Public Governance, Administration and Finances Law Review Vol. 10. No. 1. (2025) • 137–149.

DOI: 10.53116/pgaflr.8108

After Authority

Csaba Varga*

* Research Professor Emeritus, HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Legal Studies, Budapest, Hungary. Professor Emeritus, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Faculty of Law, Department of Legal Philosophy, Budapest, Hungary, e-mail: varga.csaba@jak.ppke.hu

Submitted: 08 April 2025 | Accepted: 13 June 2025 | Published online: 27 June 2025

Abstract: Authority is a fundamental tool of social integration. By selecting the most laudable and exemplary patterns, behaviours, actions or events – whether real or merely imagined – from the entire range of potentialities, it creates a community capable of communal action, by transforming an undifferentiated mass of independent individuals into a somewhat cohesive social group able to find common ground on matters vital for their shared existence, thus turning mere quantity into quality. It is thus evident that the existence of a certain degree of authority is also the basis for the viability of public administration, public policy and public management – to name but a few – in any given society. This paper will examine the conditions, manifestations and correlations of authority in the various domains of its social context, in order to provide a comprehensive account of its existence, its inevitability, but also the dangers inherent in its weakening.

Keywords: authority, social integration, order, coercion, obedience, persuasion, tradition

The more extensively and deeply we inhabit our intellectual and emotional environment, the more additional features or components worthy of distinction we find, which need to be noted, named and described. Embedded in the development of our culture, in the exploratory synthesis of our sciences and arts, is the perception of things that were perhaps always present, but which we lacked the sensitivity to perceive. These are the basic features of our individual and social existence, and as soon as we become aware of them, we immediately begin to cultivate them.

Existence is a singular, vast unity and process: it is a perpetual motion. Humans are the ones who break it down into parts and give it names, in order to understand and master it. Nature does not have its own catalogue; rather, it is our human language that partitions and describes it – in whatever ways are most conducive to its practical usage. Humans live in a particular space and time, and so they use different parts of nature, and in different ways: not necessarily the same aspects or in the same fashion as the humans of other regions and eras. This very same multiplicity characterises the diversity of individual and social existence, resulting from material conditions and cultural variations across

different times and places. Notably, the subjects of social existence cannot be grasped through physical distinction; they can only be understood through a certain contemplation. Its definitions are therefore vague, since they can hardly be based on anything other than the shared experience of lived reality. Nevertheless, they are real. They exist in the ontological sense as well, because they exert influence through their existence (see further Varga, 2021).

The very concept of authority invokes a series of images, as it is not, in fact, about the properties of a person or a thing, but rather about the significance, the pivotal role that we ourselves ascribe to these. Perhaps in a more amorphous, violent and intrusive form, but still a reminder of something that modern literature and art histories occasionally attempt to assert as canon in their own field.[1] The shared beliefs of our lives; our fellow human beings from the past or present, identified with their teachings or achievements; the works we identify with the messages they convey, or the practices they exemplify – these are the people from whom we select a scant few to honour as authorities. In our personal lives, our parents, our mentors, our esteemed colleagues, and the luminaries of our profession are the ones we elevate to the status of authorities. The main domain of authority, however, is society, with respect for authority being one of the fundamental integrating forces, an important factor in the organisation of individuals (with many, today, indoctrinated into the cult of individuality) into a community. By selecting the most laudable and exemplary patterns, behaviours, actions or events – whether real or merely imagined – from the entire range of potentialities available that can be voluntarily chosen through human free will, it creates a community capable of communal action, by transforming an undifferentiated mass of independent individuals into a somewhat cohesive social group able to find common ground on matters vital for their shared existence, thus turning mere quantity into quality. Thus, while our choice of authority in our personal lives is likewise personal – and rightly so, considering the stark differences between us all (and remembering the mentors who have shaped us through their own example, within our own family) – in the social space this must become strongly homogenised, unified and thereby directionally aligned for us to be at all capable of existing as members of a *societas.* Though insufficiently researched, this has historically, anthropologically and developmentally been the basis for the emergence of a community, for the development of individuality in whatever proportions. This is a necessary precondition for public administration, public policy and public economics to gradually take institutionalised forms.

We know little about the struggles of our early ancestors for social integration. It is only on rare occasions that we can find ourselves marvelling at historical facts such as the appearance of a code of law shortly after the appearance of writing in the history of mankind: the code attributed to Hammurabi, admired for its perfection in linguistic form and logical structure alike for eighteen centuries both before and after Christ, is still the perfect exemplar of its type alongside the code of Napoleon (Varga, 2011). While we know that the very act of norm-setting, and thus the idea of planning the future, was itself a fantastically modern point of development in our early evolution, it was also a kind of

[1] On the Western canon see, e.g., Schröder et al. (2012); Perry & Cunningham (1999); Iskin (2017). In the Hungarian context, see also Szegedy-Maszák (1995); Kulcsár Szabó (2019); András (2020); and critically Papp (2013).

destination in the progress of humanity (which Oppenheim, 1977, suggests could have developed in Jewish eschatological thought). Because training people to follow the ideal, to adhere to procedure for no gain but pure obligation, to show obedience, as well as the magical conceptuality of the linguistic drives of "must" or "forbidden", could presumably be nothing other than the civilising result of a struggle that may well have lasted for many millennia[2] – together with the achievement of establishing all the necessary tools of socialisation and education (which our present habits tend to accept as skills that are almost part and parcel of being human.)

Whatever the era, for cultures near or far, it is clear that order cannot be established without the assignment of authority, and power cannot be institutionalised without the necessary level of obedience. On the other hand, it is also evident that as soon as an order collapses, the loss of authority will be the first in the chain of consequences to follow.

And yet, although one can hardly point to an example of any contemporary who perceived the rule of authority as flawless in their own time, and did not complain of its waning or loss, nevertheless, this strange entity never seems to fully vanish. The history of humanity is rich in cataclysms, and they may occasionally even shake the foundations of the authority at the time, but neither then nor afterwards – with the situation settled and a new equilibrium established – does humanity continue its life without authority. In fact, it is often precisely when society is pulled off balance that authorities proliferate – sometimes in daily flux, dragging life along until their anarchic turmoil is somewhat calmed.[3]

From a socio-ontological perspective, our personal and communal existence is a single roiling stream. However, in order to analyse it at all, the cognitive mind highlights various aspects through analytical exploration, then presents their incredibly complex interplay in relation to other (previously highlighted) aspects. Recognising the importance of authority is thus associated with an infinite number of additional factors, including the multifaceted complexities of power, obedience and discipline.

In its historical formation, authority "comes into being from the beginnings of mankind" (Malinowski, 1944, pp. 187–188), as its essential need (Riga, 1996), as "a functionally universal component of organized social life among human beings" (Hoebel, 1958, p. 222).

In the most ancient times or conditions – known as the tribal state in legal anthropology – the authority in the struggle for survival went to the one who could best unite their community through their wisdom and insight on the one hand, and the respect they enjoyed, their talent for organisation and their strength in securing community consensus on the other. In other words, much like how it works for animals. A tribal chief was able to exercise this type of relative and mostly mediating power only until he was faced with a challenger who, proving stronger than him, could divert his tribe's sympathies away from

[2] In contrast to German metaphysics that sought the so-called essence of objects in the conceptual world, the philosophers who founded Scandinavian legal realism in the 19th and 20th centuries (cf. Faralli, 1982 and Bjarup, 1978) saw the precondition for the birth of social normativities in the magical invocation of the emotional impact of words and their corresponding practices.

[3] A classic example of this is the terror of the French revolution. As a more recent example, Bork (1997) analyses this in the American chain of consequences that was triggered by the 1968 student rebellion, and continues to the present day.

him (Hoebel, 1958, pp. 227, 232; cf. Varga, 2005). It was no coincidence that this apparent uncertainty could give rise to a relative and always temporary certainty, even without any institution, formality or formalism to support it. Naturally, the nexus of authority has taken many different forms in its various social contexts since then. The most interesting aspect, however, is that in many areas we still have a practice of authority operating with a similar logic to these ancient examples.[4]

The various forms of authority developed in antiquity, which once applied to rulers or the beliefs and worldviews underpinning the power to rule, are also alive today.[5] By way of example, "it could be the law of nature, or the commands of God, or the Platonic ideas, or ancient customs sanctified by tradition, or one great event in the past" (Arendt, 1958, p. 83). Their particular strength, sometimes spanning multiple eras and often still valid today, came from the fact that they became independent of any *ad hominem* reference, i.e. of any form of justification that could in principle be easily refuted or disputed: "In all these cases legitimacy derives from something outside the range of human deeds" (Arendt, 1958, p. 83).

The presence of authority encompasses virtually the entire range of human relations, connections and affiliations. An exhaustive typology is virtually impossible. They may be categorised in a non-exhaustive manner, almost at random, as divine or human, or epistemic (of competence), parental, operative (a freely established organisation that claims to achieve the ends of its members), and political (De George, 1978, pp. 99–102; De George, 1970), as well as personal, official or functional, political or pedagogical (Hungarian Catholic Lexicon).

And what is behind all of this? It is obvious that authority is a privilege, and behind it lies some kind of personal or institutional excellence on the part of the holder of the authority. An accurate formulation would be one that finds some type of surplus value in this excellence – which may be founded in intellectual or moral superiority, competence, recognition, wealth, trust, or courage (Hungarian Catholic Lexicon). Because of the many individuals comprising it, society is always diverse, and such surpluses are therefore likely to be dispersed to some extent. However, it is precisely what is universally understood to be authority, as described above, which performs the function of making this surplus visible, highlighting it and giving it its due weight in the everyday life of society. One definition, although it may seem offputtingly dry and reductive, captures the essence in a somewhat economistic but nonetheless accurate way. According to this: "Authority, rightly instituted, is a mode of coordination that treats individuals with the respect due them without requiring each to possess an impossibly high degree of knowledge about every sector of social life or an unreasonably high level of civic virtue. It is an appropriate mode of coordination in societies where social knowledge is specialized, interests are diverse, and the requirements of common action are relatively high" (Connolly, 1987, p. 19).

[4] Kiss (1969), p. 507, for example, rightly points out that "the authority of the expert is not hereditary and not an accessory of rank, but rather a constant struggle for the right to make decisions", and another author (Farkas, 2000, p. 72) regarding the suitability to lead the Gypsies (Romani), stated: "Aura is a gift, but authority must be earned! It cannot be given, nor taken; it is not a commodity. Its touchstone is trust, and mutual trust."

[5] An interesting example of early research in this field is Ibn Khaldûn's immensely rich work and its impact on the principles of governance in the Muslim world; see Alibašić (2025) for a recent overview.

Whether it is about being able to exert an exemplary influence on our children as parents, one that varies in strength depending on external influences, or about elevating a particular artistic expression, creator, community or school from among the artistic expressions/creators of the place and era in question through a process of evaluation and setting examples, or about the fact that we (fortunately) do not usually need to start from scratch, from an empty *tabula rasa* in developing our view of the world and of society: we apply a belief system, a set of moral standards and a culture of conscience already accepted in our environment, and which has become naturally socialised to become habitual in all of us. We thus inevitably perceive that authority does not simply offer a selection from a varied miscellany of all existing possibilities, but also enforces the choice of what exactly we acknowledge as having authority. To borrow the scientific definition of authority used in anthropology, it includes "the explicit capacity to direct the behavior of others" (Hoebel, 1958, p. 222).

In this case, however, what distinguishes authority from any similar phenomenon that can also be used in the analysis of the wide variety of alignment and management tools of social processes?

The first aspect that might come to mind, obviously, is power. Moreover, authority is often associated with power – and this first, historically proven theorem can certainly give us pause – and vice versa, and therefore the two are "often interchangeable" (Sennett, 1993). Yet, they are not identical. Our human intellect chose to use separate terms for these two phenomena precisely because it wanted to emphasise their distinguishing features in uncovering the driving forces and the directional switches of social processes. First and foremost among these is that since "force speaks from without; authority always speaks from within", the only possible answer is that: "Force is only a substitute. Authority is the real thing" (Berggrav, 1951, pp. 102, 97). Consequently, this shows that the two concepts are clearly interrelated, at least for the version of authority used in the sphere of macro-social organisation, i.e. the political sphere. This interrelation was beautifully described a century and a half ago by a learned parish priest in the Hungarian Highlands, speaking of the most visible instrument of political power, the enactment of laws: "Laws in themselves are dead things. Only authority gives them spiritual power, lends them the commanding force by which they can regulate the path of individuals and of society; on the quality of that authority depends the result produced by the laws" (Ferenczy, 1874, p. 893). And it is of course helpful for our analysis to consider the law as a statement of authority (at least ideally). Because the law, i.e. the formal normative of state power, backed by its own coercive mechanism, is binding on all recipients and in all regulated situations, whereas authority, on the other hand, does not imply obligation, but (in view of the aforementioned value surplus) merely advisable courses of action worth considering, and even that only for those who choose to pay attention.

Because authority is not raw necessity. Nor is it a command. Consequently, it does not act with the force of an inevitable prescription. Instead, as noted previously, it offers a kind of ranking and ordering in the totality of social heterogeneity, in the marketplace of confusion and the randomness of infinite diversity. But for whom? Well, only to those who are willing to listen. Thus, we can draw a kind of analogy to the advice one receives from one's doctor or mentor. After all, it is not imposed or forced as an external constraint,

it is merely a suggestion: if you truly want what you have sought him out to accomplish, then do as he says (De George, 1978, pp. 104–107). Hannah Arendt, in her struggle to decipher the nature of society while trying to make sense of Nazi crimes, gave an excellent speech at a Harvard forum on the topic of authority, where she provided us with a powerful tool for understanding the issue. As she explained:

> Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion where force is used, authority itself has failed! Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical. If authority is to be defined at all, then, it must be in contradistinction to both coercion by force and persuasion through arguments. The authoritarian relation between the one who commands and the one who obeys rests neither on common reason nor on the power of the one who commands; what they have in common is the hierarchy itself, whose rightness and legitimacy both recognize and where both have their predetermined stable place (Arendt, 1954, pp. 1–2).

Conceptual positioning offers virtually infinite possibilities. The classical doyen of political science seems to perceive the simultaneously stabilising and socially integrating role of the community of values, embodied in established authority and self-validating in the historical fact of this highly spontaneous and formless establishment, when noting that "authority is neither power nor legitimacy, but the peculiar something through which power may achieve legitimacy" (Friedrich, 1954, p. 309). In other words, these three are specific aspects of a common, more general and more essential phenomenon, forming a complex where they could potentially be in opposition, but can, in the ideal case, also harmoniously complement and reinforce each other.

The conceptual delimitation of authority also raises the question of respectability. Although these two categories may seem closely related, they cannot be identical, because in the conceptual proximity of power, "authority also implies a kind of position of power, of decision" (Karsai, 1998, p. 564).

Beyond the delimitation of related phenomena, a sharp distinction can also be found by considering the counter-concept of authority. That would be none other than freedom, including the principle of democracy. In principle, they not only stand in opposition to each other, but are also capable of destroying each other. Nevertheless, according to the expert of this topic, they coexist: they operate in a single space simultaneously, both according to their demands. This also means that they are in constant interaction with each other. Through this interaction, they are capable of enriching each other (Simon, 1962). And what is it that nourishes both the one and the other? Well, the literature answers this by providing additional distinctions, such as the almost paradoxical opposition between the authority of reason and the reason of authority (L'Heureux-Dubé, 1993). This is a revival of older debates, from which Pascal already deduced his ancient, deceptively simple gem of wisdom: that the rights of authority and reason are, so to speak,

different.[6] The early Enlightenment added its own contribution, claiming that "reason and not authority should determine the judgment" (Bentham, 1952, p. 25, note 3).[7]

However, the closer we come to the present day, a world that defies the impossible and attempts to rewrite the inherent gifts of our existence, the more often we encounter efforts to unravel the basic fabric of society as we know it. It is no coincidence, then, that we sometimes find ourselves in situations where wisdom, enlightenment and science are no longer capable of producing anything other than empty words. For example, the current (and hopefully only temporary) landscape of the West suggests that the cult of freedom, democracy and human rights, and their overwhelming need for totality, is irrational, emotionally heated, and fearlessly intensifies the risk of its own social disintegration. It has become an all-encompassing, semi-anarchic and anti-authoritarian ethos in which even the values that have been so often proclaimed since ancient times have long since been distorted into their own opposites, and its progress may now threaten the very foundations of human existence as we know it.

However, it is inherent in the creation and the logic of authority that the more "it derives from something outside the range of human deeds", the stronger it can become.[8] The logic at work here is no different from anything else created by humans. First, we have humans, who are fallible. Their abilities, individually and collectively, are magnificent: they have built an entire world to rival nature. And yet they are unable to alter their own fallibility. In ancient times, this aspect of humanity may have been more nakedly evident, but in truth it is no different today either. Humans cannot be anything other than uncertain in their own existence, in their destiny. Although they do try to find an answer, they do their best to put it somewhere outside of themselves – objectifying and institutionalising it – ensuring that their task is then merely to draw conclusions from something that exists, supposedly, independently of themselves. Naturally, both they and we are fully aware that it is humanity that created these constructs. But as it is no longer in anyone's personal possession, it is no longer anyone's responsibility. Rather, it belongs to humanity, in a way. In other words, what was once internal has now been made external for them. And they now reckon with this external force as they do with their environment, with the outside world, even though its content may actually match up with their most dearly held, personal beliefs, or the institutionalised form of the order to be established among people. It is no coincidence, therefore, that authority was theologised – traced back to the Creator and claimed as His creation (Horváth, 1942) – even in our oldest sources, to such

[6] As one of Blaise Pascal's monographers writes on the subject of his *Pensées* (Tetsuya, 2012, pp. 49–50): "L'autorité est un poids qui entraîne la confiance quand il s'agit de choses auxquelles on n'a ni accès ni expérience immédiate. Le domaine de l'autorité est celui où les principes ne tombent pas sous les facultés propres de l'homme, sens et raison."

[7] But by the very fact that this conclusion was reached by the Bishop of Gloucester, William Warburton (1698–1779) (Warburton, 1736; 1737–1741), Bentham sarcastically claims that he had thereby set up a self-denying paradox, insofar as he set up an authority in opposition to his own.

[8] "Historically, we know of a variety of sources to which authoritarian rulers could appeal in order to justify their power; it could be the law of nature, or the commands of God, or the Platonic ideas, or ancient customs sanctified by tradition, or one great event in the past […]. In all these cases, legitimacy derives from something outside the range of human deeds" (Arendt, 1958, p. 83).

an extent that our ancestors continued to derive secular authority and raw power from divine mandate (or at least used it to reinforce its validity) almost until the modern age.[9]

This is the essence of institutionalisation: transferring something created by us as the simple product of human choice and decision into our so-called second nature – man-made, but now a natural part of our environment – thereby granting it a serious mantle of legitimacy. It is as if we were adding: "I didn't do it, I only found it, just like you did." This makes it possible to state, for example, that "all supra-political sources of authority: religion, morality, science, law, are nonpolitical in character" (Berggrav, 1951, p. 108), as well as to legitimately draw the cultural-historical inference that authority in its basic forms is not only an integral and harmonious part of a common culture, but also its most characteristic offspring (Wołpiuk, 2019).

While the word "authority", rooted in the Latin *auctoritas,* has strongly directed the perception and use of the concept itself towards its legal and power-political dimensions in English and Latin-speaking cultures, engendering a forum-based, procedural approach, it is nevertheless interesting and instructive to review some analogous features of the legal appearance and representation of authority.

The first might be its pyramidal structure. This reflects the historical lesson that the aligning effect of authority can be most powerful where the basic organisation of society itself reflects the presence and need for authority. In a literary formulation, it is like the pyramid, in which "the power concentrated at the apex gradually trickles down to ever wider layers of power: each layer perceives the authority in the narrower layer above it, radiating from the apex of the pyramid" (Balázs, 2013, p. 8). Any legal scholar on the European continent can recognise that this model is classically aligned with Hans Kelsen's hierarchical theory of law *(Stufenbaulehre),* that is, with our own basic conception of the structure and functioning of law as a basic model. It has been shown that this is in accordance with the theological formula of a creative deity, deriving the entire process of validity transfer from a presupposed basic norm as the ultimate normative source (Krawietz, 1984; resp. Varga, 1999).

The concept of sacralisation through time also appears to be legalistic in nature. "Authority is granted by time; it is authoritative", he claims, "because it is traditional, it has stood the test of time" (Gombár 2009, p. 6). This is one of the precepts that was granted an institutionalised form throughout the development of medieval law. There was not yet a reliably established system for sourcing laws, and in the case of competing references, the true law was considered to be the *gutes altes Recht* [good old law], which successfully justified itself through its continuous use (Kern, 1939; resp. Liebrecht, 2016).

Looking at this from a different angle, if we consider durability as proven in social practice to be a precondition for the validity of authority and for the real integrative force of the social equilibrium supported by authority, the consequences of the alarming collapse of authority in the U.S. and Europe set into motion by the 1968 student rebellion come into full view, with the chain reaction and its consequences expected to continue unabated

[9] For example, to use the brilliant words of a 19th century director of the theological seminary in Győr (Surányi, 1895, p. 344): "The authority of the state [...] is granted by the Lord of nature as power of dominion over the world, and therefore its will is based on the eternal law of morality."

for the foreseeable future. The simple and blunt truth of the matter is that without the backing of a common normative force capable of uniting society as a whole – be it religious faith, or any other form of attachment to the community in existence – no law has ever been sustainable, either in the past or in the present. And it was finally the jurisprudence of the U.S. Supreme Court that allowed for the self-destructive scandal of allowing the removal of the last support, the idea of common authority that could still ultimately be invoked. This has since led to the precarious instability (Bork, 1997; further Varga, 2012) of law in the United States of America. While the linguistic formulation may seem archaic, our ancestors clearly saw that the law only has the power to place special emphasis on something that already exists, using its own additional tools and institutional background to reinforce it (Varga, 1986). Or, as the progressive statesman József Eötvös wrote: "The infinite power vested in the state is sufficient wherever great effort is required at a singular point; but nowhere is it sufficient where many kinds of different activities are required" (Eötvös, 1854, p. 29). This is because society is not sustained by some demiurge, but by the cooperation of many actors, and the aligned values and skills developed through cooperation. So, even if the once fashionable Catholic author may have intended his aphorism as a paradox – "A virtuous nation would survive longer without laws than an immoral one with the most perfect laws" (Leroy, 1872–1873, p. 899) – today, there is an increasing sense among an ever-widening group of people that he was right.

Regardless of the many unexpected twists and turns in the civilisational collapse we are currently experiencing, the United States continues to dictate norm fetishisation and the almost irrational extremity of the faith in rationality underpinning it (cf. Varga, 2013). It is strange to acknowledge, then, how different the ancient roots of these ideas and the traditions they engendered were. In the practice of Roman law, acknowledged as a perfect system of rules, "the authority of the jurist was a more important source of law than the reason or basis for the decision", with the same wisdom pervading early canon law as well: "If the judge is cautious," the saying went, "he will not give reasons."[10] It was precisely in this tradition that the development of European – and within it, English – law matured. The jurisprudence of the European continent was in fact relatively late to break with this tradition, in the aftermath of the great codifications.[11] This tradition and jurisprudence has long relied on ancient and medieval authorities (the Bible, the Church Fathers, Aristotle and Justinian), with its English version also adding five classical books (from the 12th–18th centuries) (Pound, 1939, pp. 34; 35–36; Lévy-Ullmann, 1935). It was only quite recently, in the era of globalisation, that further non-mandatory but "persuasive authorities" were added.[12]

Thus, ever since the ancient beginnings, authority has permeated the law. This has continued almost to this day, and it is almost the same authority that conveyed its content. This is because, in live proceedings "orators appealed to the authority of tradition and to the idealistic intentions of the ancient law-givers in the midst of their courtroom speeches. Reference to the substance of the laws was only one of many rhetorical resources available

[10] "Stat pro ratione auctoritas" [authority rests on the will] the decision stated, and canon law wisdom says "si cautus sit iudex, nullam causam exprimet" (Godding, 1978, p. 48).

[11] This occurred in 1810 in France, and 1877 in Germany (Schluchter, 1981, pp. 82–138; Bergholtz, 1989).

[12] In Anglo–American law, this means "the extensive use of foreign, non-binding sources" (Glenn, 1987, p. 261).

to them." Which means that the law was of course present, but mostly in the guise of an authoritarian solution. "It is as if, in all these cases, the law and its proponents seek the sanction and authority of something or someone transcendent, who stands above and beyond the activities of the known law-makers", where "in many cases it is also the sense of a higher order that provides the basis for commitment to the law—as an interpretation of the words of God, or of Vedic principles, as the reflection of immemorial custom, the legacy of a heroic ancestor, or simply as a guarantor of life and liberty" (Pirie, 2013, pp. 117, 126, 129).

In the modern world of rationalism, of course, the mockery of authority has long become commonplace. And Bentham, for example (1952, pp. 17–42, 26–29, 34–42) – who showed constructive intent in many other respects – encouraged the mockery: his view was that this was all merely the result of different practices of earlier times, or the opinions of others, rife with abuse, with jurists and ecclesiastics playing a leading role in the said abuses back then. In contrast to this arrogant point of view, a more balanced, even defensible, assessment is reflected in the current situation, according to which, essentially "the authority based on traditions and bureaucratic hierarchy has been replaced by functional authority" (Kiss, 1969, p. 507). In the light of which we can also agree that "the objective is the maximization of rational processes and the restriction of authority to minimal requirements. But conformity is far from being purely rational and if the robes, flags and insignia of office make authority more effective, due allowance must be made" (Hall, 1958, p. 102).

In summary and conclusion, a few closing thoughts are worth mentioning here.

For it does indeed appear from conceptual analyses and scholarly studies that authority is not only a virtually ubiquitous and massively dominant feature of social movements and arrangements, and one of the most fundamental tools in the service of social integration, but that its destabilisation is also a seismograph-like indicator of social disruptions and, occasionally, cataclysms.

Our story of ideals is not simply about glory. Far from it. From the earliest times to the present, we have also perceived the weakness of world religions aspiring to absolutism, of forms of would-be rulership collapsing inflexibly into their own axioms. But authority is never for its own sake. By default, it is justified by the surplus value that it brings. And that is as it should be. Its development and refinement are therefore a natural phenomenon in itself. In the longer term, this may naturally entail not only changes but also the transcending of previously established forms. It is not simply a question of who is behind it, or what type of thought or even impulse motivates it. For if authority is indeed such a widespread and necessary social option, a tool for governing and civilising, which can nevertheless successfully guide our personal choices in certain directions, then we must guard it against the dictates of trends and fashions, against being shaped at will, against warping.

Regarding public administration, our law students learn early on how different it is to control a tiny rowboat, capable of reacting instantly to sudden movements, from steering a huge ocean liner, whose overwhelming mass cannot be controlled except by infinitely slow and subtle shifts in the rudder, the speed and so on. Because – and this is

perhaps the most important lesson on the question of authority – any steering move larger than what is strictly necessary can result in an imbalance and a loss of control, leading to the irresistible approach of disaster.

References

Alibašić, H. (2025). Administrative Legacy of Ibn Khaldûn: A Comparative Study of Historical Influences in Contemporary Governance Practices. *Institutiones Administrationis. Journal of Administrative Sciences, 5*(1), 25–49. Online: https://doi.org/10.54201/iajas.142

András, E. (2020). Hatalmi konstrukció: a kánon [Construct of Power: The Canon]. *Műértő, 23*(2), 7–8. Online https://amu.hvg.hu/2022/02/22/kanon/

Arendt, H. (1954). *What Is Authority?* Online: https://tinyurl.com/32pkxzka

Arendt, H. (1958). What Was Authority? In C. J. Friedrich (Ed.), *Authority. Nomos 1* (pp. 81–112). Harvard University Press.

Balázs, Á. (2013). Tekintély, autoriter hatalom és zsarnokság [Authority, Authoritarian Power and Tyranny]. *Élet és Irodalom, 57*(3).

Bentham, J. (1952). *Handbook of Political Fallacies* [Book of Fallacies (1824) rev. ed. H. A. Larrabee] (pp. 17–42). Johns Hopkins University Press.

Berggrav, E. (1951). Authority. In *Man and State* (pp. 97–113). Trans. by G. Aus. Muhlenberg Press.

Bergholtz, G. (1989). Ratio et Auctoritas: A Comparative Study of the Significance of Reasoned Decisions with Special Reference to Civil Cases. *Scandinavian Studies in Law, 33,* 11–48.

Bjarup, J. (1978). *Skandinavischer Realismus: Hägerström–Lundstedt–Olivecrona–Ross.* Karl Alber.

Bork, R. H. (1997). *Slouching towards Gomorrah. Modern Liberalism and American Decline.* Regan Books.

Connolly, W. E. (1987). Modern Authority and Ambiguity. *Nomos, 29,* 9–27. Online: https://www.jstor.org/stable/24219336

De George, R. T. (1970). The Function and Limits of Epistemic Authority. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy, 8*(2–3), 199–204. Online: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1970.tb02110.x

De George, R. T. (1978). Anarchism and Authority. In J. R. Pennock & J. W. Chapman (Eds.), *Anarchism. Nomos XIX* (pp. 91–110). University of New York Press.

Eötvös, J. (1854). *A XIX. század uralkodó eszméinek befolyása az álladalomra.* Vol. II. Emich Nyomda. Online: https://mek.oszk.hu/06600/06619/

Faralli, C. (1982). Diritto e magia: Saggio su Axel Hägerström. In E. Pattaro (Ed.), *Contributi al realismo giuridico* (pp. 1–166). Giuffrè.

Farkas, K. (2000). Aura és tekintély [Aura and Authority]. In *Fekete nap. Publicisztikák* (pp. 71–73). Oktatási és Továbbképzési Központ Alapítvány.

Ferenczy, Gy. (1874). Tekintély és törvény [Authority and Law]. *Magyar Sion, 5*(12), 891–906.

Friedrich, C. J. (1954). Loyalty and Authority. *Confluence, 3*(3), 307–316.

Glenn, H. P. (1987). Persuasive Authority. *McGill Law Journal, 32*(2), 261–298.

Godding, P. (1978). Jurisprudence et motivation des sentences, du Moyen Âge à la fin du 18^{e} siècle. In C. Perelman & P. Foriers (Eds.), *La motivation des décisions de justice* (pp. 37–67). Établissements Émile Bruylant.

Gombár, Cs. (2009). Kozárdi meanderezés 2. (Kacskaringók a tekintély fogalma körül) [Meanderings from Kozárd 2 (Explorations Around the Concept of Authority)]. *Kritika, 38*(6), 6–9.

Hall, J. (1958). Authority. In *Studies in Jurisprudence and Criminal Theory* (pp. 95–102). Oceana Publications.

Hoebel, E. A. (1958). Authority in Primitive Societies. In C. J. Friedrich (Ed.), *Authority. Nomos 1* (pp. 222–234). Harvard University Press.

Horváth, S. (1942). Emberi és isteni tekintély [Human and Divine Authority]. *Bölcseleti Közlemények, 8,* 19–48.

Iskin, R. E. (Ed.). (2017). *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon. Perspectives in a Global World.* Routledge. Online: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315639772

Karsai, F. (1998). Gondolatok a professzori tekintély alakulásáról – Hutyrától napjainkig [Reflections on the Evolution of Professorial Authority – From Hutyra to the Present Day]. *Magyar Állatorvosok Lapja, 120*(9), 561–566.

Kern, F. (1939). *Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages.* Vol. I–II. Blackwell.

Kiss, G. (1969). A tekintély ellen [Against Authority]. *Új Látóhatár, 12*(6), 505–512.

Krawietz, W. (1984). Die Lehre vom Stufenbau des Rechts – eine säkularisierte politische Theologie? In W. Krawietz & H. Schelsky (Eds.), *Rechtssystem und gesellschaftliche Basis bei Hans Kelsen* (pp. 255–272). Duncker & Humblot.

Kulcsár Szabó, E. (2019). Kánon és befolyás (Az irodalmi autoritás kérdéséhez) [Canon and Influence (On the Question of Literary Authority)]. *Alföld, 70*(10), 33–49. Online http://publikacio.uni-eszterhazy.hu/7127/

Leroy, L. (1872–1873). *A történelem katholikus bölcsészete vagy A nemzetek Krisztusért és egyházért.* Trans. A Pesti Növendékpapság Magyar Egyházirodalmi Iskolája. Hunyadi Nyomda [(1866). *Philosophie catholique de l'histoire ou, les nations pour le Christ et l'Église,* 5ème éd. V. Palmé]

Lévy-Ullmann, H. (1935). Books of Authority. In his *English Legal Tradition, Its Sources and History* (pp. 127–168). Macmillan.

L'Heureux-Dubé, C. (1993). By Reason of Authority or by Authority of Reason. *University of British Columbia Law Review, 27*(1), 1–18.

Liebrecht, J. (2016). *Fritz Kern und das* gute alte Recht: *Geistesgeschichte als neuer Zugang für die Mediävistik.* Klostermann.

Malinowski, B. (1944). *Freedom and Civilization.* Roy Publishers.

Oppenheim, A. L. (1977). *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization* (rev. ed.). The University of Chicago Press. Online https://oi.uchicago.edu/sites/oi.uchicago.edu/fi les/uploads/shared/docs/ancient_mesopotamia.pdf

Perry, G. & Cunningham, C. (Eds.) (1999). *Academies, Museums and Canons of Art.* Yale University Press.

Papp, E. (2013). A nemzeti irodalmi kánon szükségességéről [On the Need for a National Literary Canon]. *Hitel, 26*(5), 53–59. Online https://epa.oszk.hu/01300/01343/00136/pdf/EPA01343_hitel_ 2013_05-053-059.pdf

Pirie, F. (2013). Ideals, Tradition, and Authority. In *The Anthropology of Law* (pp. 106–130). Oxford University Press.

Pound, R. (1939). The Idea of Authority. In *Jubilee Law Lectures, 1889–1939, School of Law, The Catholic University of America* (pp. 26–36). Catholic University of America Press.

Riga, P. J. (1996). Authority in Morality. *American Journal of Jurisprudence, 41*(1), 307–314. Online: https://doi.org/10.1093/ajj/41.1.307

Schluchter, W. (1981). *The Rise of Western Rationalism. Max Weber's Developmental History.* Trans. by G. Roth. University of California Press.

Schröder, A., Busse, U. & Schneider, R. (Eds.). (2012). *Codification, Canons and Curricula. Description and Prescription in Language and Literature.* Aisthesis.

Sennett, R. (1993). *Authority.* W. W. Norton.

Simon, Y. R. (1962). *A General Theory of Authority.* University of Notre Dame Press.

Surányi, J. (1895). Az állami tekintély erkölcsi alapja [The Moral Basis of State Authority]. *Bölcseleti Folyóirat, 10,* 337–355.

Szegedy-Maszák, M. (1995). A kánonok szerepe az összehasonlító kutatásokban [The Role of Canons in Comparative Research]. *Irodalomtörténet, 76*(1), 5–36. Online: http://www.irodalomtortenet.hu/pdf/IT_1995-1.pdf

Tetsuya, S. (2012). *Entre foi et raison: l'autorité – Études pascaliennes.* Honoré Champion. Online: https://www.penseesdepascal.fr/General/Autorite.php

Varga, Cs. (1986). Macrosociological Theories of Law: A Survey and Appraisal. *Tidskrift för Rättssociologi, 3*(3–4), 165–198. Online: http://journals.lub.lu.se/index.php/trs/article/view/8894/8001

Varga, Cs. (1999). A bécsi iskola [The Vienna School]. In Cs. Varga (Ed.), *Jogbölcselet: XIX–XX. század – Előadások* (pp. 60–68). Szent István Társulat.

Varga, Cs. (2005). Legal Traditions? In Search for Families and Cultures of Law. *Acta Juridica Hungarica, 46*(3–4), 177–197. Online: https://doi.org/10.1556/AJur.46.2005.3-4.2

Varga, Cs. (2011). *Codification as a Socio-historical Phenomenon* (2nd ed.). Szent István Társulat. Online: http://real.mtak.hu/163798/

Varga, Cs. (2012). Humanity Elevating Themselves? Dilemmas of Rationalism in our Age. In his *Comparative Legal Cultures. On Traditions Classified, their Rapprochement & Transfer, and the Anarchy of Hyper-rationalism* (pp. 131–163). Szent István Társulat. Online: http://real.mtak.hu/163799/

Varga, Cs. (2013). Legal Mentality as a Component of Law: Rationality Driven into Anarchy in America. *Curentul Juridic, 52,* 63–77. Online: https://tinyurl.com/bvzswxxu

Varga, Cs. (2021). Politikai filozófia – konzervativizmus – mindennapi cselekvés [Political Philosophy – Conservatism – Everyday Action]. In Zs. Peres & G. Pál (Eds.), *Ünnepi tanulmányok a 80 éves Tamás András tiszteletére: Semper ad perfectum* (pp. 717–727). Ludovika Egyetemi Kiadó. Online: https://zenodo.org/records/13828088

Warburton, W. (1736). *Divine Legation of Moses, Demonstrated on the Principles of a Religious Deist.* Vol. I–II. London.

Warburton, W. (1737–1741). *Alliance between Church and State: or, the Necessity and Equity of an Established Religion and a Test-law Demonstrated, From the Essence and End of Civil Society, upon the Fundamental Principles of the Law of Nature and Nations.* Fletcher Gyles.

Wołpiuk, W. J. (2019). Władza a kultura [Culture and Authority]. *Krytyka Prawa: Niezalezne Studia nad Prawem, 11*(1), 335–360. Online: https://doi.org/10.7206/kp.2080-1084.288