CHAPTER 22

Moral Power

JAL MEHTA AND CHRISTOPHER WINSHIP

INTRODUCTION

Despite their many differences, when Barack Obama speaks about the Muslim world, his words are remarkably similar to those of his predecessor, George W. Bush. Compare the September 2006 speech President Bush gave to the UN with the June 2009 Cairo speech of President Obama. Both presidents talked about the importance of human rights, self-determination, and democracy in Muslim nations; both said that America will respect the history and traditions of the Muslim world; both argued that America is not at war with Islam; both called on Muslim moderates to join America in denouncing the perpetrators of the September 11th attacks. The reaction to the two men from the Muslim community, however, could not be more different: shoe throwing hatred for President Bush, and, at least as of June 2009, healthy respect for President Obama.[1]

The difference in the way that the two presidents have been received by the Muslim world, we argue, lies not in what these men have said, but in how they are perceived. As a product of their past actions, their biographies, and the narratives that they have crafted for themselves they have entirely different moral status and standing, or what we call *moral power*, in their relationship to the Muslim world. As a result, their words are interpreted quite differently. This difference in moral power is critical for understanding not only how they are perceived, but also is one of the resources they have available to persuade and affect the actions of others.[2]

[1] Michael Crowley, "Just Like Bush," June 4, 2009, *The New Republic*. Accessed online at: http://www.tnr.com/politics/story.html?id=770a874d-9279-4cda-b0e4-2fd0533b07b6.

[2] There is some overlap with what Joseph Nye has called *soft power*, but *moral power* is a distinct concept. Nye (2004: x) defines soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments." Nye, a foreign relations scholar whose interest is in the power of nations, argues that the "soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture. . ., its political values. . ., and its foreign policies" (Nye 2004: 11). The more outsiders are attracted to America on those various dimensions, argues Nye, the greater the nation's soft power. Moral power is thus a more specific concept than soft power: soft power refers to the range of attributes that might attract another to do one's bidding; moral power is focused on the degree to which one's moral status and standing affect one's ability to sway others. Moral power can contribute to soft power, but soft power need not rest on a moral basis. As Nye (2004: 17) writes, "Much of American soft power has been produced by Hollywood, Harvard, Microsoft, and Michael Jordan."

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To claim the importance of moral power is not to discount more traditional forms of power such as economic or military power. Rather it is to say that there are frequently situations where other forms of power are not dispositive, and moral power is one critical resource in these situations. In these cases, there is often an important but uncommitted middle; moral power is critical to persuading that middle that a particular interpretation of a situation is the correct one, which in turn affects which positions that middle will adopt.[3] Put another way, moral power is important when there is moral ambiguity and the ability to persuade those on the fence as to what is moral is critical. This is frequently the case in politics, but can also be true in other spheres of life. In situations such as these, moral claims about what is right or just and/or what is best for the common good are often made to influence people to support one position or another. A classic example to which we will return is the Civil Rights movement and the passage of federal civil rights legislation during the 1960s. It is difficult to argue that the power of blacks and black leaders as understood in its traditional sense was the key factor in pushing through this legislation. Rather, it was, at least in part, the moral arguments made by Martin Luther King and others that were critical. Furthermore, it was not just the arguments that King and other clergy made, but their moral status and standing as ministers that was influential.

Morality and power are often taken to be opposites, with morality grounded in altruism and a commitment to the common good, and power located in self-interest. Our contention is that moral power, seemingly an oxymoron, is actually a widely present and important factor in social and political life. Our aim is to introduce and situate the concept, offer a theory of how moral power is generated and what role it plays, and give examples that illustrate its importance.

Moral power is the degree to which an actor, by virtue of his or her perceived moral stature, is able to persuade others to adopt a particular belief or take a particular course of action. While there has been some writing about the importance of *moral claims* and *narratives* (Jasper 1997, Polletta 2006, Ganz 2008), it is our argument that it is not only the perceived morality of the claims, as argued by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), but also the *moral power* of the specific *actor* making the claim that is important in determining the outcome.[4] Thus, the quite different reception of Bush's and Obama's comments in the Muslim world.

The importance of moral power as a form of influence is exemplified in the widespread debate about the extent to which the US behavior in foreign affairs is consistent with the moral claims that it espouses. One common view is that although the United States preaches the virtues of democracy, its practices violate that claim in important ways (e.g. by engaging in torture or supporting authoritarian or dictatorial leaders). The issue here is not whether the USA has the economic or political muscle to convince other countries to take particular actions, but rather whether it has the ability to persuade other countries that particular actions are morally justified given the perceived moral inconsistencies of its own behavior.

[3] There are some similarities here to Fligstein's (2001) notion of social skill, in that both ideas are about creating cooperation among actors. However, social skill seems to be more highly rooted in understanding, shaping, and responding to the needs and preferences of other actors, while moral power is more about how actors' moral status affects their abilities to get others to follow their lead.

[4] An actor could be an individual, organization, or corporate actors more generally.

Below we develop the outlines of a theory of moral power. Specifically, we argue that moral power is a function of whether one is perceived as *morally well-intentioned*, *morally capable*, and whether one has *moral standing* to speak to an issue. With respect to *intentions*, the issue is whether an actor is perceived to be promoting a particular position out of concern with what is morally right or good, as opposed to being driven by self-interest or other motivations, and, relatedly, whether that actor is perceived to be trustworthy. In terms of *capability*, the question is whether an individual is seen to be both generally wise and knowledgeable in forming moral judgments and appropriately informed about the specific issue at hand. *Moral standing* refers to the degree to which the actor is understood to be a member of the relevant moral community.

In the next section of the chapter, we place our argument in the context of previous theoretical work. We start by discussing the antipathy between power and morality as concepts in traditional sociological writings. We then discuss the relationship between our use of the concepts of power and morality and how they have been used by others. Next, we develop our analytic model and define our key terms. We then present several extended examples drawn from our own work to illustrate the impact of moral power: Winship's work on the partnership that arose between the Boston Police Department and a group of black inner-city ministers known as the Ten Point Coalition, and Mehta's work on the federal education program No Child Left Behind. We conclude the chapter by discussing the potential importance of moral power as a concept for future research.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Our interest in moral power is also part of the larger project, shared by other contributors to this volume, of reviving interest in the sociology of morality. Morality was a central concern of the discipline's founding fathers, particularly Durkheim and Weber, but it has fallen largely off the agenda in the past four decades. A full accounting of this decline is beyond the scope of this chapter, but one central strand has been the rejection of Talcott Parsons' notion of a unifying moral or normative code that holds society together. This neo-Durkheimian notion was virulently attacked by conflict theorists such as Dahrendorf and others, who argued that such a claim ignored important differences in power, and aimed to legitimize a functionalist view of society that was rapidly being eclipsed by the events of the 1960s. In subsequent years, the Parsonsian view has also come under attack for assuming too much homogeneity across the population in its notions of morality and too much coherence in individuals' views of morality (Alexander 1987).

If Parsons' notion of morality mistakenly overlooked issues of power, subsequent theorists of power have made a similar error in overlooking morality. Post-Parsonsian sociology is right to see society as made up of individuals, organizations, institutions and logics rather than overarching functional norms. However, as some more culturally-inclined scholars have recognized,[5] the presence of conflict does not necessarily imply that actors are acting out of narrow self-interest or that the only resources that actors possess are material ones. While

[5] See Adams, Clemens, and Orloff (2005).

power can be a function of role or of social status, power can also be derived from the perceived moral weight of the actors involved.[6] Our view of moral power thus tries to avoid both dangers, seeing society as pluralistic rather than unified, but accepting that moral claims and the moral power of the actors who make them are an important part of how social and political decisions are made.

In a sense, our work harkens back to the classic sociology of Weber, who was similarly interested in both power and morality, before those concepts came to be seen as antithetical. Weber's (1968, 1946) notion of charismatic authority has some parallels to our view of moral power: they are both about a form of power that is not traditional or rational-legal, but rather dependent in part upon the qualities of the leader. We also share Weber's sense that power is relational. Thus, a particular individual may have particular power with respect to some individuals, but not others. For example, arguments about the evils of gay marriage by an evangelical minister may be persuasive to other evangelicals, but be seen as irrelevant by atheists.

At the same time, moral power is not the same as charismatic authority. According to Weber, charisma "will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional power or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origins or as exemplary" (1968: 241). While charismatic authority can generate moral power, moral power can also adhere to people who are not conventionally charismatic or extraordinary, and it is potentially much more widespread than charismatic authority. Parents, for example, frequently use moral power in trying to establish the justice of their rules. Teach for America founder Wendy Kopp is a good example of someone who is frequently described as more "discipline" than "dynamism" and "has never been a charismatic public speaker," but who is able to use the moral clarity of her cause to advance the mission of her organization.[7] Thus while leaders like Martin Luther King or Gandhi can rightly be seen as examples of both charismatic authority and moral power, moral power can also exist in the absence of charisma, and is thus a much more common feature of social life.[8]

In terms of Lukes' (2005) famous typology of the three dimensions of power, moral power is most closely related to his third dimension.[9] Summarizing crudely, Lukes' first dimension of power is the ability of an actor to directly determine the outcome where there are competing recognized alternative outcomes; his second dimension is the ability of an actor to define the agenda, that is, what alternatives are publicly recognized and debated; his third dimension is the extent to which an actor is able to influence and change what others see as desirable. To the degree that people want what is morality right, moral power is about changing wants, Lukes' third dimension of power.

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[6] This chapter is intended to investigate moral power; it is not intended to an exhaustively catalogue different types of power. See Lukes (2005) for one such attempt.

[7] Jodi Wilgoren, "Wendy Kopp, The Leader of Teach for America," *New York Times,* November 12, 2000.

[8] We also offer a more specific account of the sources of moral power than Weber does of the sources of charismatic authority; see the next section on components of moral power.

[9] Presumably moral power could also matter at the level of the first or second dimension of power; actors who are perceived to have moral power can also have influence on how debates are decided or what is on the agenda.

Moral power is particularly salient when a moral conflict is less about general principles than the appropriate interpretation of those principles in particular contexts (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). Abortion is a good example: the lines of disagreement are less about the values each side seeks to uphold (many on both sides of the debate are for "choice" and for "life" as general principles), but rather whether abortion should be seen as a case of "life" or one of woman's "choice." Thus, deploying moral power is often less about changing others' principles, and more often about convincing them the right way to understand the world.[10]

COMPONENTS OF MORAL POWER

We see moral power as a function of whether one is perceived to *morally well-intentioned*, *morally capable*, and whether one has *moral standing* to speak to an issue. We argue that all three are needed for an actor to have moral power.

To be perceived as *morally well-intentioned* is to be seen by others as consistently acting in accordance with moral principles. This often takes the form of an actor who is seen as motivated by concern for the common good rather than out of self- or group-interest (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006). The classic example is Martin Luther King, whose argument for civil rights for all was seen by many as grounded in universal moral principles, not because it solely and narrowly advanced the interests of African-Americans. At the same time, it may be the case that moral worthiness is demonstrated by defending the in-group rather than expanding it to include morally compromised members outside of the group. Torturing alleged terrorists to prevent future plots, for example, can be seen as morally admirable or morally bankrupt depending upon the standards of the surrounding community. Hence we emphasize *perceived* moral intentions because we see moral power as it operates in the world as socially constructed, not as an *a priori* philosophical attribute.

However, moral intentions are not enough to achieve moral power; moral power is also a function of *moral capability*. Moral capability is the ability to effectively diagnose and act in a moral situation. It is akin (with a particular emphasis on what is moral) to what Aristotle called *phronesis* or practical wisdom, defined as the knowledge gained through experience of how to act (morally) in particular situations. The key attribute here is the relationship between the particular and the general; to be morally capable means to be able to make persuasively the moral judgments about particular cases with reference to broader moral principles. If the situation sits within a set of governing institutional norms (i.e. a bioethical dilemma, or one within a religious faith), to be morally capable will additionally require technical knowledge of the domain, and the ability to effectively assess the particulars of the situation within the broader governing principles of the domain.[11] Moral capability provides an important complement to moral intentionality. For example, if one is well-intentioned, but is unable to recognize when one is being swindled or taken advantage of by a malevolent actor, then one is not perceived

[10] We also assume that people's sense of morality may be affected explicitly or implicitly. For example, Martin Luther King was able to persuade many that blacks should have the same political rights as whites. This would be *explicit* influence. A prominent, charitable member of a community might influence others to be charitable simply by example. This would be *implicit* influence.

[11] See Abbott (1988) on the importance of diagnosis as key to skilled practice within a domain.

by others to be an effective moral guide. Since moral power is in part about the ability to persuasively define what is moral, having the capability to effectively make such distinctions is an important part of this equation.

A third essential component of moral power is *moral standing*. Moral standing is whether an actor is perceived to be part of the moral interpretive community that is relevant to the question at hand. Moral philosophers are an example of a group that is morally capable and well-intentioned but has little moral standing with respect to many questions of social and political life. Moral standing can come within a rational-legal structure if the structure is perceived as legitimate (i.e. judges). Alternatively, it can emerge through a kind of open jurisdictional claims-making (as advocates often do in politics). This means that moral standing can sometimes derive at least in part from one's role, while at other times it may be more informally negotiated.

Much of politics is about who has moral standing with respect to an issue: issues that sit at the intersection of race and other social problems are potent examples of the fights over who has moral standing in the dispute between different claims. Another example is euthanasia: the debate over who should decide (medical professionals? family members? ethicists? society writ large?) is in part a question of who has appropriate moral standing in the matter. Extremely powerful and skilled moral actors are often able to claim membership in multiple moral communities. To return to the Martin Luther King example, the civil rights leader was part of at least three such communities: the black community, the Christian community, and the American community, and his standing within each of them effectively allowed him to broaden the reach of his moral power and mobilize multiple moral communities.

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that we view moral power as something which is both highly relational and socially constructed. There is no 'view from nowhere' when it comes to moral power—there are only actions which are seen as moral or not by a relevant community, which in turn then allows the actor to utilize (or not) moral power with reference to that community. As such, there is a strong "performative" (to use Jeffrey Alexander's term) dimension to moral power. Whether an individual has moral power is a function of whether their performance in relation to others is successful, which requires that it be perceived as "authentic" (Alexander 2004). Here, we argue that perceived intentions, capability, and moral standing are the essential ingredients for initially achieving moral power. Over time, moral power can become a kind of social fact—once an actor's moral power is widely seen as legitimate, it then becomes a resource, which that actor can use as new situations arise.[12]

A THEORY OF MORAL POWER

Figure 22.1 presents a theory of moral power. At the core of our argument is the claim that moral power is a result of a cultural/symbolic process, that is socially constructed, where the enactment and perception of moral standing, intentions, and capability coheres into a "successful performance." Our theory of how moral power works is similar to Jeffrey Alexander's

[12] We discuss this further in the section below on uses of moral power.

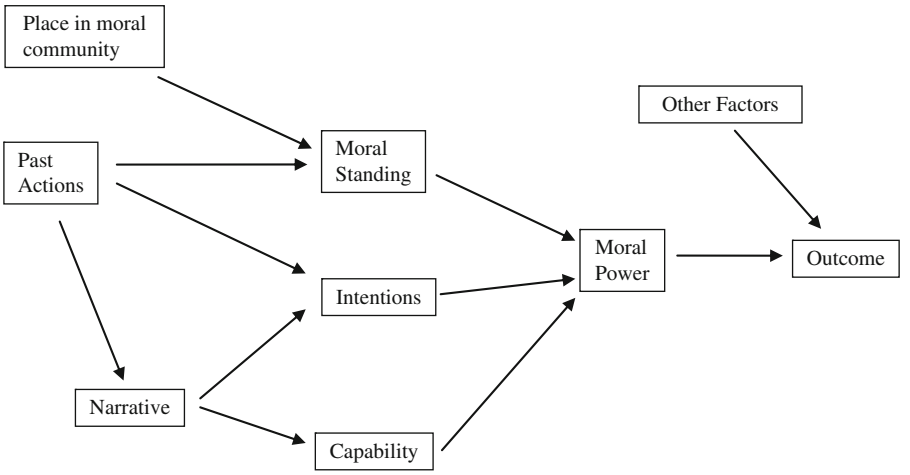

Figure 22.1. A theory of moral power.

view of how social "performances" work more generally, and so we draw upon some of his thinking here. For Alexander, the understanding of a situation is the result of the cultural performances of the individuals involved and how the "audience" experiences and understands that performance. A key issue for Alexander is the necessary conditions for a performance to be persuasive and thus successful. He argues that the critical component of success is that the performance be seen as authentic. To quote Alexander: "a strategy's success depends on belief in the validity of the cultural contents of the strategist's symbolic communication and on accepting the authenticity and even the sincerity of another's strategic intentions" (2004: 528).

Note that while the language of "strategy" and "performance" seem to imply that moral power is something which is contrived, we do not mean to suggest that that is necessarily so. It may be that the most convincing and sustainable way to establish moral power is simply to consistently act in a way that is broadly seen as morally right (e.g. Gandhi). However, given that moral power is ultimately relational, and that it is the perception of the surrounding community that matters, it is also the case that some actors will seek to achieve moral power by intentionally creating a narrative of their moral worthiness and concealing their immoral actions.

Our argument is that moral standing, intentionality and capability are the needed ingredients for an actor to be seen as morally "authentic" and thus achieve and maintain moral power. A failure in any one of these components is likely to lead to a performance being seen as invalid, and thus result in the loss of moral power. As such, moral power is fragile. If it is discovered that an actor's intentions are based in self-interest, the actor's arguments lose their persuasive power. Similarly, if the actor is thought to be morally incapable, no one is likely to give credence to the arguments the actor makes. If she is perceived to be outside the relevant moral community, her opinions are easily ignored.

Because moral power is fragile, it is easily attacked. Political actors as well as others are frequently accused of ill intentions. As such, ad hominem attacks can actually be very powerful, because of their potential to undermine an actor's moral intentions, and hence their

moral power. Similarly, an actor's arguments may be dismissed if the actor is perceived as not having the appropriate knowledge, that is, not having moral capability.

The fragility of moral power is socially important because it requires and constrains specific behavior on the part of actors. This is closely related to Merton's notion of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1968). A perception of what is true causes individuals to act in a way consistent with that perception, with the result that it becomes true. To the extent that others would like to deny someone moral power, an individual must be sure that they are perceived as well intentioned, capable and having moral standing in the community if they want to retain their moral power, or, in some cases, their power more generally. An obvious recent case is John Edwards. Edwards built much of his presidential candidacy on a moral basis as an advocate for the poor and disenfranchised, but the revelation of his affair, illegitimate child, and cover-up, eliminated his ability to make moral claims and presumably finished his career as a politician. Edwards' situation is an interesting contrast to Francois Mitterand, former President of France, who had many extramarital affairs, with one mistress even attending his funeral with their daughter. Context matters in terms of what types of behavior can undermine moral power.

There is also the question of the relationship between moral power and other forms of power. Are actors who have high degrees of financial, social, military, political, or organizational power more or less likely to possess moral power? This is ultimately an empirical question worthy of further research. Clearly there are extreme examples on both sides: leaders who possessed tremendous political, financial, or military power but whose actions robbed them of any chance at moral power (i.e. genocidal dictators, rapacious Wall Street executives), as well as actors who built upon other forms of power to enhance or exhibit moral power (i.e., major philanthropists). In the first case, the problem is people may well believe that "power corrupts." In the second case, power in the traditional sense may provide individuals with the resources to promote their moral power. This may be in the form of money, access to the media or more influential social networks (Alexander 2004).

There may also be spillover effects, whereby actors' high status in one domain makes them more credible in another. From the perspective of moral power, one way to interpret the Milgram (1974) electric shock experiments is that the social and professional authority of the experimenters led the subjects to trust their moral judgment as well. (Again, this points to the perception-based nature of moral power; clearly what the experimenters were asking the subjects to do was to act immorally, but one way to read what happened is that they were able to persuade the subjects to do so because of their social, professional, and moral authority.) Conversely, Akerlof (1983) has made the argument that high moral status can result in high social status. In particular, he argues that Quakers have been particularly socially and economically successful because they are perceived to be of high moral character by others and thus trustworthy. This is an area that would benefit from further research.

EXTENDED EXAMPLES

Black Ministers and the Boston Miracle

In a series of articles, one of us, Winship (and co-authors), has described how during the 1990s, a group of inner-city black clergy know as the Ten Point Coalition developed a partnership that successfully dealt with the problem of youth violence and homicide in Boston. Although the

story of how this partnership came about is its own story, for the purposes of this chapter our interest is in illustrating how the partnership worked.

At the height of the partnership, the Boston police and black ministers conducted "gang forums" as part of a program called Operation Cease-Fire. The purpose of the forums was to let individuals know that they needed to stop their gang activities (gang-banging), and that if they did, they would get help. To quote Berrien et al. (2000: 275), paraphrasing the ministers:

> "You have a choice. Stop your gang-banging and we will help you—help you get back in school or get a job, help you deal with your family, your girlfriend; help you straighten out your life. Continue to gang-bang and we will work as hard as we can with the police to see that you are put in jail. Both for your own good, and the good of community. As long as you are gang-banging you are a danger to yourself and to others. What I ultimately want to avoid more than anything is presiding over your funeral."

The moral content of this message is obvious: as a minister, I care about you and your well-being, but as a minister, I also require you to act in a way that is consistent with your own and the community's best interest.

For the purposes of this chapter, the Ten Point story is interesting for two reasons. First, the ministers provided what Berrien et al. (2000) called an "umbrella of legitimacy" for the police. Specifically, people in the community believed that the ministers had full knowledge of what the police were doing to curb youth violence and that the ministers would loudly and publicly speak out if they thought that police activity was illegitimate.[13] This had two consequences. First, as one high-ranking police official said, it allowed the police to intervene more aggressively to deal with youth violence than they might have otherwise. Second, however, before intervening, the police would confer with the ministers to make sure that they thought that what the police were going to do was appropriate. Thus, in a direct way, as discussed generally above, the desire of the police to be seen as legitimate and maintain their moral power constrained their behavior and caused them to act in ways that were moral, at least as defined by the ministers. In addition, the fact that this moral power was dependent on the ministers' support and community understanding of the relationship between the ministers and police illustrates both the perceptual and relational dimensions of moral power.

The second reason the Ten Point story is of interest here is the nature of the moral power of the ministers themselves. The legitimacy of their partnership with the police was often questioned by local black politicians and other clergy. Their status as members of the clergy gave them a degree of moral power, but not enough to thwart criticism and establish the nature of their intentions, their capability, or appropriate moral standing. Having "walked the walk" is clearly important as a means both of signaling one's moral intentions and of establishing oneself as an important member of the relevant moral community. The fact that the ministers had chosen to live and work in some of Boston's most dangerous neighborhoods and that one of them had decided to give up a career as a doctor provided the needed evidence that their actions were motivated by the good of the black community as a whole, not personal self-interest. Their ability to defuse potential gang violence and negotiate favorable outcomes for youth charged with crimes provided evidence of their considerable moral capability. The fact

[13] At that point the Ten Point ministers participated in a study of racial profiling being carried out by a Northeastern University faculty member that was highly critical of police behavior (Berrien et al. 2000).

that they lived where they worked, as well as the fact that one of the ministers had been a gang member in his youth established their moral standing in the community.

As briefly discussed above, access to the media can be an important resource in creating moral power. In the Boston example, *The Boston Globe* played a critical role in the creation of a narrative, often called "The Boston Miracle" wherein it was claimed that the fact that the Boston Police Department and the Ten Point ministers were working together explained an 80% drop in Boston's homicide rate over the 1990s. The Ten Point ministers were acutely aware of the importance of the media; often publishing op-ed pieces, making themselves available for interviews, and offering pithy phrases to explain particular situations.

The black inner-city ministers in Boston enjoyed considerable moral power within Boston's black community (Berrien et al. 2000). Many individuals, however, particularly Boston's black politicians, were unhappy with their influence. As a result, the black ministers' behavior was constantly under scrutiny, most importantly in Boston's black newspaper, *The Bay State Banner*. Claims that the ministers' behavior was guided by self-interest and/or not in line with the interests of Boston's black community were used against them and, if they had been persuasive, their influence most certainly would have been undermined. Given this constant scrutiny, the Ten Point ministers were under constant pressure to act in a way consistent with their image.

No Child Left Behind

The research of the other one of us, Mehta, on educational politics provides a second extended illustration of the role and impact of moral power. In January of 2002, the United States signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The act declared that all children would be proficient in reading and math by 2014. Students would be tested annually in grades 3–8, and schools that failed to show the expected rate of improvement ("adequate yearly progress" or AYP) would face an escalating series of consequences, culminating in the closure of schools and the replacement of staff. Whether this legislation was a good idea or whether it has been efficacious in achieving its goals is not our concern here. What is interesting from our perspective is that it came into being in the first place, as it owes its existence in part to the impact of moral power.

NCLB represented a significant and unexpected departure from previous American educational politics. For more than two centuries, American education was resolutely localized by international standards, with local districts having primary responsibility for schools. This began to change somewhat with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965, which for the first time granted the federal government some formal responsibility for the role of schools, but still the federal contribution to schooling remained at less than 10%, and most powers remained devolved to districts and states. NCLB represented an unprecedented expansion of the federal role in American education. That this change happened under a Republican president was even more surprising, given longstanding conservative opposition to a federal role in education.

Existing theories did little to predict this change. Institutional accounts emphasize the ways in which long entrenched patterns of federalism are expected to be inertial and constrain the opportunities for change. (They explain well why the system stayed so localized for so long.) Interest group accounts are also particularly unsuited for explaining these changes,

because by widespread consensus one of the strongest interest groups in American education politics are the teachers unions, which have long resisted efforts to introduce accountability and testing in American education.[14]

In other work, Mehta has argued that the key reason for this set of changes was the emergence of a paradigm that linked together the nation's economic and educational futures. This new paradigm legitimized a greater state and federal role, and also created urgency around the reform. It generated business support, was friendly to both liberal Democrats seeking equal opportunity and conservative Republicans seeking more skilled workers, and thus generated bipartisan political support.

So how does moral power come into this story? That the aims of the act—to close gaps between more- and less-advantaged children—were broadly seen as a moral imperative strengthened the hand of proponents and weakened the hand of opponents. This was particularly true of the materially powerful teachers unions, who were largely undermined by their lack of moral power. Discussions with legislators, including Democratic legislators, revealed that the unions were viewed as compromised moral actors. The unions were perceived as being more invested in the self-interest of their members than in improving the school system, which undermined the legitimacy of their arguments against NCLB. This compromised moral status was derived from their previous positions. To take just one example, union opposition to districts' ability to fire what districts regarded as incompetent teachers was seen as the unions favoring the interests of their members over the broader social goal of increasing opportunity for poor students. These specific positions crystallized into a broader narrative of teachers unions being opponents of almost any type of "reform," which, in a political climate that was demanding reform, left them on the losing side of the debate.[15]

An interesting counterpoint to the unions was a small liberal think tank called the Education Trust. The Ed Trust, with fewer than 50 employees, no national base of support, and relatively few dollars, was a critical player in NCLB, according to detailed work on the creation of the Act. The Ed Trust was a proponent of NCLB, and they made a simple moral case: schools, particularly urban schools, have failed our students, and we need to hold them accountable until they improve. The Ed Trust had everything the unions lacked in terms of moral power: their past actions indicated that they were deeply committed to the cause, as the organization was staffed by a number of former civil rights actors; they had capability, in that they produced a number of reports detailing the failings of the current system; they were viewed as largely impartial, meaning that their numbers were seen as trustworthy; and their overall narrative successfully positioned them as a fair-minded group, with strong social scientific skill, that was deeply committed to expanding opportunity for all children, particularly poor children. The strength of their moral power, in other words, largely outweighed what they lacked in material power, and they became integral players in the development of the legislation.

This example also illustrates the possibility of a kind of *moral surrogacy*, whereby the moral power of one actor is used to enhance the position of another. In this case, the support of the Ed Trust and another longstanding civil rights organization, the Citizens Commission

[14] This was particularly true of the National Education Association, and less true of the American Federation of Teachers. The NEA is the larger and more powerful of the two unions. See Mehta (2006) for details.

[15] See Mehta (2006) for details.

on Civil Rights, were used to buttress the moral credibility of the legislation. When centrists and Democrats were accused by union members and other critics of the legislation of being complicit in a right-wing scheme to scapegoat schools as failures and pave the road for privatization, they would point to the support of these civil rights groups as a way of defusing the criticism and signaling the moral importance of the issue.

USES OF MORAL POWER

Moral power is like the other forms of capital: it is a resource, which allows actors to do things that they would not be able to do without it. Just like actors can differ in their level of financial capital, or human capital, or even social capital, they can differ in their level of moral power, which affects what they can do and what options they have at their disposal. Unlike financial or political capital, one does not deplete moral power by "spending it"; effective moral leadership enhances one's moral power for the future.

Moral power is important for everyone from parents to leaders of organizations to heads of state. Parents of adolescents today need to rely almost entirely on their persuasive powers, and the ability to make well-intentioned and morally capable judgments are the keys to getting their children to accede to their wishes. Organizational leaders often have some form of coercive or top-down power, but in more collaborative or less hierarchical organizations, moral power can be a means to overcome collective action dilemmas and motivate one's charges to action. Inconsistencies between what one is asking from others and what one is willing to do oneself erode moral power, as when clergy drive Cadillacs or university presidents' pay themselves extravagantly while raising tuition or freezing faculty salaries. Similarly, when world leaders gather and make requests to one another to amend treaties or contribute troops or humanitarian aid, how they are viewed morally by their contemporaries is often a critical factor in the success of these efforts.

Like other sources of power, the importance of moral power is in its ability to convince other actors to do something or to allow something to be done. However, moral power does more than this. As David Beetham has argued in his book *The Legitimation of Power*, legitimation of authority is created by the expressed consensual behavior of individuals who obey that authority whether they in fact believe in the legitimacy of that authority or whether in any principled sense that authority is legitimate. For example, although George W. Bush's election in 2000 was initially contested, the fact that the media covered his inauguration as they had past inaugurations in part legitimated his election. In a similar way, when individuals act in consent with the moral power of an actor, they cause both that actor and the actions he advocates to be seen as moral. To return to Martin Luther King, King not only convinced the majority of Americans that blacks deserved equal rights, but also that this was morally correct and thus established himself as a moral leader. As Tom Tyler has argued in *Why People Obey the Law* (Tyler 2006) persuading people to do something because it is right is a far more effective form of influence than outright coercion, which is often costly to carry out. Thus, democracy has proved a more viable form of government in many situations than authoritarian totalitarianism as its stability is to a large degree a function of people's belief in its legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

Moral power is a centrally important factor in social life which has not been given its proper due. We suggest in this chapter that outcomes are not just determined by standard structural factors (the economic and social resources of various actors and the relationships between them), but by the relative ability of different actors to persuade and influence others by asserting the correctness of particular moral positions. Differences in the moral power of various actors in their relationships with others are an important and at times key determinant of various outcomes. We have found moral power to be a useful concept in our own work in explaining everything from school policy to presidential politics to the relationship between cops and ministers. Our hope is that other researchers will find the concept of moral power similarly useful in explaining a variety of outcomes.

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