Authority and Relational Reasons

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Introduction

Practical relations of authority are pervasive. Bosses claim authority over employees; parents over their children; and state officials over their subjects. Such claim requires that one party’s say-so, as such, generate not just reasons for action, but duties, making it wrong, typically, for the subject of authority to act otherwise than as directed. But this claim is puzzling: how can someone’s say-so, as such, generate duties on another?

My aim in this paper is to show that a relational account of practical authority can offer a compelling solution of this puzzle. On a relational account, authority is grounded in what I shall call the acting-on-behalf-of relation, where one agent empowers another to act on her behalf. If so, authority-based reasons will be relational reasons, that is, reasons for action generated by the structure and exercise of the relationship itself, rather than reasons tracking some independent non-relational normative fact. The relational solution, then, is to maintain that someone’s say-so, as such, generates duties only on two conditions. First, the background relation of acting-on-behalf-of must be in place, and second the specific directive cannot contravene the normative basis of the relation, namely, the equal dignity or moral status of moral agents. In a word, legitimate authority generates duties not because authorities are helpful tools for mediating between agents and the reasons such agents already have (as in Raz’s influential service account), but rather because authority is a fundamental expression of our interdependence as rational creatures.

Since the chief focus of this paper is a puzzle about the connection between authority and reasons for action, I focus here only on the elementary conceptual structure of a relational account of authority and stop short of offering a comprehensive account of legal and political authority. Solving the puzzle for the interpersonal case can clear the ground for making legal and political authority more tractable.

1 A Puzzle about Authority and Reasons

1 For helpful feedback on a previous draft, I am indebted to Chris Essert, and Jacob Weinrib.
Let me begin by showing why authority has seemed puzzling and how some of the principal strategies for accounting for authority have not yet offered a compelling solution to the puzzle.

It will be helpful to begin by introducing a working notion of authority.

\( A \) has authority over \( B \) if, and only if,

1. Right. \( A \) has a right to be in charge of \( B \).
2. Directive. \( A \) issues a directive to \( B \) that \( B \) should (not) \( \varphi \).
3. Duty. \( B \) has a duty to (not) \( \varphi \).\(^2\)

The basic idea is that if you are in a position of authority, you have a right to be in charge of another (a right to rule), such that when you issue a directive the other is now duty-bound to (not) act as directed. To say that a boss has authority over an employee is then to say that the boss has a right to be in charge of the employee such that when boss issues a directive (prepare the balance sheet, sell shares in a company) the employee is duty-bound to act as directed.

A key feature of authority, as H.L.A. Hart put it, is that authoritative directives are supposed to be content-independent. Directives are supposed to bind regardless of the content of the directive (Hart 1982: 254). In drawing this distinction, Hart was giving expression to the old distinction between counsels and commands. While counsels provide reasons due to the merits of the content of the recommendation, commands are supposed to generate reasons for action regardless of the content of the command. With command, it is someone’s say-so that generates a reason for action in another. If you follow an authoritative directive simply because you find it independently correct, then you are not yet following an authoritative directive. As Robert Wolff put the same point, authority is vested in persons, not in the content of the reasons. And so, if there are authoritative directives, they bind individuals through the say-so of others, not through the correctness of the content of the directive (Wolff 1998: 6).

This sketch of the notion of authority suffices to articulate a puzzle. Assuming all moral agents have a basic equal moral status, how is it possible for some to be in charge of others? And, more generally, how can someone’s mere say-so constitute a binding directive on another independently of the merits of the directive’s content?\(^3\)

\(^2\) Raz, for instance, endorses these three conditions (2009: 134). See also Shapiro (2004: 294), and Wolff (1998: 4).

\(^3\) There is a related metaphysical puzzle about how someone’s say-so can create reasons in the first place, much as with promising there is a puzzle about how my words can bring
One solution is to deny (1) and debunk the notion that authority involves a right to rule (Enoch 2014: §7). If no one has a right to rule others, then the exercise of authority need not be incompatible with our equal moral status. But even if we deny (1), the puzzle remains: how can someone’s mere say-so bind another under a duty?1

A second solution is to deny (3): authoritative directives do not issue in duties. For instance, Robert Ladenson has pursued this line by arguing that authority involves what he calls a *justification-right*, a right justifying one’s own conduct rather than pressing a claim on the conduct of another.2 On this picture, authoritative directives do not generate obligations; they are nothing more than threats backed by sanctions.3

Yet, Ladenson’s strategy is now widely discredited for a chief reason: deprived of the power to generate duties, the concept of authority becomes unrecognizable.4 A boss whose directives do not bind her employees or a sergeant whose directives do not bind her subordinates are hardly recognizable instances of authority.

Perhaps the most influential strategy is Joseph Raz’s service conception of authority, according to which legitimate authorities generate reasons for action in virtue of the fact that they offer the service of helping individual agents act more successfully in accordance with the reasons they already have.

The service conception has three main elements. First, the dependence thesis maintains that authoritative directives depend on prior reasons, that is, reasons the addressee of the directive has independently of the directive itself (Raz 1986: 47). Second, the normal justification thesis maintains that:

> the normal way to establish that a person has authority over another person involves showing that the alleged subject is likely to comply with reasons *which apply to him* (other than the alleged authoritative directives) if he accepts the directives of the alleged authority as authoritatively binding and tries to follow

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1 Indeed, Enoch does not debunk the notion of a right to rule to solve the normative puzzle of authority, for he thinks, rightly in my view, that debunking such a right does not solve the puzzle.

2 “The right to rule is such a justification right. That is to say, strong reasons can be advanced for holding that possession of the governmental power and acceptance by those one presumes to govern of its exercise jointly constitute a justification for coercive acts which would otherwise be immoral.” (1980: 139)

3 I shall take the terms ‘obligation’ and ‘duty’ to be equivalent throughout this paper.

4 For a lucid rebuttal of Ladenson’s account, see Shapiro (2004: 396-398).
Raz’s point is that a directive is authoritative only when individuals are more likely to act in accordance with the reasons they already have by following the authority than by deliberating on their own. Together, these two theses are supposed to entail the preemptive thesis, namely, that when the dependence and normal justification theses are satisfied, then an authority generates preemptive reasons for action.

Raz analyses the notion of a preemptive reason by means of a distinction between two levels of reasons: first-order reasons are considerations in favor or against a particular course of action, while second-order reasons are considerations in favor or against having certain first-order reasons. While first-order reasons override competing first-order reasons in virtue of their greater comparative weight, second-order reasons like exclusionary reasons do not so much override competing first-order as exclude them from the field of action. This difference means that conflicts between first- and second-order reasons are not solved by determining where the balance of reasons lies. Instead, in such a conflict, the mere presence of exclusionary reasons means that such reasons always prevail. Preemptive reasons, for Raz, are the combination of first-order reasons to act in a certain way coupled with exclusionary reasons that replace or exclude competing first-order reasons.

The service conception offers an elegant solution to our puzzle. It is not that someone’s mere say-so as such generates preemptive reasons. Rather, someone’s say-so generates preemptive reasons only when the authority acts in the service of the reasons you already have. To illustrate, consider the case of an institution, such as Disneyland, setting the speed to the seemingly arbitrary limit of 14 miles per hour. On the service account, Disneyland would have the authority to do so only if two facts obtained. First, drivers have dependent reasons to drive around safely, reasons they have independently of Disneyland’s specific directive.

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8 “Such conflicts are resolved not by the strength of the competing reasons but by a general principle of practical reasoning which determines that exclusionary reasons always prevail, when in conflict with first-order reasons.” (Raz 1975: 40)

9 So understood, preemptive reasons differ from Hart’s understanding of peremptory reasons. A peremptory reason is a reason not to deliberate about competing reasons. An exclusionary reason replaces competing first-order reasons and so is a reason not to act on the excluded first-order reasons. But exclusionary reasons do not prevent deliberation about competing considerations. And so, when your boss tells you to sell the shares, if this is a preemptive reason, you may deliberate about the advantages of not selling, but you may not act differently than instructed. For Hart’s view of peremptory reasons, see Hart (1982: 253-254). For Raz’s distinction between peremptory and exclusionary reasons, see Raz (1986: 39)
Second, drivers could act in accordance with these reasons and so drive around safely if they followed a single, publicly set rule rather than if each drove around deliberating about the optimal speed. If Disneyland’s directive met these two conditions, its speed limit would generate a preemptive reason for drivers to comply with the 14 mph directive.

However, as commentators have identified, the service conception faces two basic difficulties. First, as Raz acknowledges, the service conception can warrant at best a piece-meal approach to authority: directives will bind individuals differently depending on the individuals’ pre-existing reasons and varying degrees of knowledge. To use Raz’s example, if a government agency issues a directive concerning a certain medication, that directive would bind me, someone ignorant in pharmacological matters, differently from the way it would bind an expert pharmacologist. (Raz 1986: 74) This is because the directive would fail the normal justification thesis when applied to the pharmacologist: she will likely do better following her own judgment than that of a rusty bureaucracy.

Raz acknowledges that this conclusion is in tension with the intuitive idea that an authority claims to bind equally all those subject to it, but seems to think this is a problem for traditional claims made on behalf of authority, not for the service conception. However, the traditional picture that the authoritative character of directives need not depend on the varying degrees of knowledge of addressees seems to capture something essential about authority. If Disneyland’s 14mph speed limit is authoritative, it should bind all drivers equally, regardless of their varying knowledge of road-safety matters. If a sergeant’s directive to do ten push-ups is authoritative, it should bind all subordinate soldiers equally, regardless of their varying degrees of knowledge about fitness matters. And so, if the service conception can justify, at best, a piece-meal approach to authority, that counts as a reason against the service conception.

Second, as Stephen Darwall has argued (2013a,b), the service conception fails because the dependence and normal justification theses do not entail the preemption thesis. To show the problem, let me offer a
variation of an example due to Darwall. Suppose that you want to find a partner and so sign up to a dating app on your phone, an app with an exceedingly good record of matching people. Moments after you sign up, the app generates the following message: “You are to meet A next Wednesday evening”. The app’s directive appears to satisfy the dependence thesis (for it directs you to act on reasons to date others that you already had) and the normal justification thesis (for, we are supposing, in following the app’s direction you are more likely to find a partner than if you kept looking on your own). And yet, it is implausible to suppose that you are now duty-bound to meet with A next Wednesday evening. Darwall puts the point nicely: at best, you might be foolish not to follow the directive, but you are clearly not duty-bound to do so. If satisfying the two basic conditions of the service conception nonetheless does not generate preemptive reasons, then the service conception is powerless to explain authority.

These objections seem forceful enough to warrant exploring an alternative solution to the puzzle. The remainder of this paper develops a relational account of authority that promises to solve our puzzle. The next three sections articulate three elements of a relational account of authority: the symmetrical basic structure of our moral world (§2), the permissibility of the asymmetrical acting-on-behalf-of relation (§3), and the relational reasons constitutive of such relation (§4). Against this conceptual background, I articulate a relational account of authority (§5) and show how it solves the puzzle (§6). I sharpen this solution by showing how authority requires neither of the two pillars of the service conception and so how a relational account avoids the two objections to the service conception (§7). I conclude by anticipating three objections to the relational account (§§8-10).

2 Symmetry and Asymmetry in Moral Relations

To begin to articulate the alternative account, I want to explore further a basic condition of the possibility of our puzzle.

Let us imagine a world – call it Superiorsville – where there are two classes of moral status. In Superiorsville, all agents belong innately to one status or the other. Further, the two sorts of status are ordered hierarchically, one higher or superior to the other. The superiority of one sort of agent over another manifests itself in clusters of moral relations. The superiors – as they are known – have basic claims against and powers over the inferiors that the inferiors lack. At the same time, the

Darwall develops the example of an “authority alarm clock” to show how in following the alarm clock’s directive you would be acting in conformity with the dependence thesis and normal justification thesis, and yet we would not say that the alarm clock has authority over you. Darwall (2013b: 160-163). For further discussion of these arguments and a related example, see Hershovitz (2011: 6-10).
inferiors owe duties to the superiors that the superiors lack. As a result, as far as their basic moral relations go, members of each sort of status are symmetrically situated vis-à-vis each other and asymmetrically situated vis-à-vis members of the other class.

Given the moral structure of Superiorsville, one of its features could be that superiors have certain rights to rule inferiors. Members of the superior sort may then, through their mere say-so, bind inferiors to a number of duties, such as paying dues for moving around, for using the land, or for participating in the market. The basic asymmetry in the two classes would also manifest itself in more personal ways, with inferiors having duties to express their deference and respect to superiors, such as bowing in their presence or always asking for things deferentially, as proper ways of publicly marking the asymmetry in their relation. Naturally, superiors would lack such duties, perhaps being entitled to ignore the standing and presence of inferiors.

Superiorsville, then, lets us articulate a potential ground for authority relations: the intrinsic superior status of some agents over others. Superiors would have an innate right to rule inferiors such that their directives, simply as such, would presumptively generate duties of action on inferiors. And yet, the account made available by Superiorsville succeeds only by ignoring the puzzle. The thought that someone’s directives could generate on you a duty is puzzling precisely because we assume that no one has an intrinsically superior moral standing.

More precisely, we have been assuming that our moral world is fundamentally different from Superiorsville. Our moral world — call it Equalia — is one where no moral agent has an innate power to rule over others. In Equalia there is only one basic sort of innate moral status, such that no agent is innately superior to any another. If so, Equalia is structured by a deep symmetry of moral standing. And that is exactly what generates our puzzle: if all moral agents are essentially symmetrically situated in Equalia, what could possibly warrant the fundamental asymmetry required by authority relations?

Framing the puzzle this way, I think, can open up space to begin to see its resolution. We would solve the puzzle by elaborating an account of how the basic symmetry structuring Equalia need not conflict with certain forms of asymmetrical relations, in particular the one required by authority relations. To do so, let us take a closer look at the members of Equalia.

3 Acting and the Acting-on-Behalf-of Relation

The members of Equalia, we are assuming, are like us in two fundamental respects: they are rational agents, and they are finite, i.e., organic and embodied.
The rational agency of Equalians, as we might call them, can be captured through the notion of a basic power to act, that is, a basic power to set and pursue ends. These agents set ends by identifying certain facts as reasons for action. Thus, my identifying the fact that it would be good to satisfy my hunger would set the satisfaction of my hunger as my end. Accordingly, I may pursue this end by choosing from a variety of means of satisfying my hunger, such as fetching the apple before me or making an omelet.

That Equalians get hungry reflects their finitude. Equalians are not simply rational, they are also organic and embodied. This sets Equalians apart from other possible rational beings, such as angels. Unlike Equalians, angels are not mortal, are unembodied, and so have no bodily needs – like satisfying hunger and thirst. For Equalians, then, the continued existence and maintenance of their basic organic functions is part of what is required for continuing and sustaining their rational agency. Moreover, at least for practical purposes, Equalians are not disembodied souls that happen, by accident, to be located in this or that organic body. The person of each Equalian is to be identified with a perduing and persisting organic body.

Although both of these features (rationality and finitude) might be disputed at some level of philosophical reflection, I take them to be sufficiently uncontroversial articulations of the picture presupposed about Equalia. When we ask about the nature of authority, we are asking a question about the normative coherence of a relation we are supposed to inhabit. And for the purposes of an inquiry into the possibility of authority, it seems safe to assume that the we in question makes implicit reference to finite rational agents with a single innate moral status.

Let us then ask a further question: under what conditions, if any, would it be permissible for Equalians to inhabit asymmetrical relations? Perhaps under some conditions, such as if all Equalians were angels, asymmetrical relations would always be impermissible. Any type of interaction that would introduce asymmetry among angels might be seen as in conflict with their symmetrical basic moral status.

Be that as it may with angels, that could not be the case of our finite Equalians. This, I am thinking, is for a basic reason: the finite nature of Equalians means that without asymmetrical relations, their basic powers of action could not be fully realized.\footnote{15}

\footnote{14 More on reasons for action in the next section.}

\footnote{15 The basic idea is that for agents like us relations of interdependence are not necessarily hindrances to our powers of agency but can be fundamental manifestations of such a power. Seana Shiffrin, as I read her, makes this point in the context of the importance of sincerity in communication (Shiffrin 2014). Barbara Herman, as I read her, makes this point, for instance, in the context of articulating the grounds of our duties of mutual aid (Herman 1993: 45-72).}
I would like to focus on one specific kind of asymmetrical relation, one I shall call the *acting-on-behalf-of* relation. This is a relation whereby one agent is empowered to act on behalf of another in a given domain of activity. In order for me to exercise my basic powers of agency within the constraints of my finite constitution, I may enter into relations with others that empowers them to act on my behalf. My limited cooking skills may mean that I enter a relation empowering you to cook for me. My limited knowledge of medical matters may mean that I enter into a relation empowering you to heal me. My limited knowledge of financial matters may mean that I enter into a relation empowering you to invest for me. The *acting-on-behalf-of* relation expands the exercise of one’s powers of agency by empowering another to act on one’s behalf.

However, the *acting-on-behalf-of* relation represents two fundamental ways in which such relation may be inconsistent with the basic moral status of members of Equalia. We may see this point by considering the figure of the slave. On the one hand, one agent’s empowering of another could not amount to a wholesale renunciation of agency. A master’s *acting on behalf* of the slave, for instance, by deciding what kind of and how much work the slave is to perform, where the slave is to live, etc. cannot be consistent with the slave’s equal moral status. The empowerment of another must stop short of wholesale renunciation of personality. On the other hand, empowering the other to act cannot turn the empowered agent itself into a tool at the discretion of the principal agent. The fact that you get to cook for me or heal me cannot collapse into your becoming my servant. In order to prevent the collapse of the *acting-on-behalf-of* relation into the nightmare of Superiorsville, then, two kinds of normative constraints must be in place.

The first concerns the domain of activity that is the subject matter of empowerment. The domain of activity must be limited rather than wholesale. If one agent empowers another to act on all possible domains of activity, empowerment becomes disempowerment, the renunciation of personality. Still, there is indeed ample conceptual space for empowerment without renunciation of personality. When I enter into the *acting-on-behalf-of* relation with cooks, doctors, or financial trustees, I do not renounce my personality wholesale precisely because I empower others to act in a specific domain of activity (cooking, health, financial matters). At the same time, and from the other direction, when I empower you to act on my behalf, you do not become a simple tool for my purposes because the scope of the relation is limited. You are empowered to act on my behalf in pursuing my ends without becoming a mere means to my ends. Put differently, by restricting the domain of activity that is the subject of empowerment, each party can preserve its basic claim to respect as an equal member of Equalia.

A second constraint is that one agent’s empowerment of another can be consistent with their equal status only when the empowered agent
is understood to act under a fiduciary duty owed to the principal. My empowering you to act on my behalf does not amount to a renunciation of personality because the scope of your empowerment is limited precisely by the nature of the relation: you are entitled to act only in ways that further my own agency.

To be clear, my argument here is not the ambitious one that the acting-on-behalf-of relation is a necessary element of the basic structure of Equalia – although that may be true. Rather, my argument is more modest. The asymmetrical acting-on-behalf-of relation is permissible (rather than required) when it satisfies two normative constraints: (1) the domain of activity is restricted, and (2) the empowered party is bound to the principal under a fiduciary duty, permitting action by agent only when it is objectively understood as furthering the agency of principal. If the two conditions obtain, I see no reason why the acting-on-behalf-of relation could not be a part of Equalia.

To clarify the nature of the acting-on-behalf-of relation, it may be helpful to make two further remarks, one concerning benefits, the other concerning consent.

First, the acting-on-behalf-of relation is different from the relation of one agent benefiting another, since benefiting is neither necessary nor sufficient for the acting-on-behalf-of relation. It is not sufficient because you may benefit me without thereby becoming my agent. For instance, the fact that you closing your competing business benefits me does not thereby establish that, in closing your business, you were acting as my agent. And benefitting is not necessary. Suppose that as your financial trustee, I may have specific instructions to invest your funds exclusively away from fossil fuels or from any industry that might contribute to global warming. The fact that I know ways of increasing your returns – and thereby benefitting you more – by investing in fossil fuel related corporations does not entitle me to do so.

Second, an appealing way to find the acting-on-behalf-of relation permissible is to seek to ground it in consent. But it is important to see that this appealing idea is misleading. The structure of acting-on-behalf-of does not fit neatly into the structure of consent precisely because the relation can warrant actions without the mediation of consent.

Suppose I, a doctor, go for a walk and find someone, David, lying unconscious on the ground, a tree having crushed his leg.16 It quickly becomes evident that unless David’s leg is amputated straightaway, David will die. Is it permissible for me to proceed? Why? As Thompson argues, one key factor is David’s moral and religious beliefs, such as whether he is a Jehova’s witness. But once these facts are settled, what does the moral work in determining whether I may amputate David’s leg

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16 This is Thomson’s example (1990: 187-188) and her point that hypothetical consent is neither necessary nor sufficient for permissibility.
is not David’s consent. As a general matter, David’s consent is not sufficient for permissibility, as the impermissibility of consensual murder seems to show. And as this case brings out, consent, even hypothetical, is not always necessary. If so, what does the moral work in warranting the permissibility of intervention is not the simple hypothetical fact that David would consent but the complex fact that (i) David will die unless I intervene surgically, (ii) there is no reason to believe that David’s religious beliefs would prevent any such surgical intervention, and (iii) the situation can be objectively understood as one where David and I are locked into the nexus of the acting-on-behalf-of relation.\(^\text{17}\) The acting-on-behalf-of relation empowers me to act as David’s agent subject to its two normative constraints: my domain of action is restricted to those acts necessary to save David’s life, and my activity is restricted by my fiduciary duty to David, in this case sustaining the continuity of David’s powers of action by keeping him alive.

In sum, the acting-on-behalf-of relation is asymmetrical, empowering one agent to act on behalf of another. So long as the acting-on-behalf-of relation meets the two normative constraints regarding (i) a restricted domain of activity and (ii) the fiduciary structure of sustaining the agency of the other, the asymmetrical acting-on-behalf-of relation is compatible with the symmetrical moral status of members of Equalia. In other words, far from hindering the powers of agency of Equalians, this relation furthers these powers by making their exercise possible.

4 Relational Reasons

Suppose, then, that members of Equalia frequently find themselves locked into the nexus of the acting-on-behalf-of relation. When an empowered agent issues a directive to the empowering agent, what kind of reason, if any, would it generate? To understand the nature of these reasons, I would like to introduce the more general notion of a relational reason.

Let us begin with the general notion of a reason for action. Joseph Raz understands the basic form of practical reasons as relations between facts and persons (Raz 1999: 19). Accordingly, if we take the operator ‘\(R(\phi)\)’ as a reason for \(\phi\)-ing, then we can represent the basic form of a reason for action as follows:

\[ R(\phi)_{p,x} \]

\(^{17}\) The first two conditions are Thomson’s. The third is my addition.
where $p$ ranges over facts and $x$ over persons. And so $R(\phi)p,x$ will be equivalent to ‘there is a fact $p$ such that it is a reason for $x$ to $\phi$’ (Raz 1999: 20–21).

For our purposes, we can take for granted this basic notion of a reason for action. And yet, we should notice that this basic formulation admits of three fundamentally different readings: simple evaluative, simple deontic, and relational, as I shall call them. Each of these readings offers an interpretation of the kind of fact that generates a reason for action.

A simple evaluative judgment represents the goodness of a state of affairs.

It is good that $p$.

In its basic form, the evaluative judgment represents the intrinsic or non-derivative value of a state of affairs. Call the following an evaluative reason:

$R(\phi)\ [p \text{-goodness}] , x$.

An evaluative reason represents the fact that a state of affairs is intrinsically good (or bad) as a reason for action. If feeling intense pain is bad, that fact, for instance, would be a reason not to put your hand on an open flame.

A simple deontic judgment represents the rightness of an action-type.

It is right that $A \phi s$.

In its basic form, the deontic judgment represents the permissibility of a kind of action. Call the following a deontic reason:

$R(\phi)\ [p \text{-rightness}] , x$.

A deontic reason represents the fact that a kind of action is permissible (or impermissible) as a reason for action. If breaking traffic rules is impermissible, then that fact, for instance, would be a reason for you not to do a rolling stop.

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18 For the competing view that reasons are best understood as items in pieces of reasoning rather than as relations between facts or events and attitudes, see Hieronymi (2005, ms.). The view of relational reasons I am about to introduce departs from the familiar model by making the agential power of rational thought paramount in our picture of reasons.
Note that the first two kinds of normative judgments, the simple evaluative and deontic judgments, represent, respectively, states of affairs or action-types. They do not necessarily represent interpersonal relations. And that is a loss. For relations to others can be a source of reasons not easily reducible to the mere goodness of states of affairs or the mere permissibility of action-types.

To see this, consider two paradigmatic relational practical concepts: directed duties and claims. If you have a directed duty to φ, then it is not only true of you that it is impermissible for you not to perform the action-type of φ-ing, it is also true that you owe this φ-ing to another. This distinction makes a difference. When you fail to act as required by a simple deontic judgment, you simply act wrongly. But when you fail to act as required by a directed duty, you violate the other’s claim. You wrong her. These latter relational thoughts are not contained in our simple evaluative or deontic judgments. And so, to capture them, we need to introduce a third form of practical judgment.

A practical relational judgment represents the significance of an interpersonal relation or the correlative claims and directed duties that constitute an interpersonal relation.

\[ A \text{ owes it to } B \text{ (not) to } \varphi. \]

Call the following a relational reason:

\[ R(\varphi)[x \ni y, x]. \]

A relational reason represents the fact that the agent stands in a relation to another as itself a reason for action for that agent. For instance, the fact that you have a claim against me – to respect your standing as a fellow Equalian, to not steal your smartphone, or to be sincere in my assertions – generates on me relational reasons for action. These reasons represent my duty in relation to you.

Now, relational reasons can characterize the structure of a cluster of normative incidents constitutive of relationships. For instance, arguably, relational reasons characterize the structure of friendship. The reasons of friendship are not plausibly understood as simple evaluative or simple deontic. Your reasons to keep in touch with your friends, to be interested in how they fare, or to want to do fun stuff with them are not just simple evaluative (because wanting to keep in touch is an intrinsic value) or simple deontic (because it is impermissible of me not to keep in touch). Rather, such reasons are best understood as relational (because that is what a friend does with another).

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19 For excellent discussion of directed duties and correlative claims, see May (2015). See also Darwall (2013c), Thompson (2004), Wallace (2015), and Zylberman (2014).
Be that as it may with friendship, I want to suggest that the reasons generated by the acting-on-behalf-of relation are essentially relational. The basic idea is that just as normative relationships like friendship are constituted by relational reasons representing the various claims and relational duties of the parties, so too the acting-on-behalf-of relation is constituted by relational reasons representing the various claims and duties of the parties.

Specifically, we can analyze the structure of the acting-on-behalf-of relation in terms of its constitutive relational reasons. First, the empowered agent has both a permission and a claim to act on behalf of empowering agent. If I, the doctor, am locked into the acting-on-behalf-of relation with David, I have both the permission and a claim to act on behalf of David, for instance, by deciding for David that he is to have his leg amputated. Second, having empowered another to act as agent, the empowering agent now has a duty, correlative to the empowered agent’s claim, to act in conformity with the other’s decision. In this case, David would have no reason to claim to have been wronged by me, the one who amputated his leg, although amputating another’s leg is typically abhorrent.

The acting-on-behalf-of relation, I am suggesting, is best understood as constituted by the relational reasons of both parties to the relation: it generates certain claims and permissions on empowered agent vis-à-vis the empowering agent, and it generates correlative relational duties on empowering agent.

To illustrate, consider another example of the acting-on-behalf-of relation, the relation between parents (Odysseus and Penelope) and a child (Telemachus). As I understand it, the parent relation is another instance of the acting-on-behalf-of relation, and so generates ordered, interlocking pairs of relational reasons taking this form:

\[ R(\phi)[\text{Penelope acts on behalf of Telemachus}], \text{Penelope}. \]
\[ R(\phi)[\text{Penelope acts on behalf of Telemachus}], \text{Telemachus}. \]

Viewed from the perspective of the *empowered agent*, the parent, Penelope has relational reasons to act on Telemachus’s behalf, for instance by making arrangements for Telemachus’s nutrition, education, and entertainment in certain ways. These are not simple evaluative or deontic reasons because they emanate from the *acting-on-behalf-of* relation. At the same time, viewed from the perspective of the *empowering agent*, the child, Telemachus has relational reasons to act in accordance with Penelope and Odysseus’s arrangements. Again, this is not because of reasons independent of the relation, such as independent facts making it good or required to act in accordance with the parents’ decision concerning nutrition, education, and entertainment. Rather, Penelope’s reasons for issuing directives to Telemachus are structured by her power to act on Telemachus’s behalf. At the same time, Telemachus’s reasons...
for acting in accordance with Penelope's directives are structured by his being objectively understood as having empowered Penelope to act on his behalf. The acting-on-behalf-of relation represents an articulated whole of relational reasons interlocking the powers of agency of the two parties.

5 Authority

With these three elements of a relational account in view (the symmetrical structure of Equalia, the permissibility of the asymmetrical acting-on-behalf-of relation, and the relational reasons constitutive of the relation), we can construct a novel account of authority. The basic idea is that authority relations are grounded in the acting-on-behalf-of relation.

First, the acting-on-behalf-of relation explains the normative basis of (1): an agent has the right to make decisions for another just in case both agents are linked through the acting-on-behalf-of relation. Conversely, where the acting-on-behalf-of relation is absent, there is no right to be in charge of another.

Second, an authoritative agent (one who has been empowered to act for another) can issue binding directives on another. When Penelope decides that young Telemachus is to study under a certain tutor, her decision is binding on Telemachus in virtue of the fact that Telemachus is linked to her mother through the acting-on-behalf-of relation.

And third, the binding directives enacted through the acting-on-behalf-of relation flower into a correlative duty on the part of the empowering agent. Telemachus does not simply have a reason to act in accordance with Penelope’s directive, he has a duty to do so.

What explains these three conceptual elements of authority, I am suggesting, is the relational reasons constitutive of the acting-on-behalf-of relation. The first element manifests a relational reason as a permission and a claim, the titles possessed by the empowered agent. The second element is parasitic on the first relational reason. The directive is not binding in virtue of its intrinsic features or of non-relational facts. For instance, suppose that Eurymachus, though deceitful, is quite knowledgeable concerning educational matters. The fact that Eurymachus has superior knowledge than Penelope on such matters does not establish that Eurymachus’s suggestions to Telemachus about his education generate binding directives. That is for the simple fact that Eurymachus is not linked to Telemachus through the acting-on-behalf-of relation. And finally what explains the fact that Telemachus does not have mere reasons but duties generated by Penelope’s directive is a relational reason too. Telemachus’s duty is a relational reason correlated to Penelope’s claim as empowered agent.

Moreover, the relational account expands the traditional picture of authority by clarifying the relational structure of the relation. On the
traditional picture, the right to make decisions for another coupled with a directive result in

\[(3) \text{ the addressee has a duty to (not) } \varphi.\]

The relational account expands this picture by clarifying that (3) is not a simple deontic but a relational reason, as follows:

\[(3') B \text{ has a directed duty, owed to } A, \text{ to (not) } \varphi.\]

The relational account of authority, then, is that the three moments of authority embody relational reasons constitutive of the acting-on-behalf-of relation. (3) follows from the fact that the directive in (2) is binding. But this underdescribes the normative situation, for it is also true that the addressee of the directive owes the duty to the addressee.\(^{20}\) This means, as we have seen, not only that addressee acts wrongly in not complying with the content of the directive, but also that addressee wrongs addressee.

In sum, the relational account is that three elements of authority are explained and unified by the relational reasons constitutive of the acting-on-behalf-of relation.\(^{21}\)

6 A Relational Account of Content-Independent Directives

Let us return to the normative puzzle about authority and see whether the relational account can solve it.

Here is a more general statement of the relational view:

\[A's \ directives \ to \ B \ is \ binding \ just \ in \ case\]
\[(i) \quad A \ is \ empowered \ to \ act \ on \ behalf \ of \ B, \ and\]

\(^{20}\) Surprisingly, the directed nature of the authority-generated duty has been widely neglected in the literature on authority. One salient exception is Darwall (2013a).

\(^{21}\) In the literature, the two accounts of authority closest to the relational one proposed here are those offered by Ripstein (2004) and Fox-Decent (2005). Indeed my relational account is inspired by Immanuel Kant’s often neglected discussion of the legal category of status, a form of interdependent and non-consensual relation. To that extent, the account on offer here should complement Ripstein’s. But Ripstein’s account is focused on legal and political authority and does not explicitly tackle the connection between authority and reasons for action. It is not clear how Ripstein’s account would solve the normative puzzle we have been tarrying with. Similarly, the proposed relational account shares with Fox-Decent the view that authority has an essentially fiduciary structure. But Fox-Decent does not explain the basis of this structure. I have sought to explain that basis in the permissibility of a certain form of asymmetrical relation in Equalia. Fox-Decent, like Ripstein, is focused on legal and political authority, rather than on the more general question concerning the very rationality of authority relations.
(ii) A’s directive does not contravene the two normative constraints on the acting-on-behalf-of relation:
   a. **Scope.** The directive occurs within the scope of activity warranted by (i)
   b. **Fiduciary.** The directive is objectively understood as furthering the agency of empowering agent.

The relational account articulates the normative background of authority relations in a sequenced manner. First, in order for purported authoritative directives to be binding, the relational reasons of the acting-on-behalf-of relation must be in place. Eurymachus’s advice concerning tutors, in spite of its merits, does not amount to a directive to Telemachus because the first condition is not in place. But even when the first condition is satisfied, purported directives may fail to bind in two ways. For one thing, the purported directive may exceed the scope of the empowering relation. A financial trustee is empowered to make certain financial decisions for you, but not, say, whom you are to marry. For another, the purported directive may exceed the normative basis of the relation by contravening empowered agent’s fiduciary duty. A financial trustee may issue a directive within the permitted scope of activity – financial matters – and still fail to act in ways that further the agency of the principal, such as by contravening the principal’s term that only investments unrelated to the oil business are permitted.

Now, what happens when an agent issues a directive and these conditions are satisfied? The result is a content-independent binding directive. The directive is binding and content-independent in virtue of the relational reasons in place. The directive is binding because it satisfies the normative constraints placed by the acting-on-behalf-of relation. The bindingness of the directive, in turn, should be understood relationally. It is not just that B has new reasons for action or that B is now under a duty, it is also the case that B owes it to A to act as directed. And the directive is content-independent in virtue of the fact that what makes the directive binding is the relational reasons linking A to B, rather than the content-specific merits of the directive. What explains the bindingness of the directive is the fact that it emanates from the acting-on-behalf-of relation and that it manifests relational reasons, not the fact that the content of the directive tracks non-relational reasons, such as simple evaluative or deontic reasons.

Let me put the solution in a different way by highlighting the apparent irrationality involved in following a content-independent directive. How could it be rational to require of agents that they follow directives on the mere say-so of others? Authority would then seem to require that one abdicate one’s rational powers.
The duty to act as directed by an empowered agent is rational not in virtue of the merits of the specific directives issued under the relation. Rather, this is a rational activity because it seems permissible for finite rational agents to expand the exercise of their powers through the acting-on-behalf of relation. To be sure, authority would indeed be irrational if there were no normative background conditions on the legitimate exercise of the acting-on-behalf of relation. If empowering someone to act as your financial trustee meant that this person could now make binding decisions on any aspect of your life, then authority would certainly be irrational. Yet, so long as the background normative conditions are satisfied, there is nothing intrinsically irrational in the thought that content-independent directives can be binding. They are rational because the acting-on-behalf of relation is a fundamental way in which agents expand rather than restrict the exercise of their powers.

Let me put this solution in a third way. Authority seems puzzling because, if we assume our moral equality (that is, that our moral world is Equalia), then it seems incoherent so suppose that some agents could be in charge of others. A relational account shows there is no incoherence. It is not the nature or standing of others that entitles them to issue content-independent directives. Rather, it is the acting-on-behalf of relation. And since this relation does not conflict with the structure of Equalia, there is no moral incoherence involved in the notion of a content-independent directive.

In short, a relational account solves the puzzle by showing that it is never the case that one agent’s say-so, as such, can generate content-independent binding reasons for action on another. But granting this is not equivalent to denying the possibility of authority. Rather, an agent’s say-so issues a content-independent binding directive when the acting-on-behalf relation is in place and the directive does not contravene the normative basis of the relation.

7 Relation vs. Service

To sharpen the relational account of authority, let us return to Raz’s influential service conception and contrast the two.

First, the relational account rejects the dependence thesis. It is not true that, whenever an agent follows an authoritative directive, she must be following reasons she had independently of the directive. This is because dependent reasons are neither necessary nor sufficient for binding directives. They are not sufficient because the mere fact a directive reflects the reasons you already have does not suffice to make the directive binding. For instance, if an authority issues a directive that reflects reasons you already have but that exceeds the scope of the relation, the directive is not binding. Think again of the financial trustee (or your dating app!) making a decision on whom you are to marry. And
dependent reasons are not necessary because often the reasons for the addressee’s action will be deeply enmeshed with the structure of the directive. Suppose that Penelope instructs a servant to go on a diplomatic mission to contact Telemachus in Troy and assume the directive is binding. The servant’s reason to go on a diplomatic mission cannot be fully understood independently of the directive. It is not that individuals, in general, have reasons to go on diplomatic missions to the thick of the Trojan war because of the fun of it. The servant’s reason is tied up, conceptually, to the servant’s relation to Penelope as her servant and officer. As such, servant acts on Penelope’s behalf. And the reason servant has to comply with the directive cannot be made sense of independently of both the relationship to Penelope and to the specific directive. And so, the dependence thesis is false for authority relations: dependent reasons are neither necessary nor sufficient for directives to be binding.

Second, the relational account rejects the normal justification thesis. For the service conception, directives are binding because they enable individuals to conform better to the reasons they already have. For the relational conception, directives are binding because they emanate from a relational nexus where one party acts on behalf of another. And so, whether a directive enables you to act better in accordance with the reasons you already had is, to put it bluntly, perfectly irrelevant.

This is so for the same reasons that I rejected the dependence thesis. First, on a relational account, a directive can be binding even when it makes you act in accordance with reasons you never had independently of the relationship — such as when the servant has reason to go on a diplomatic mission. Second, the fact that a directive makes you act more successfully in conformity with your reasons does not render the directive binding. Eurymachus’s suggestion concerning Telemachus’s tutor does not fail to bind because the suggestion is a bad idea. In fact, following Eurymachus’s suggestion might enable Telemachus to act more successfully in accordance with the dependent reasons he has. The point is that the suggestion does not flower into a binding directive on Telemachus precisely because Telemachus has not empowered Eurymachus to make that kind of decision. Although this result means one must repudiate the normal justification thesis, it is a result that strikes me as eminently plausible.

And third, Raz’s picture of binding directives as exclusionary reasons misses how binding directives operate within a relational framework of practical thought. A binding directive is not simply a free-floating reason an agent happens to acquire. Rather, a binding directive is a reason for action that binds one party to another. In a word, Raz’s picture misses how the authority relation structures reasons in a directed way: empowered agent has a claim to make decisions on the entrusted matter, while empowering agent has a duty, owed to trustee, to act as
directed. Raz’s reasons are free-floating in the sense that they have no relationality or directionality built in. As Raz concedes, an agent’s own psychological states, such as her tiredness, can produce exclusionary reasons. So there is nothing inherently relational about exclusionary reasons. Raz’s picture, then, misses the way in which binding directives result in directed duties.

These differences matter because they enable a relational account to avoid the chief difficulties of the service conception.

The first difficulty was that the service conception is committed to a piece-meal approach to authority. By contrast, by rejecting the two pillars of the service conception the relational account is not committed to a piece-meal approach to authority. If the cases of Disneyland’s speed limit or the sergeant’s orders are instances of authoritative directives, then they will bind all addressees equally. That is because what makes the directive binding is not the fact that following it would enable its addressees to act more successfully in accordance with reasons they already have but rather because in each case the directive emanates from the acting-on-behalf-of relation. The reasons of drivers in Disneyland and of soldiers would be relational, bearing the following form:

\[ R(\phi)[X \text{ is under the charge of } -Disneyland], X. \]
\[ R(\phi)[Y \text{ is under the charge of } -\text{Sergeant S}], Y. \]

X ranges over drivers within Disneyland’s jurisdiction, while Y ranges over soldiers under our imagined sergeant’s mandate. Disneyland would act on behalf of all drivers within its jurisdiction by fixing the speed limit, while the sergeant would act on behalf of its soldiers in fixing the workout program. In each case, the right-hand side of the relation represents the empowered agent which is entitled to decide for all under their charge. This picture entitles us to the idea that an authoritative directive will bind all its addressees equally, regardless of their contingent and varying degrees of knowledge. And this is because, in contrast to the service conception, varying degrees of knowledge, for the relational account, are irrelevant to the bindingness of the directive.

The second difficulty was Darwall’s objection that the service conception fails because the dependence and normal justification theses do not entail the preemption thesis. This objection, if true, leaves untouched a relational account, for the relational account rejects the two pillars of the service conception.

But even if the relational account manages to avoid two important difficulties of the service conception, it might attract difficulties of its own. Before closing, I would like to consider what seem to me to be the three strongest objections to the relational account: the account fails to accommodate the plurality of functions of authority, the account is circular, and the account fails to solve the paradox of authority. I argue that none of these objections goes through.
8 Functions

Many have found the service conception implausible because it locates the function of authority in the wrong place. The function of authority is not to mediate between individuals and their own reasons, but to mediate between individuals. On this arbitration model, the function of authority is to arbitrate disagreements between agents concerning their rights. Moreover, Scott Hershovitz has recently argued that, in general, it is imprudent to identify authority with a single function or role (Hershovitz 2011). So, one might worry that a relational account commits us either to the wrong view of the function of authority or to too narrow a range of functions.

First, a relational account supports the conclusion that the arbitration model is incorrect. Although some instances of the acting-on-behalf-of relation will indeed be cases of arbitration, others will not. Think of Penelope sending her servant to Troy. If Penelope’s directive is authoritative, it is not in virtue of the fact that it plays the role of arbitrating a dispute between her servant and… Similarly, the sergeant’s directive to do ten push ups does not play the function of arbitrating disputes of rights. So, it seems to me a virtue of a relational account that it does not commit us to the arbitration model, even if the relational account can certainly support instances of arbitration.

In fact, the relational account offers independent support to Hershovitz’s conclusion that authority need not be identified with a single function. The relational account is committed to the view that the normative basis of authority is unified. What grounds authority is the coupling of the symmetrical structure of moral agents in Equalia with the permissibility of the acting-on-behalf-of relation. However, a unity of ground is compatible with a plurality of functions. Agents may enter into the acting-on-behalf-of relations for a variety of reasons and to play a variety of functions. This should be evident from the wide range of cases we have considered, from a doctor making a decision for an unconscious agent crushed by a tree and on the brink of death, to a parent’s making decisions for their child, or to an institution setting speed limits for drivers within its jurisdiction. It is difficult to maintain that all these cases manifest the same practical function. But a relational account does not commit us to a single function. It commits us only to the view that what grounds authoritative directives is the relational reasons structuring the acting-on-behalf-of relation.

9 Circularity

A second objection is that the relational account is circular. Friends of the service conception might insist that, for all its faults, their account has the virtue of not being circular, for it explains the bindingness of authoritative directives through the independent concept of the rationality of acting in accordance with your reasons. By contrast, the relational account seems circular, for it explains authority in terms of the acting-on-behalf-of relation. But this relation already contains the notion of one agent having the power to make decisions for another.

However, I do not think that the relational account is viciously circular. Such an account explains authority in terms of three notions that make no reference to authority: the power of a rational agent, the act of empowering another, and relational reasons. I take the notion of an agent’s power of action in the world to be primitive. There is a plausible way of construing the notion of an agent’s power of action that does not already presuppose the notion of authority, much less the real target of an explanation of authority, namely, legal and political authority. To the extent then that the two notions of an agent’s power and an agent empowering another do not presuppose the richer and more robust explanandum, authority, a relational account is not viciously circular. At the same time, I presented the notion of a relational reason at a sufficient level of generality that it does not already presuppose the notion of authority. Claims and directed duties are paradigmatic cases of relational reasons, but these do not already presuppose the notion of authority. Friends and lovers can have basic claims and responsibilities to each other without thereby having authority over each other.

Still, one might think that the account is viciously circular because the incidents of authority are already baked into the notion of the acting-on-behalf-of relation. Even if that were so – and I doubt it is so – it would still fail to establish the vicious circularity of the account. That is because I took as primitive only the notions of a finite power of rational agency, the basic moral symmetry of Equalia, and the notions of relational reasons. From this sparse material, I sought to tell a story about why the asymmetric acting-on-behalf-of relation might be warranted. My basic point was that this relation would be permissible in virtue of the fact that it makes possible the very exercise of our rational powers. To be sure, that point may turn out to be false, or my account may fail to compel. But the account is not viciously circular. Even if the notion of authority is already baked into the notion of the acting-on-

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23 I am grateful to Chris Essert by alerting me to this possible objection.

24 I thus acknowledge my so far implicit commitment to a power ontology, at least about moral agents.
behalf-of relation, the relational account does not take that relation as primitive but seeks its warrant in the independent notions of a finite rational agent’s power of action, their symmetrical moral status, and relational reasons.

10 Paradox

A third objection is that, in spite of its intrinsic and comparative plausibility, the relational account ultimately fails because it cannot handle a basic paradox about authority. If an authoritative directive instructs you to do something morally prohibited (such as committing genocide), the directive cannot bind; but if the directive instructs you to do something morally permitted or required (such as not punching random people in the face) then the directive is redundant and cannot bind. Either way, authority cannot generate distinctive reasons for action. Authority is impossible. And the relational account does nothing to show otherwise.

However, a further virtue of the relational account, I think, is precisely that its solution of the normative puzzle of authority also works as a solution of the paradox.

Begin with the first prong of the dilemma: a directive cannot bind if it contravenes moral requirements. A relational account accommodates this insight in a distinctive way. Remember that our starting point was the assumption the members of Equalia enjoy a basic equal moral status. If authority is indeed grounded in the acting-on-behalf-of relation, that relation is in turn ultimately grounded in the fact that Equalians are symmetrically situated as far as their basic moral status is concerned. That means that any directive that contravenes that status—such as a directive that required surrendering your personality in one way or another—would be immediately void. If we understand the notion of a moral requirement in the terms I suggest here—as requirements on action placed by our symmetrical moral standing—then it is easy to see why authoritative directives could not contravene morality. That is because such a directive would undermine itself: it would undermine the normative basis that makes it possible. A relational account can show how the very idea that provides a basis for relations of authority also constrains the scope of authoritative directives. So, I think, the relational account can accommodate the first prong of the dilemma.

At the same time, a relational account shows why the second prong of the paradox is false. Authoritative directives are never redundant. That is because authoritative directives generate new relational reasons.

\[\text{Weinrib (forthcoming) makes this point nicely in a broadly Kantian way.}\]
For one thing, authoritative directives can sometimes generate reasons for action agents did not have prior to the directive. Drivers in Disneyland do not have a binding reason to not exceed the 14mph until they enter Disneyland’s jurisdiction. Penelope’s servant did not have a reason to go on a diplomatic mission to Troy until Penelope issued the directive. Authoritative directives are not redundant because the domain of the morally permitted underdetermines the reasons for action agents have. By transforming the permitted into the required, authoritative directives are not redundant, but make a difference to practical thought.

For another, authoritative directives can make a difference even when their content concerns the morally required. This is due to a point that most thinkers about authority typically neglect: since authoritative directives are relational reasons, they generate new normative relations among agents.

Suppose that upon entering his ship towards Troy, Telemachus encounters a sign that reads: “these seats are reserved for the elderly”. Presumably, Telemachus had moral reasons to offer his seat to the elderly before receiving the directive. So the directive appears redundant.

But that is not so. A binding directive, we have seen, is grounded in the acting-on-behalf-of relation which, in turn, grounds \((1)-(3')\). The ship owner can act on behalf of all passengers and make decisions for them. And so, even when the ship owner’s directives happen to coincide with moral reasons passengers had before, the directive still makes a difference: in virtue of \((3')\) each passenger now owes it to the ship owner (or his agents) to act in conformity with the directive. Before the directive, that was not so. No passenger owed it to the ship owner (or those acting on the ship owner’s behalf, the employees) to act in accordance with that reason. And this changes the normative situation of the parties involved.

For instance, an employee of the ship owner may be entitled to impose a fine on those who break the rules of the ship, and, in extreme cases, to prohibit them from future entrance. But ship operators cannot have these powers for any moral fault of their passengers. It is also true that Telemachus has a moral requirement not to lie or to steal, but so long as his actions happen outside the jurisdiction of the ship, ship operators are not entitled to impose fines, for instance, on Telemachus for breaching the moral requirements against lying and stealing.

We can extend the same point to a legal or political authority. Take the independent moral prohibition of randomly punching people in the face. That does not entitle just anyone to enforce this rule. Rather, it entitles only those in charge of making and enforcing public laws. And this gives a unique normative role to the tort or criminal law of your land, a normative role lacked by legal systems under which you do not act.

These reflections support the view that a relational account has the resources to solve the authority paradox. On the one hand, the relational account accepts the first prong and construes it as a
requirement placed by the basic structure of Equalia. On the other, it shows that the second prong is false. Authoritative directives are not redundant. Indeed, they make a difference to the normative landscape in two ways: they transform the permitted into the required, and they add further relational structure to the already required.

**Conclusion**

Authority seems puzzling: how can the mere say-so of one agent generate a duty on another? The relational answer is that authority is grounded in the acting-on-behalf-of relation, such that directives are binding only when they are in harmony with the background normative constraints on such a relation. This means that someone’s say-so is never, as such, the source of duties on another. But this does not mean that authority is impossible. Rather, once the background normative constraints are satisfied, a directive does issue a content-independent reason for action. The key to authority, I have argued, turns on taking seriously the powers of rational agency of individuals coupled with relational reasons. Once we do so, authority need no longer be puzzling or mysterious. If so, the relational account presented here can lay the groundwork for developing a more comprehensive account of the richer phenomena of legal and political authority. If the relational account is correct, it shows that authority was never about providing to individuals the service of mediating between them and their reasons. Rather, authority is one of the conditions of the possible exercise of our rational powers in a finite, material, and interdependent world.

**References**


--------- (ms.) ‘Reasoning First’.


Weinrib, Jacob (forthcoming) ‘

