Sources of Authority:
The Double Threads of Wonder and Anxiety

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Published in **"Dare to Think the Unthought Known",** Ed. Ajeet N. Mathur, Aivoairut Oy, Finland. March 2006.

The exploration of Authority, particularly as it relates to Leadership and Organisation, has been a focus of Group Relations work around the world since the first "Leicester" Conference organized by the Tavistock Institute and Leicester University in 1957. Gouranga Chattopadhyay, in whose honour this book has been written, has been a pioneer in this exploration through initiating, and directing, Group Relations Conferences in India from the 1970s, working as a member of Staff in Conferences in the U.K., France, Holland, Israel, and Australia[1] and through his organisational consultancy practice. When I first read "Hierarchy and Modern Organisation: A Paradox Leading to Human Wastage" by Gouranga Chattopadhyay and Ashok Malhotra I realized that the problems that were identified in hierarchical management structures paralleled thoughts I had developed and written about in the *Baric Experiment*. Gouranga Chattopadhyay and I were both concerned with the exploration of organisational forms that were designed to enable people to use, and to grow their *adult* capacities at work. Hierarchical models too frequently, as Gouranga Chattopadhyay has shown, mobilize inappropriately the infant within us.

The action research experiment carried out with Baric Computing Services by Peter Spink and myself, and reported in the *Baric Experiment* convinced me of the value of self managing work groups in terms of efficiency, job satisfaction, and stimulating growth of human capacity. At the same time this experiment was carried out when accepted managerial theory[2], practice, and cultures emphasized hierarchy, and models of control[3]. It is only recently that I have come to realize the significance that the definitions of authority we all used, and still use, were based on the locus of authority being the *individual, or the role the individual has within an organistion.* There was no definition of authority which was based on the *group or community*. As such we lacked a grounding that would give legitimacy to ideas that were evidently true. And the ideas were encountering a vertex, based on a different paradigm of authority.

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[1] And probably many other countries I am not aware of.

[2] See, for example, Jaques (1964): "Manager: an individual occupying a role with managerial authority over subordinates; namely, the authority to veto the appointment of subordinates not acceptable to him, to assign work to subordinates, to decide their performance assessment relative to each other, and to dismiss them from his own command if they are not acceptable to him". (p9)

[3] I am not sure much has changed in this regard in the last 30 years.

This may sound simple and obvious, and it is. But it only became apparent to me in the confluence of experience, and ideas, which lead to a different formulation of authority, and its origins. The experience and ideas have been generated with my colleagues in the Centre for Socio-Analysis – Christopher Falkingham, Peter Hetrelezis, and Joshua Bain. Without Joshua Bain's contribution of the significance of "Wonder" as a foundation of socio-analysis, and Peter Hetrelezis' concept of "Authority for Meaning", this paper could not have been written

What follows is an exploration of what I have called the double threads of "Authority in the Mind":
1. Sources in Wonder and Sangha[4]
2. Sources in Anxiety, the Individual and Hierarchy

This exploration may offer new vistas for socio-analysts, perhaps another paradigm of authority, and if so, they are there, in part, because of the thought seeds of Gouranga Chattopadhyay.

The ideas in this paper were originally presented at a Seminar I contributed to on "Authority in the Mind" during a Workshop on "Gender and Authority"[5], that took place in Hyderabad, India, 13 -16 August, 2005. The Seminar was one of four contributions Staff[6] made on the theme "Authority and its Origins". I have decided to leave the ideas as they were presented in Hyderabad, as there is a freshness about the first person presentation, which is lost once the language is changed to artificially reflect a "scientific idiom". So the "you" that is being addressed is the Seminar audience in Hyderabad, but equally, it could be you the reader.

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"I will be exploring "Authority in the Mind" as it arises, and manifests, for me, and in what I am saying is the possible connection of "Authority in the Mind" for you.

I have been engaged in the exploration of authority most of my adult life: as a Political Scientist, as a socio-analyst at the Tavistock Institute in London, and from 1983 in Australia through AISA, and now the Centre for Socio-Analysis. Besides what might be called these "professional" roots of understanding and exploration there are also the personal experiences of authority in my family, at school, and at work which have become part of me. Another aspect I draw on that contributes to the "Authority in the Mind" I hold is understanding of authority through spiritual practice, saddhana, and reading – Advaita Vedanta and Zen Buddhism have been particularly important for me. And, fourthly, there is the exploration of the human and divine through poetry, literature, music, and art, and the authority we are given to create meaning.

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[4] Buddhist concept of the community of people on the path.
[5] The Workshop was sponsored by Chindu in association with the Centre for Socio-Analysis.
[6] The other three Presentations were made by Gouranga Chattopadhyay, Rina Tagore, and Rosemary Viswanath.

These are the four foundations for the "Authority in the Mind" I hold, and continue to create:

1. Professional experience, practice, and knowledge.
2. School, family of origin, and work experiences.
3. Spiritual exploration / saddhana / knowledge.
4. Poetry, literature, art, music – authority to create meaning.

Some, or all of the four, and other things I haven't mentioned, may contribute to the "Authority in the Mind" you hold, you act out of, and you are creating.

It is easy as a professional or a manager to forget the other three sources or inspirations of authority. In professional or managerial worlds "authority" is a known thing, an object, and one is paid to know what it is all about.

Thus, one has Max Weber's famous 1947 definition:
Authority is "legitimated power within a role to bring about a desired result", which I have often found useful in my work.

Or a definition of authority arising from Group Relations offered by Anton Obholzer: "Authority refers to the right to make an ultimate decision, and in an organisation it refers to the right to make decisions which are binding on others".
Again, very clear, albeit with nuances of hierarchy, control, and linearity. But with this definition there is really not much more to be thought about.

And I find that for me "authority" is a puzzle to be engaged with, and the "Authority in the Mind" that I hold is being constantly created. The ideas in this paper, for example, were not present for me before preparing for this Seminar [in Hyderabad].

An hypothesis about usual professional, scientific, managerial practice is that it exists to define and to stop something. "To define is to kill", as the poet Mallarme remarked. In this case the stopping of exploration and understanding of authority as derived from the other three sources which may lead to a conception of authority as a process that is to do with growth, and not as a zero sum, static, game – the implication in the Obholzer quote.

It is to these other three sources or inspirations of authority I now want to go in this exploration of "Authority in the Mind". And there are two themes which are bound together in a double strand which I think are significant for our understanding of authority.

The **first theme** is the origin of what we call, and how we experience authority – *whether it is based in wonder or whether it is based in anxiety.*

The **second theme** is the location and generation of authority *on an Individual / Community dimension.* For example, in the Obholzer definition of authority, and by implication in the Weber definition, authority is located as an aspect of a role taken up by an individual. I will suggest that there is another way of thinking about authority, where

authority may be better thought of as a property of the functioning of a group or a community.

But first I would like to offer some observations about our experience of authority.

I would like to put forward the hypothesis that the earliest apprehension of the world outside oneself as new born baby is through wonder. I don't know how many of you have been present at the birth of a child which has gone reasonably normally. I always remember the birth of my daughter, who after she was born looked around in what can only be described as wonder. My view is that wonder as a faculty is rooted in love and trust, and is associated with being held by mother or father, and being fed. Authority rooted in wonder is authority for exploration and learning.

"Wonder" is the first response to the world. It precedes anxiety. But it is often anxiety that is being defended against, or controlled, which is present in experiences from early childhood, and at school.

When I think about my earliest experiences of authority in my family of origin, and at school, many are to do with punishment, or prohibition, of one kind or another, where something apparently is in need of control. Sometimes the prohibition is in one's best interests, preventing harm, but often when one looks a bit more deeply into these experiences it seems that they are often based in anxiety – frequently one's parents or teachers anxiety that something may get out of control. This need to be in control through prohibiting behaviour, or punishing oneself and others, then becomes a part of one's authority template as an adult. To repeat it is based in a need to defend against anxiety in oneself, and to control anxiety. And it is most evident in underlying justifications for hierarchical management and styles – "unless you do this things will get out of control".

Along side these experiences of authority which are etched in one's character due to anxiety and the need for control are tendencies to exploration and learning which I believe are rooted in wonder, and the origins can also be found in family experiences of nurturance and encouragement in exploration, and later at school in delighting in new learning, ideas, ways of doing things, playing a musical instrument, singing, writing etc.

However, in the way in which we design organisations, and the ideas we bring to their functioning, it is the authority based in anxiety model that is most evident. I suggest that this model is implicit in Obholzer's definition of authority, and that as the essence of the model is the control of the weaker by the stronger (and thereby controlling the anxiety of the stronger) it leads directly to the idea of authority existing in a linear hierarchy. This may often be a patriarchal model and this too may be linked with the division in the child's mind of "wonder" "love" and "nurturance" being associated with mother, and punishment and prohibition being associated with father. Though this is a considerable over simplification.

So to sum up this part of the argument. I see early experiences of authority being rooted either in "wonder" or in "anxiety". Acting out of authority which is based in anxiety stops, or covers over, the emergence of authority based in wonder. Authority based in wonder is about exploration and learning. Authority based in anxiety is about control, or stopping things happening which are feared may lead to a loss of control. There is personal authority found in wonder, and authority "over someone" found in anxiety and its control.

I want now to turn to the second theme: *the location and generation of authority on an Individual / Community dimension.*

I have been aided in thinking about this through the Buddhist conception of Buddha or Truth: Buddha may be manifested in three ways, or there are three aspects of the same thing, the Three Jewels:

1. There is the aspect of the Buddha as a person – most recently – Gautama.
2. There is the aspect of Buddha as Dharma – truth, as evidenced in the texts of Buddhism.
3. There is the aspect of the Buddha as Sangha, the community of people on the path.

(This idea can be translated to other faiths. For example, in Hinduism the truth as a person may be manifest in Shankara, or recently Ramana Maharsi. The truth in the texts of the Vedas, Upanishads, Baghvad Gita, and other Shastras. And the community of a particular order. The same is true for Christianity – the person of Christ, the New Testament, and the congregation of true believers).

Truth, and therefore authority, is manifested in these three ways.

The traditional or usual way of conceiving of authority is that it is the property of a role, and that the role is taken up by an individual. The role itself may be part of a system of roles, each role usually occupied by different person.

A colleague, and friend, Peter Hetrelezis, has recently been developing a concept which I think helps elucidate a different model of authority, a model which seems to fit better with experiences in the Social Dreaming Matrix. Peter calls this "Authority for Meaning". Peter writes that "Social Dreaming is in part a vehicle for truth inherent in the connection between individual and group"[7]. Authority for Meaning is generated through sharing dreams, association, and connections in a group. The "authority" is social in origin, and while individuals give expression to authority for meaning, its evolution is the property of the group. If the group has a particular task, "authority for meaning" is generated within that container.

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[7] Personal communication.

The concept points to the reciprocal, and engaging, nature of authority for meaning being constantly created as individuals share dreams, associations, and connections within the context of their task.

Perhaps an image from a dream in a recent Social Dreaming Matrix in Australia may help to make this clearer. The image was of a jigsaw puzzle, and associations to that image included how the pieces of the jigsaw join together to make a picture, or to make a meaning, while individual pieces on their own are likely to be "meaningless".

The analogy can be drawn with individual dreamers in a Matrix[8], sharing dreams, associations, and connections – together in the way they join, link etc., they are making meaning for that group, and the process is creating authority for meaning.

To do this requires giving up belief in the omnipotence of one's own bit of the puzzle, and allowing the "penetration" of other dreams, associations, and connections, as well as allowing oneself to "penetrate" in the same way, or "join" in some ways may be a better word.

My thought is that the truth that is being generated by social dreaming is akin to the truth of the Sangha, the community in Buddhism, of people on the path. In our case in this Workshop it is the truth or meaning that is created or made manifest through our common exploration.

This kind of authority I would suggest is different from the usual individually based role notion of authority. And I would also suggest that it is the exercise of authority based in wonder rather than authority based in anxiety.

The two strands I have outlined I believe come together:
1. The first strand of individually based role authority usually being grounded in hierarchies of control. And if one follows it through grounded in early experiences of authority being generated to deal with anxiety.
2. The second strand is community based. It is the authority and meaning created by people on the same path. This authority is based in wonder.

The process of social dreaming, and ways of working and exploring which are grounded in wonder can be thought of as "giving voice" to an idea, a connection. Similarly, exploring problems in a socio-analytic way which are buried and rooted in anxiety and pain – work and other problems – can also be thought of as giving voice to that which has been silenced, or is regarded as unspeakable. What we are collectively doing here is giving voice to what may be painful or buried, and giving voice to shared wonder."

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[8] In this case there is no one jigsaw doer, but all of us in the Matrix – each taking his or her authority to offer dreams and associations.

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