put his finger on a real possibility within social systems. Some forms of power (against Parsons' intent) may remain oppressive, dominative, and zero-sum. But not all forms of power have to. Some critics who agree with Parsons' general position on power want, nonetheless, to call what he points to, *influence*, and differentiate it from power. Influence is purely persuasive and does not carry with it any right to coercion. Power, on the other hand, is related to coercion or force (at least as the last weapon of recourse by authorities). Influence does not have resort to sanctions. Anyone who adopts this Parsonian definition of power would need to rethink Weber's assumptions that power *always* involves domination and subordination. There are some forms of cooperative and non-dominative power—power *with* and not just power *over*.

Michel Foucault makes a point quite similar to Parsons, although with much more subversive intentions. For Foucault, too, power is essentially relational. No one in the net of interaction ever lacks some power. There are no zeros in this game. Once again, a stark domination-subordination paradigm for power becomes quite misleading. Subalterns do not just obey, they manufacture *their own* consent. They connive or cooperate in any domination that takes place. Subalterns always, also, have resources of resistance. Foucault's redefinition of power goes back to a radically democratic understanding of *all* power and authority. All government and all authority (whatever the explicit belief system which legitimates it) is by the consent and connivance of the governed. Or put slightly differently, power—which is always a two-way relational reality—is a network in which everyone is the authority. For Foucault any system of power which denies its inherent mutual two-way relationality (as does each of the Weberian forms of legitimate authority) is simply not authoritative or legitimate. Foucault is not likely, of course, to want to keep the distinction between *legitimate* and *mere* power. Power, in his view, involves a game of negotia-

¹⁶ Talcott Parsons, "On the Concept of Political Power," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 104 (1963) 232–62; Parsons, "On the Concept of Influence," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 27 (1963) 37–62.

tions, resistances, and strategies but no forms of it are any more legitimate than any others. There is no such thing as authority.¹⁷

MUST POWER BE CONCEIVED IN VOLUNTARISTIC TERMS?

Other social scientists have assaulted the Weberian definition of power by focusing on its overly voluntaristic nature. This is the move made by Steven Lukes in his widely influential sociological study, *Power: A Radical View*. Lukes notes that it is a misleading indicator of power only to look at the probabilities that someone's commands or explicit decisions will be followed. Many powerful people do not directly engage in command or get involved in explicit decisions. They control, however, the agenda—as it were, under the table, behind the scenes. Even before any decisions are made, they determine the assumptions. They exercise what the Italian Marxist social thinker, Antonio Gramsci, called hegemony. Lukes distinguishes two different ways of looking at power. In what he calls the one-dimensional view (e.g., Weber's), an analysis of power focuses on explicit commands and decision-making. It misses, however, the ways power can be exercised within the system, unconsciously, prior to any decision-taking, to limit decision-making to acceptable issues.

Political systems (and the groups which operate within them) can prevent demands from ever becoming explicitly political issues or even from being made. Thus, for example, a mere reputation for power, unsupported by any explicit acts of command or power, may be sufficient to inhibit the emergence of certain issues (e.g., environmental controls). A one-dimensional view of power may not reveal the less visible ways in which a social system may be biased in favor of certain groups and against others.¹⁸ Prestige, for example, as a form of power may sway actions, even in the absence of any explicit commands or decisions.

CONFLATING POWER AND INFLUENCE

A third way of drastically revising the classic Weberian understanding of authority and power moves in the direction of joining together the notions of power and influence. In this view, authority is a sub-set not just of power but also of influence. Influence points to the arena of leadership outside of legitimate office or authority. Weber

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

¹⁸ Lukes, *Power*, 37. For this view of background power predating any decision, see Matthew Cresson, *The Unpolitics of Air Pollution: A Study of Non-Decision Making in Cities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971).

tended too much to address *formal* authority. Leadership is a kind of informal authority which flows from expertise, experience, personal character, or being centrally located in a strong inter-personal network within groups or organizations. Weber's analysis of rational-legal and traditional forms of authority prescind from the personal qualities of the wielder of authority. In rational-legal forms of authority, for example, we obey the office, not the person of the office-holder, or we have a government of laws, not of persons. In traditional authority the power of tradition rules, no matter the personal qualities of the bearer or articulator of the tradition.

Charismatic authority, however, does not neatly fit this pattern. It is really best seen as a variant form of influence or leadership. It seems as much persuasive as coercive. Nor can influence be truly divorced from a consideration of authority. Formal authority systems, in which the wielders of authority over a long period of time or in the main even in one time period lack leadership qualities (e.g., bishops who are inept leaders in a church; university administrators without competence), lose credibility.

The very belief system which grounds the type of authority gets undermined if the authority system does not deliver rewards to its members. We do also speak of someone being, e.g., an authoritative scholar or work colleague (by reason of her capabilities and integrity) even outside any formal authoritative system of power. Authority based on leadership can only appeal to persuasion, not to coercion. But it may be more powerful than the authority based on *mere* power. Legitimate power does depend—in the last analysis—on credibility, credence, and effective deliverance of benevolent goods to those who yield to it. Subalterns can transfer this credibility and credence away from formal authority toward leaders who lack all legitimate authority but whose qualities may be likened to those found in charismatic authority: an intrinsic personal authority based on wisdom, competence, character, or insight.

APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH

I was asked to address in this article a specifically sociological and general understanding of authority, power, and leadership. Other essays in this issue will address more directly authority in the Church. But several elements in this more general discussion can be directed toward authority in the Church:

- (1) Even theories of divine origin of authority (e.g., as in theories of the authority of pope, bishops, the ordained) do not preclude appeals beyond the divinely instituted authority to God or the originating charismatic authority of Jesus.

(2) The Church represents an amalgam of traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal forms of authority. Its explicitly religious character, however, lifts up strongly the authority of holiness. Charismatic authority in the Church can never be fully routinized.

(3) In the Church, as elsewhere, there is no *generalized* authority without specific limits of competency as to persons and domains.

(4) No matter what the belief system which grounds the authority system, in fact no authority is credible which does not serve its membership and deliver "benevolence" and genuine goods to it.

(5) Authority of office, systematically cut off from real leadership, sociologically erodes its own authority.

(6) There is no reason to suspect, following in this de Jouvenal, that even legitimate authority in the Church will resist inevitable temptations to link legitimate power to mere power. Hence, Acton's dictum applies no less to the Church than any other group: power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

John A. Coleman, S.J., served for over twenty years on the faculty of the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Recently he assumed the Charles Casassa Chair of Social Values at Loyola-Marymount University in Los Angeles.