

Civil Disobedience: Advantages and Disadvantages Research Paper

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Introduction: Obedience

The present day society has uncalculated into us that being obedient is good while being disobedient is very bad. Our social institutions have taught us that we have to obey people in every order or command that has been issued out to us without any question. Even without being told, people have to be obedient to the rules, laws and guidelines that have been set out by social institutions to ensure that there is peace and harmony in the society. This goes without saying that obedience is a human behavior that has been deeply ingrained within us. It has become an impulsive behavior that goes beyond being emphatic and sympathetic.

Social beings are prone to being obedient to a higher authority that makes them feel protected and secure. They therefore cannot make any mistakes or be disobedient to these authorities as they make the most vital decisions. These higher authorities include the government, law enforcement agencies and social institutions such as churches, schools and medical facilities. All these institutions are guided by moral, ethical and legal guidelines that ensure their practices have been followed and maintained within the society. Social beings are therefore expected to obey these guidelines to ensure their well beings have been met adequately by these institutions.

The thesis statement for this research paper will be "The courage to be disobedient at times is what makes us fully human, with a strong and confident personality". The thesis statement basically supports the notion that disobedience in social beings makes them stronger and more confident when facing life challenges. Most social proponents might argue against this statement by saying that being disobedient does not only make a person to be confident or stronger but it also fosters an attitude of negativity and disobedience.

They might also argue that disobedience creates an environment of hostility and rebellion within the society. Such proponents of social behavior argue for obedience when it comes to maintain a positive social equilibrium within the society. The research paper will therefore look at the aspect of obedience as well as of disobedience in social beings. The three arguments that will be raised in the research paper include; obedience is good and disobedience is bad, disobedience is good as it helps mould a human's personality and obedience is bad to a human being's development.

Definition of Obedience and Disobedience

To better understand the concept of disobedience and obedience a definition of each is required. The term obedience refers to the act of performing commands or orders issued by other people. Obedience is part of human behavior and part of the norms and guidelines that make up the social fabric of the society.

Stanley Milgram conducted experiments and research into obedience with particular focus on how the Nazis were able to get ordinary German citizens to participate in the Holocaust that saw millions of Jews being murdered in concentration camps. He focused on how ordinary citizens were obedient in the presence of authoritative figures or social institutions. The results of his



research work showed that obedience was normal and people who disobeyed were viewed to be abnormal within the society (Passini and Morselli 97).

The various forms of obedience that exist within the society include obedience to God and religious beliefs, obedience to social norms and cultural practices, obedience to governments and other social institutions such as churches, schools, and medical institutions, obedience to self imposed constraints and obedience to country laws (Milgram 64). Disobedience on the other hand is the refusal or failure to obey. It is basically the opposite act of obeying where an individual does not follow the set out guidelines or laws.

An individual might decide to disobey certain rules or certain orders given by a person in authority. Such an act has been described by social researchers to be an act of rebellion and non-compliance. People who disobey do so deliberately to break certain laws or to go against a certain authoritative figure. They also disobey to show that they do not cooperative with the authorities. Disobedience is therefore seen as a negative act that affects the institutions in the society (Passini and Morselli 100).

Arguments for Obedience and Disobedience

To explain the first argument where obedience is good and disobedience is bad, human beings follow rules so as not to against the law or against the rules. People are prone to obey because it offers them a sense of security and protection. People are not allowed to make any mistakes because the major social institutions and authoritative figures make the important decisions for us. Presidents make important decisions for their countries while the citizens get to exercise obedience to the decisions that have been made. Regardless of what kind of behavior is involved, obedience can be justifiable as long as the individuals follow orders and commands (Asch 31).

Obedience in the society provides a sense of order and continuity which is important. Social institutions around the world create laws and guidelines that are used in maintaining order and peace. Laws are made for various reasons and some of the most important reasons for following laws is to demonstrate obedience. Obeying laws ensures that there is no trouble in the society and it shows that people agree with the set out laws and are ready to defend them. Obeying laws also ensures that order is maintained in the society preventing cases where the rule of the jungle prevails (Asch 31).

The concept of obedience is at times difficult given the complex nature of human behavior which is difficult to control. This creates a situation where some people are prone to being disobedient or vulnerable to disobedience. While some people readily obey, others decide to disobey regardless of whether they have the opportunity to act independently.

To demonstrate this statement, most of the offenses that are committed within the society are usually done by ordinary people instead of social outcasts. These people decide to disobey under the impacts of surrounding circumstances and authoritative figures. They also disobey because the set out laws might at times contradict their belief and value systems. Ordinary people also disobey because of the pressure to conform to values that at times might not be right (Behrens and Rosen 304).

Disobedience also stems from the feeling of performing other people's wishes rather than our own. This makes individuals to no longer feel responsible for their actions as their decisions are made by authoritative figures or people who have authority over social beings within the society. Such a situation forces people within the social context to feel responsible to the authoritative figures creating a need to constantly perform well out of duty or obligation to these authorities. Value systems and beliefs are at times compromised when this happens (Behrens and Rosen 304).

The human psychology prevents people from resisting orders or commands. Human beings are mostly wired to obey therefore making obedience to be a normal state. Obedience has become a historically accepted norm where a society requires each of its members to follow the established rules and guidelines.

Obedience is mostly focused on an authoritative figure that influences the norms and rules within social institutions. Authoritative figures create and regulate norms and rules that are used within the society and in return they require social members to follow these rules without any question. For example governments around the world create laws that require all citizens to obey. This is important as it ensures there is no disorder present in the society. Obedience has therefore been viewed to be a fundamental component in maintaining order within the society (Behrens and Rosen 304).

The next argument to be focused on will be disobedience is good as it build's an individual's personality and confidence. As explained before, society requires every social being to be obedient. But in some instances, obedience causes more harm than good as exemplified by the Holocaust where German citizens betrayed Jews to the Nazis.

Milgram explains the role of obedience during the Holocaust where ordinary people agreed to obey an authoritative figure which was the Nazi to the extent of severely hurting other ordinary human beings. Milgram's explanation of the Holocaust points to the fact that disobedience is not always wrong. Some Germans during the Holocaust disobeyed the Nazis by harboring and protecting Jews an act that spared their lives (Milgram 64).

According to Fromm (2) the first act of disobedience in the world was committed by Adam and Eve. The two disobeyed God's command by eating fruit from the Garden after God had forbidden them. Human history was therefore founded by an act of disobedience because of Adam and Eve. This act of disobedience affected the development of man in the world as obedience and disobedience co-existed together in the world.

This especially became true as more and more people continued to rebel against authoritative figures who were charged with developing their worlds. Fromm (2) also highlights the stealing of the fire by Prometheus as an act of disobedience. As much as it laid the foundation for human evolution, Prometheus' act of disobedience set the stage for human history and it put him on the historic map for his crime.

The intellectual development of human beings has mostly been dependent on acts of disobedience. This disobedience arises from authoritative figures trying to stifle the thoughts and expressions of their subjects as well their long established opinions and thoughts that govern social institutions and members. Disobedience has also arisen from the pressure to conform or comply with these laws that might at times contradict the individual's set of beliefs and values (Fromm 2).

Fromm further analyzes the act of disobedience by looking at various historic events that took place in the course of the century. Such occurrences such as the Garden of Eden and Prometheus formed the basis for the evolution of man. Acts of disobedience over the past would not have formed the foundation of the world today. Human history began with an act of disobedience when Adam and Eve defied God by consuming the prohibited fruit. This according to Fromm (2) was seen to be an act of freedom and independence from the authoritative figure of God.

Fromm relates disobedience with obedience by stating that an act of obedience to one principle might at times lead to an act of disobedience on the same principle. In the social context, human beings are faced with disobedience when performing their moral duties. When trying to obey some human principles, other laws have to be broken.

When the principles that had to be obeyed conflicted with those that had to be disobeyed, an irreconcilable situation arose. For example people using a zebra crossing might back up traffic which might be wrong, in some other cases people who water their gardens during the drought season might be doing so to keep the city green but they might be wasting valuable water resources that have become scarce during the dry season (Fromm 3).

Antigone was a perfect example of explaining the act of obeying one principle and disobeying another. She was faced with the dilemma of obeying a law that was deemed to be too inhumane which meant that she had to disobey the laws of humanity. Therefore an act of obeying one principle would be an act of disobeying another. Fromm advocates that people within the society should be free from any laws or rules established by authoritative figures or social institutions as they were born to be free and independent.

He states that people should be able to disobey as well as to obey without having to resort to rebellion. Fromm advocates for the proper balancing of the two concepts according to what individuals feel is right to obey or disobey. He uses an example of martyrs in either the religious or science circles who at one point had to disobey people that wanted to stop them following their own consciences (Fromm 3).

In coming up with the proper balance, Fromm analyzes the concept of obedience by looking at two types of obedience which include autonomous obedience and heteronomous obedience. Heteronomous obedience is the kind of obedience that is given to a person, an institution of power or an authoritative figure. Fromm describes this kind of obedience to be submissive in nature as it implies that an individual should abandon their own perceptions of what is right and accept the foreign perceptions of a higher authoritative figure in place of their own.

It is the kind of obedience that responds to outside thoughts and power. Autonomous obedience is the kind of obedience that is used by individuals who believe in their own religious, personal and political beliefs and convictions. Individuals who practice autonomous obedience exercise their own judgment and follow their own perceptions rather than those of other people. Fromm describes this kind of obedience to be the ability of an individual to judge for themselves (Fromm 4).

In describing how acts of disobedience develop people psychologically, Fromm states that acts of disobedience provide an individual with freedom and the ability to withstand oppression. Disobedience also enables an individual to voice their opinions and concerns against any societal or authoritative pressures. Fromm suggested that choice and the ability to be disobedient were two indivisible concepts that had to go hand in hand. For an individual to be free from societal norms and pressures, they had to be disobedient. This did not mean that defiance was a virtue and obedience was a vice, as a highlight like that would take no notice of the relationship that existed between the two concepts (Fromm 3).

In analyzing the third argument that states that obedience is bad, historical events such as the Holocaust come into mind. Innocent Jews were killed as a result of ordinary Germans obeying Nazi orders. This brought into contrast the fact that society's committed human rights abuses in the name of being obedient. Ordinary German citizens were forced to commit inhuman acts against the Jews that they would ordinarily have not committed under normal circumstances. While some German citizens stood up and disobeyed Nazi orders to identify Jewish hideouts, others acted as Nazi spies by informing the officers where the Jews were hidden (Milgram 64).

Milgram's analysis of German behavior during the mass murders of Jews during the Holocaust showed that people's behavior changed drastically when they were faced with military conflicts. They tended to obey to avoid being involved in the conflicts that mostly led to the death of people who were disobedient. Such obedience created some forms of aggression amongst the social members who were under oppression. The results of Milgram's research experiment revealed that people tended to obey authoritative figures and it was deemed to be abnormal for a person to disobey these authoritative figures. This created a dangerous situation where obedient people had to fulfill the commands of authority that were deemed to be illegal or criminal in nature (Passini and Morselli 100).

People who obey authoritative figures do so to fulfill the orders of these figures so that they can benefit from carrying out those orders and at the same time prevent the occurrence of conflicts within the society. Obedience at times becomes a very powerful tool that can make ordinary people commit acts that are deemed legal by authoritative figures. Cullingworth (262) discusses the aspect of blind obedience which is deemed to be more negative than positive.

Blind obedience dehumanizes people by making them act in an unimaginable way. Cullingworth further notes that blind obedience has a range of negative effects that might include death, fear, insecurity, and inconvenience. An example of blind obedience was the terrorist attack of September 11th where suicide bombers attacked the World Trade Centre in the US based on their obedience to religious beliefs and values (Cullingworth 262). In summary obedience has been used for the purpose which at times has led to the devastation and loss of innocent lives.

Conclusion

The various arguments presented in the research paper have shown that obedience and disobedience can be both positive and negative concepts. On one hand obedience ensures that there is order in the society while disobedience demonstrates rebellion to the norms and guidelines that are used to govern the society. On the other hand disobedience ensures that a person has the freedom to do whatever they want based on their own perceptions and beliefs while obedience prevents people from being free and openly expressing their concerns, views and opinions without any fear of reprisals or condemnation.

In support of the thesis statement where the courage to be disobedient is what makes us fully human, strong and confident, disobedience has been noted by several authors in the research work to be positive in the intellectual development of human beings. Disobedience allows people to develop their freedom by voicing their concerns on aspects that are deemed to be detrimental to the society. It also allows for people to base their decisions on their own perceptions of what is good and what is bad. Disobedience is therefore seen to be important in developing a person's intellectual capacity and perceptions.

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