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The Dual Nature of Authority and Its Generative Capacity

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Abstract Authority is a controversial and complex term. It refers to a social process that shapes intersubjective and institutional relationships. This article aims to discuss 'authority' starting from the meaning of the term and its controversial history, and then to identify the characteristics of its dual nature. This duality is inherent in authority itself and can be seen as the relation between the instituted forms of society and the innovative, creative forces that drive change through human social actions and interactions. This may help us to reconsider authority and its contribution to social life from a perspective of generating change.

Keywords Authority; instituted forms; instituting dynamics; generative authority

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1. Introduction

As already highlighted by some of the classical authors of sociology – e.g. the German thinker Georg Simmel, who focused on the reciprocal interaction between 'form and life' – social life inevitably contains an internal tension. This exists between what has already been established, having been consolidated over time to assume a recognisable, organised form, and what is in the process of becoming established, that is, what is arising and has the capacity to institute something new in response to the questions life poses. If the forces driving change were removed and cancelled, society would remain unaltered. And if those forces that had already established change were totally dismantled, then formless chaos would prevail, preventing human existence from taking shape. This tension, which a typical feature of social life, is similarly found with authority.

Following Simmel's thoughts on social life and Arendt's understanding and conceptualization of authority, this paper analyses the concept of 'authority', focusing on the dual nature of authority and its meaning in relation to the forms already established in society and the dynamic forces that change society. The article starts from the etymological meaning of the term 'authority' and traces some of its main socio-historical stages from the Ancient Roman context to our modern society. It then outlines the scope for a different understanding of authority, by focusing on its dual nature that derives from the two dimensions of authority: that of establishment (whereby institutions, organisations, forms and modes have over time become entrenched) and that of dynamism (which generates and inaugurates new forms). History is riddled with attempts to reduce authority to a single dimension, carrying the risk of confining it to a form of institutional, conservative power while neglecting authority's creative. In this way, authority loses its circular dynamic which could enable society to evolve, to be able to let human actors flourish shaping a dynamic social life.

2. 'Authority': an enigmatic term

Going back to etymological roots can help rediscover and reveal elements not only of the starting point but also of the direction we need to look towards when using certain concepts.

The term 'authority' comes from the Latin *auctoritas*, which derives from *auctor*: it refers to a certain way of acting (expressed by the verb *augere*) which makes us 'authors' who, through our actions and contributions to society, can enhance and improve our daily lives.

There is a link between authority and existence itself: authority is not only linked to characteristics externally attributed to subjects (e.g. a role, status, and prestige). As an '*auctor*', the subject also initiates something and allows something to grow which is of value to others, offering them a positive and validating guarantee, and inspiring them to look at what has gone before and what has contributed to giving them the force to act in that specific way.

Usually *augere* is translated as 'to augment', or 'to increase'. While this is inherent in its meaning, it fails to paint a full picture of the term *auctor*. In fact, there is an element of innovation and creation in *auctoritas* that goes beyond this connotation. This is by no means marginal, as Benveniste (1969) notes: authority is inhabited by two impulses. On the one hand, it improves, augmenting what already exists; on the other, it is an initiating and creative force, that generates and establishes something new which arises from ground made fertile by the intervention of sources that inspire the author and those it addresses.

From this perspective, *auctoritas* becomes a resource that promotes a model of acting which reveals the *auctor*'s capacity to creatively bring something new into the world (Arendt, 1958). This takes place in relation to preceding events or sources of inspiration, which are mediated by authority: authority is not merely the 'transit' of something that can exist independently of the subject (the *auctor*), but of something that marks their experiences and questions the authors that mediates it and to which they have given continuity.

The mediation of the *auctor* takes place both externally and internally. Externally, it can be described as a 'ternary mediation relationship' (Jaspers, 1947), since it operates between a fundament, understood as the authority's sphere of validity, which exists beyond the subject's control, and the bearer of the authority who, in turn, addresses the interlocutor by referring to the fundament. The latter is considered not as something rigid, but as the ground which allows something else to flourish and grow by taking its form. Internally, mediation already takes place between the two elements of authority itself: the element of initiation and that of growth, in other words, the dynamic driving change and the one establishing social forms already developed.

The nature of authority is two-fold: thus, the mediating relationship that corresponds to authority might be outlined as a movement to 'hold the tension' between these two dimensions that inhabit it. This is what, throughout history, has been constantly blurred.

3. The ambivalent history of authority in the ancient Roman world

Most scholars concur that *auctoritas* first takes shape in the ancient Roman world. H. Arendt (1969), confirming the concept's exclusively Roman affiliation and its use in both the public and private spheres, notes how the core of Roman politics is related specifically to *auctoritas* in its connection with tradition and religion. She emphasizes how in the ancient Roman world the link between 'authority-tradition-religion' constitutes a triad or 'trinity' that carries considerable weight: authority is drawn from the degree of proximity to the founding of the city (ancient Rome) and links future generations to that moment through tradition and institutions, providing continuity with the founding energy through the ages. Authority guarantees the uninterrupted continuity of the principle of foundation (initiating a new order of things), gaining the capacity - through the transmission of tradition - to increase that growing energy that constitutes the value that underpins authority. Roman authority thus rests with those who laid the 'foundations' for things to come by transcending the merely personal level to impact at a public level over time.

The (entirely religious) work of '*religare*' - building bridges back to the efforts of laying the foundations of the city - places the source of authority and its legitimacy beyond itself, rendering it something that precedes and transcends it. Unlike power, this makes the person in authority the repository of something to which he himself is accountable, something that exceeds him, and on whose behalf, he confirms, empowers and authorises the actions of others, without determining or defining them in their content or direction, or constraining them in any way.

From an institutional point of view, the application of the concept of *auctoritas* mainly concerns jurisprudence and politics.

In the legal sphere, *auctoritas* is expressed through offering positive support for the exercise of freedom and an individual's autonomy in their actions. For instance, *auctoritas* emerges as 'certification': the following statement incorporated in ancient Roman Law - '*adversus hostem aeterna auctoritas esto*' - emphasises the need for foreigners to be authorised by a Roman citizen to remain within the territory of the Roman Empire. Thus, *auctoritas* constitutes a positive guarantee for the actions of others, offering them authorisation to act, especially if they do not enjoy specific rights: what is interesting is that *auctoritas* authorises the *potestas* (power) of others, but without establishing a relationship of domination. In this way, as indicated by Cicero, what cannot yet be achieved through power is achieved through authority: this constitutes more than advice and less than a command (Mommsen 1965), since the decision to act on rests with the other person.

Authority does not indicate the creation of something out of nothing, since it implies the existence of something else, something external to itself, which it validates (Magdelain, 1990). And authority conveys no power, even if a subject could hold both authority and power through their status and role. Instead, authority's 'binding' force lies in inspiring and confirming others' actions.

At the political level, the distinction between *auctoritas* and *potestas* is evident in the difference emphasised again by Cicero: '*cum potestas in populo, auctoritas in senatus sit*' ("while power resides in the people, authority rests with the Senate"). The power of the senate is 'greater' in terms of leadership. A typical example is the senate's conferring of legal validity: the consuls must consult the senate, and while the senate's approval is not indispensable from a political point of view, it is necessary from a legal standpoint, because it strengthens the political will. What emerges here is a supplementary legitimisation of authority that goes back to the inaugural moment in the past on which it rests, and which is continuously confirmed over time. From this perspective, the *auctor* is the one who 'authorises' and secures a link with something that exceeds both the *auctor* and the person he is addressing.

Authority figures, however, use the legitimacy they are granted to institutionalize their control. For example, the ancient office of senators was gradually institutionalized, becoming a source of legitimising power in the Roman public power system. As Eschenburg (1965) notes, senators were not allowed to engage in trade, take on contracts, or exploit their ownership of buildings for profit. In other words, turning one's authority into personal advantage through wielding power was not permitted. However, these restrictions were gradually removed. Moreover, as consuls were appointed for only a year while senators held office for a lifetime, the asymmetry between the two became increasingly extreme, triggering power conflicts where the display of authority was used to cover up a wide variety of interests. In this way, the moral decline of the repositories of *auctoritas*, which began as early as the second

century B.C., accelerated in the following centuries, reaching a point where the distinction between *auctoritas* and *potestas* disappeared altogether.

In this framework, the instituting dynamic that exists in authority runs the risk of disappearing, giving way to a model of authority in which the principle of preservation prevails, to secure the stability of the established datum. In fact, authority tends to be gradually attributed to those who hold power because they hold an institutional office, reaching a point where those qualities that make authority evident to others - wisdom, integrity, responsibility - lose their meaning. This direction was confirmed in particular with the emperor Octavian (27 B.C.), who ordered the senate to call him by the appellation 'Augustus' (i.e. the multiplier, the creator and, by extension, the saint, the sublime, the venerable): *auctoritas* and *potestas*, a personal capacity for leadership and a recognised position of command merged, making him the supreme leader for a long time (Rich 2012). Under the guise of defending the republic, Augustus pressed to institutionalise his supra-ordinate power.

In the same vein, a twisting of *auctoritas* begins to take place, tending towards a self-centred movement that gradually advances toward reproducing itself rather than enabling the actions of others. After Augustus, the principle inaugurated by him transferred *auctoritas* to an office: in fact, his successors, while having no aptitude for government, gained their authority from their predecessor and from the office as well as from the role they played. In this context, authority belongs to the person who holds power as they primarily hold an institutionalised office. This is a shift that reinforces the institutional dimension of authority, moving towards a convergence of *auctoritas* and *potestas*.

Thus, the trend moves decisively toward permanence, reinforced by the processes of institutionalisation; a development that ends up weakening both the internal duality of authority – the tension between the movement towards inaugurating change and a permanence that enables a consolidation of the initial action - and its external duality that derives from the constantly conflicting relationship between *auctoritas* and *potestas*.

4. Towards Modernity and its Divergent Paths. The Overlapping of Power and Authority

Over the centuries, the duality of *auctoritas* was progressively diminished through the transformation of the Roman institutions themselves, both before the new religion of Christianity became entwined with the empire and thereafter. In this process, two factors were in play: the primacy of the dimension of establishment, which served to guarantee and strengthen not only the empire but also, at the same time and for different reasons, the church during the early centuries of Christianity's history; and the dilution of authority to the preservation of tradition, with previous moments of innovation being reinterpreted as something to be repeated without variation.

In the cross alliances between the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church, authority fits into the organisations' pattern of 'command and obedience' to the point of assuming a position that does not reflect its dual nature, preserving interests at stake. Thus, through continuous oscillations and interference, we reach the threshold of modernity, which the concept of authority enters having already undergone profound changes. In subsequent historical periods, authority takes on a great variety of practical forms in the various spheres of life (political, religious, family, etc.). In many cases, the primary concern is to preserve tradition and what has been established in social life. What gets obscured over the coming centuries and until the modern era is precisely the difference between authority and power and authority's dual nature, producing dangerous reductions that oscillate between a model of authority that is 'foundational' and one which is 'inaugurating/innovative'.

On the one hand, authority stabilises what has been established by making it absolute, closing off the horizon for those who follow. This position determined the reaction to authority, as can be seen in the religious field with the modern religious schism. Similar reactions can be seen in the political field with modern revolutions – which often restore the authorities they had fought against (Arendt 2018).

On the other hand, authority becomes tied exclusively to an 'inaugurating' moment that relies on the moment of innovation, on the beginning, in which a gesture that occurs at a specific point in time is made absolute to the point of exhausting it, stripping away all consistency and devaluing everything that 'precedes' it: what emerges here is the typically modern will to self-establish, according to which the beginning is understood *ex nihilo*, in an absolute sense (Blumenberg, 1999). Tradition is replaced by rationality: reference to any transcendence (religious, political, social values, or inspirations, actions, etc.) is eradicated. In a sense, the foundation of the modern, bureaucratic state, as well as of the modern economy, based on the idea of an institution as a self-centred and self-sufficient body, breaks with all forms of transcendence and establishes in its place a singular antecedent act, that exists wholly without

reference beyond itself, and denotes the point at which individuals transferred their freedom to a sovereign, or a general will, or a collective subject.

Macchiavelli and Hobbes are two important authors in this regard. On the threshold of modernity, they evoke, unsurprisingly, traces of Roman *auctoritas* to ratify the ultimate self-legitimation of political power. Macchiavelli's attempt is interesting because he insists on the political order's need to self-legitimize by endowing itself with an element considered unquestionable in any way. And in order to proceed in this direction, he asserts the usefulness of questioning reference to the concept of 'foundation' (akin to the Roman political experience) in order to again realise the original act of foundation in establishing a united Italy. In keeping with the idea of the nation-state whose authority would be derived from this very sacred act, he also legitimises the use of violence in the foundation of new political bodies.

As 'the right to do anything', Hobbes inscribes authority within action and, more specifically, in the right to act: a right, however, which individuals choose to cede to the state, which is an artificial body that ensures people are protected from fear. This artificial power legitimises itself through its self-foundation and strength. This authority that the state possesses is thus the endpoint of the contract that presupposes the actions of individuals. In Hobbes' definition too, the classical meaning of the term authority (with its link to *augere*) returns, but in an inverted form: authority here is linked to the individual's autonomous capacity to act and make decisions to create the political order. The *auctoritas* is transmitted to another entity (the state) which is authorised to act on the individual and on behalf of the individual, no longer in order to guarantee him his own authority (which existed previously but was exhausted on agreeing this pact) but rather to ensure the security of his survival, which he rationally decides to protect even at the cost of his freedom, so that in the end the individual effectively resigns his own authority. The Hobbesian covenant is between rational individuals, and on egalitarian terms. In this sense, it is acceptable to the new cultural framework of modernity that considers any form of asymmetry an obstacle to be eliminated. The endurance of state's authority is maintained through the energy of those individuals who originally handed over their freedom and creativity to a higher entity, depriving themselves of the possibility of introducing the new. Indeed, the covenant is fulfilled in the moment of its creation; moreover, the contract constitutes a theoretical hypothesis rather than a historical fact, even though it offers a possible solution to the question of the transcendence inherent in authority (Revault d'Allones, 2006).

In this way, modernity progressively and definitively renders authority self-sufficient. Referring less and less to the Arendtian Roman triad, authority is disengaged from the need for a basis that decrees its symbolic content - be it a transcendent principle, an ideal, a virtue, the common good, etc. As Arendt points out, "the downfall of any of the three components of the Roman trinity, religion or authority or tradition, has carried with it inevitably the downfall of the other two. It was the error of Luther to believe that this challenge to the mundane authority of the Church could leave tradition and religion intact. As it was the error of Hobbes and the political theorists of the seventeenth century to hope that after the abolition of tradition, authority and religion could remain intact. And finally, as it was the error of the humanists to think that one could remain within the continuity of Western tradition without religion and without authority" (Arendt, 2018: 89).

State sovereignty thus becomes the new form of established authority. This regulatory authority corresponds to the modern individual claiming to be self-referential. For this type of individual, there is then a need for a social aggregation that is merely the sum of multiple 'I-monads' and that serves to hold individuals together to satisfy their needs. In addition to the state, the market, born with the modern economy, also corresponds well to this need and is therefore recognised as having authority. In both cases, these are regulatory authorities, neutral containers capable of collecting the summation of multiple individual authors in a society founded on functional procedures.

5. The difficult relationship between power and authority

In the context of modern 'regulatory' authorities, as highlighted by Simmel, authors are imagined as self-referential monads who exist in complete independence because any bonds, they might have, are considered the cause of inequalities and a lack of freedom. At this point, however, nostalgia for recognition of their own individuality produces dangerous drifts towards protective authorities (such as those of a nation, corporation, or territorial or

religious community) that subsume authors into the whole, creating a fusion that nullifies any individuality and relationships between individuals¹.

Within the framework of self-referential individuals, autonomy and authority are made to coincide, in the hypothesis of an 'I' that stands as the foundation of everything, with no reference beyond itself except to the functional procedures that hold multiple individuals together as monads. By contrast, within a framework of fused identities, authority and paternalism overlap, without any authorial impetus (Sennet, 1980). The result is a dualism that separates dimensions which in reality co-exist - both in individual existence and in life and its forms, as Simmel taught² - and continuously pursues the thought of 'Oneness', i.e. an undisputed, solid unity; a thought which is unable to accept the difference of an opposite pole, preferring to choose a compact, reassuring, substantial unity.

Within this narrative, it is difficult to admit the coexistence of polar opposites in a reciprocal relationship, as is the case with the dual nature of authority. Authority repeatedly becomes enmeshed in rigid forms, which impede human action and its innovating (creative) energy. It continually oscillates between these two major problems: firstly, its continuous overlapping with power, which, while remaining a necessary element for collective coexistence, does not coincide exactly with authority; and secondly, the contradiction persists between the creative moment of instituting and the established forms of social life, as if these two poles did not exist in a reciprocal relationship.

Relying on the recognition by those to whom it refers, authority risks making the established dimension the only one that exists. As Kojève (2004) among other thinkers emphasises, authority needs to be accepted: the problem is that this acknowledgement tends to stabilise authority itself and solidify what has already been recognised, leading it, therefore, to be considered 'authoritative', and losing its original duality. This path of the progressive constitution of authority is explained by Weber in his analysis of types of power. In particular, with the concept of *Herrschaft* (power), Weber draws on the role of establishing belief³. According to the German thinker, legitimacy is based on the motivations that build consensus to various types of power - charismatic, traditional, and rational. A subject obeys another subject either because he recognises the existence of out-of-the-ordinary qualities in the person who holds power; or out of habit and tradition; or on the basis of rational considerations. These three types of power incorporate authority insofar as they are 'legitimised': they are subjectively recognised on different basis. The Weberian legitimisation attributed to *Herrschaft* introduces the subjective moment into the constitution of power. But, at the same time, that conceptual framework nonetheless lends itself to thinking of authority as the legitimisation of power, so that it ends up being associated with power, giving it the right to command and be obeyed. As a result, authority is compressed into a 'command-obedience' binomial.

For Weber, legitimisation is not a fulfilment of something that is already present in power, but a foundation that allows power to express itself, to be exercised, i.e. if a command is issued, it may be obeyed. By bringing a subjective element into power, authority endows it with a basis of consensus, making it something wholly unlike mere force (*Macht*), which is asserted irrespective of the consensus of others. While this perspective is valuable, as it recovers the value of the subjective (the innovating dynamic) in the objective (the established forms) within a society, it nevertheless seems to leave open the possibility that the first element may vanish and lose its force when the established forms become instituted and permanently configured. Or, at most, the subjective is left with some residual role to reappear only at the moment when the objective status quo becomes de-legitimised and destroyed - when it has lost its force.

Indeed, one cannot ignore that legitimate power always has the capacity to capture what individuals experience as their inner obligation, which they therefore feel incapable of escaping (whether as a result of moral feeling or cultural acceptance), even to the point of sacrificing their own subjective inclinations in favour of the established order, as happens with the powers that have emerged in modernity. In their historical realisations, the overlapping of power and authority produces a subtle system of domination that attenuates the strength and energy of authority's instituting dynamic force. As the very theme of Weberian legitimisation reveals, power is confronted with the enigma of some reference beyond itself: it solves the conundrum of some reference that transcends itself and justifies it, indicating its legitimisation in authority. However, this legitimisation is completely internalised, incorporated and, therefore, domesticated: this makes authority both immanent and instrumental, an artifice exposed to its rejection.

¹ In this regard, see the essays by Simmel, especially those on the forms of modern individualism (1901/02, 1917/19, 1957a). Simmel's writings are also indicated in the final bibliography with reference to their current location within the author's *Opera omnia*: Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 24 volumes.

² Again, by Simmel, see in particular the essays of 1910, 1917 and 1922.

³ An important Weberian text is *Economy and Society*, 1920-22, edited in different volumes.

6. Late Modernity. The flat society

In the transition to late modernity, a technical and technocratic society takes shape, in which authority apparently holds no sway. Indeed, authority, precisely because it is recognised as power, is what subjects fight against, with the desire to eliminate it. In a way, power changes and configures itself as 'bio-political' (Foucault, 1978-1979): it is neutral in terms of values, oriented towards managing the parameters of biological life and - through an accelerated expansion of techno-economic systems - guarantees everyone an increasing share of wellbeing, proposing consumption as the way to satisfy desires by institutionalising a consumer society - a specific social setting in which consumption is the element around which social and economic life pivot. As Zygmunt Bauman and others have highlighted, in this framework the hyper-modern *homo consumens* emerges, whose defining feature is passivity - here the *auctor* disappears⁴. However, assuming authority in its dual nature implies not only an idea of authority disassociated from power, but also a more creative idea of action: one that is able, in Arendt's words, "to make new beginnings, or to start new processes" (1958, p. XIV).

In the bio-political society shaped by techno-nihilistic capitalism, in the society of the algorithm and platform capitalism, it is now technical devices that have authority - a recognised authority - as it is they that allow individuals to achieve what has been promised, adopting the narrative that the infinite growth of possibilities means an increase in freedom (Magatti, Martinelli, 2022). Impersonal authorities are able to support the many "buffered selves" - to use an expression of Taylor (2007: 38) - called upon to live up to their supposed total autonomy and sovereignty. A paradox ensues: these authorities reproduce themselves through authors whose desire has been kidnapped by the techno-economic system so that they are squeezed into being 'functionaries' bent on performance, geared to oil the system by guaranteeing its perpetuation (Stiegler, 2015).

Within a society that imagines itself totally devoid of asymmetries, an insoluble contradiction opens up. The society urges its members to become totally autonomous authors. Nevertheless, it makes this endeavour unattainable since this type of society seeks to deny authority. How can an individual become an author if no one can fulfil this task? The technical society, with its bio-political power, wants to destroy all forms of authority but is unable to go beyond a generalised authorship as a desperate and often unsuccessful search for authenticity. Within the framework of a flat society, where meanings are constantly crumbling, the authority that was thrown out the window re-emerges in problematic forms.

On the one hand, it appears in the form of a strong leader: a sort of saviour who collects the failed projections of an ego that, on realising the failure of its own aspiration for authenticity, turns to a mythical figure to do what the individual cannot. The emergence of an authoritarian authority is a tendency that affects all fields of social life: politics, the economy, schools, families, and religious organisations - all institutions in which having a role to exercise authority is no longer enough. Indeed, a personal interpretation of that role is required. This point is not a problem in itself: it leads to a focus on personal qualities and a consideration that the exposure of the individual beyond itself is important. Ambivalence arises when leadership, as a surrogate for authority, becomes entangled in the assumption of perpetuating its own position, that is, it's purely institutional role and dimension, without giving others the chance to initiate, contribute, and increase - letting authority once again give way to power.

On the other hand, there is a whole host of authorities taking shape within a sphere of notoriety, as happens with the phenomenon of the star system and influencers, where 'elevating oneself' over others coincides with the trend of the moment, thanks to the support of powerful media processes that sustain these 'masters' of the times; masters who, in reality, are mere persuaders who sedate and reassure by pointing to a spectacular life one can rely on to pull oneself out of the everyday greyness, embracing self-realisation by positioning oneself in the spotlight (Bauman, 2015).

The flat society, within which ephemeral or authoritarian forms of authority (despite seeming less invasive) swarm and multiply, identifies every asymmetry as an aristocratic relational loop which should, therefore, be eliminated. Its pretension is tangible even in its language, impoverished in its expression, devoid of any obligation towards frankness and honesty - but it is a lexicon rich in codes. This society finds itself with neither depth nor height: it therefore has no need for authors or masters.

⁴ The passivity that Bauman (2007) indicates as a characteristic of contemporary consumer society is evident in disengagement from the political arena, contrasting with the activism of the consumer in the market. Stiegler speaks of an "unbearable lethargy of thought", a kind of resigned passivity on the part of the subject, which arises from the processes of decay undergone by the forces of individuation and all the individualities that comprise it (Stiegler, 2011, p. 26).

7. The coexistence of the tension

Reducing authority to only one of its dimensions may have a reassuring effect on people and social life, but it nullifies the tension that inhabits authority, as it is something other than both power and the processes that only emphasise change or those that only institutionalise set forms in social life.

Moreover, the duality that inhabits authority is something that concerns human existence itself: as highlighted by Simmel, polar opposites (individuality and sociality, novelty and predictability, bonds and freedom, etc.) inhabits life and are not contradictions; indeed, the relationship is viewed as a space in which each pole looks beyond itself, admitting the existence of something other than itself. Polar opposites are a feature of human life and could shape social life precisely in the sense of the interaction between what is already instituted and the dynamic to generate and institute new forms.

This is probably the direction of Jaspers when he argues that the question of authority is first and foremost anthropological, whereby authority could be better understood by recognising and highlighting its dual nature and proper meaning. This means recalling something that transcends authority. In this frame, the issue does not imply repeating what has become permanent – a position, a role, etc. – but rather drawing from the past those meanings and experiences that constitute a questioning and an inspiration to initiate something new. Jasper's idea (1947) of a 'surplus' of authority does not mean legitimising an authoritative, powerful entity. Authority does not ensure a solidification of the past as it is, but rather ensures the transmission of a generative principle that lies at the origin of what has taken shape (Revault d'Allones, 2006).

Husserl (1962) uses the expression 'original generative historicity' to indicate that spiritual life – human life – is the life of a community of persons interacting with each other, each making his own contribution; in this way, individual persons reshape the surrounding world into a cultural world, a world that is continually developing on the basis of each person's creative, and free action. The world, therefore, has a history not only if it is stable and unchanging, but if it is transmissible and changeable: the key to its duration is not stability in the sense of repeating what has already been produced in the past, but rather the generative dynamic that made that production possible and which makes the moment of establishing something new possible over time – i.e., in the framework of our discourse, the instituting moment – with the support of authority in its dual nature. Viewed from this perspective, it can make a valuable contribution both to change in social life and to the durability of what can take shape through the actions of individual 'author' (*auctor*).

In this perspective, authority cannot be identified with power – although it nevertheless remains connected to it, simply because the human being (and, consequently, social life) has a biological dimension that needs effective and efficient responses, to which power addresses itself. Nor is authority destined to irrelevance in the name of a flat society without authority and, to that extent, without authors. These are two destinies that promise to fill the void that crosses human existence – and indeed authority – by continuing to forcibly restrict the latter to just one of the dimensions it contains (returning again to the thought of Oneness⁵) as well as depriving social life of the plurality that distinguishes it. They evoke thoughts of resurgent authoritarian or technical authorities: authorities which are incapable of actually authorizing, of enabling life and freedom as a relational, flourishing experience (Simmel, 1922).

Within this framework, authority addresses the freedom of the other. Freedom prevents authority from becoming crystallised in one particular form and authority prevents freedom from running around in circles without reaching any conclusions: "In this way, authority and freedom would not be in contradiction, but would instead fulfil each other" (Jaspers, 1947: 798; my translation).

Referring again to the etymology of the terms, Benveniste finds in the term 'freedom (liberty)' aspects that are also found in the etymology of 'authority'. He highlights the intertwining in the Latin word *liber* and the Greek word *eleutheros* of a complex set of aspects drawn from the radical **leudh* that gives form in Slavic to the term 'people', while in Gothic and Indo-Iranian it recalls the movement of 'sprouting' and 'growing'. This opens the imagination to the idea of complete growth, that is, growth that leads to the fulfilment of the free human figure, produced by a 'collective' notion of growth; almost as if to emphasise that free individuals become free in a relationship with others, in which mutual growth is set in motion and authorised – which happens after all in the movement of initiating and growing, as with authority.

⁵ Many authors have described such thought of Oneness thinking as characteristic of the modern era; see, among others, the oft-quoted Simmel; Touraine, 1995; Zambrano, 2011.

The continual re-emergence of authoritarian authorities, even if disguised by a thin veil, or of authorities that legitimise themselves just by being opposed to the traditional ones, often results in a diminishing of freedom. In the implied reciprocity between freedom and authority, the latter does not fix itself on transmitting institutionalised behaviour that requires passive repetition that reassures individuals by receiving their obedience in return for satisfying their needs, but also communicates the possibility of daring, of new beginnings without giving in to the pressures of efficiency and instantaneousness that deny everything the chance to take shape.

The mediation of authority makes it possible to transmit the generative principle within actions, relations, and realisations: the inaugurating moment that authority brings with it is thus inscribed within its endurance over time and its qualitative continuity, i.e. effecting transmission of that principle. Therefore, the consolidation of authority in specific entities (whether represented by an individual or collective/institutional bodies) takes place in order to enable the generative principle to be perpetuated over time, in people and in social groups, and to keep alive the movement it sustains. This mediation thus forges a relational model that keeps the tension between the different poles open. If mediation becomes absolute, assuming a position of power and control, it in fact contradicts what mediation is as it has no ownership of what it mediates. And if mediation is invalidated, it impoverishes the human being, who is a 'being in the middle', who exists between individuality and social forms, creativity and care for what has taken shape, freedom and bonds, limits and the infinite (Simmel 2004). Authority thus becomes a form of mediation that elevates personal individuals and social groups, admitting a surplus: a mediation that does not disable but supports the tension between the established forms and the instituting dynamics of social life.

Rethinking authority from within contributes to broadening the horizon that continually closes when thought – which aims at Oneness – saturates reality. The moment of beginning – mediated by authority – is defined by its very dual nature, in relation to permanence. The relativity of these two dimensions attests to a transcendence that inhabits authority but does not slip into absolute immanence, or contingency. Instead, the instituting moment remains within what is instituted and becomes a generating principle that makes what has taken shape throughout history transmissible and transformable, rather than immutable (Revault d'Allones, 2006). And, at the same time, the instituting creation is not absolute, since it is always conditioned (though not predetermined): the frames of perspectives, the past, shared experiences, transmitted values, etc. all play a role⁶.

The dual nature of authority makes that twofold movement possible, i.e. the movement towards both stabilisation and openness, avoiding making absolute both the instituted forms and the inaugurating, instituting action. It is the dual nature of authority that makes it possible to rethink it without becoming entangled in nostalgia for an authority that no longer exists; an authority that one would like to have again as a security that creates order by consolidating tradition without changes. It is always the dual nature of authority which makes it possible not to cut all ties with the past, with memory, and with the symbolic debt which permeates human existence in its bond with those who came before us.

Authority's multi-dimensional nature precludes it from claiming to assert itself as something absolute, characterised by solidity, that possesses what it mediates without allowing any challenge. Its dual nature prevents authority from closing in and imploding on itself, wrapped up in a rationale of command that indicates power. When authority is freed from this spiral, it becomes a force which opens things up, having the capacity to authorise others to contribute, to start anew, within a context of meaning linked to those who preceded us and which is transmitted to the generations that follow, together with that generative principle that inspires it. This authority thus becomes 'authorial'.

8. The 'authorial' authority: the instituting and the instituted dimensions at stake

As we have seen, the etymological meaning of the term 'authority' has a troubled history, with the fullness of its meaning having been lost. Rethinking authority allows us to recover crucial dimensions for both the individual and for society. However, this requires that the tension that authority carries be kept open.

⁶ There is a large amount of literature that discusses the relationship between structure and the social actor, structure and agency: see for example authors such as Bourdieu, with his thought about social structures that are both 'structuring'; Giddens, with the theory of structuration, and Archer, with her morphogenetic approach. It is not possible here to delve into the thoughts of these authors although it would be worthwhile to do so. However, it is useful to at least mention the fact that they deal with topics that are quite close to the topic of this article, as they deal with the relationship between the instituted and the instituting dimension of social life.

Authority, in fact, acts according to certain distinct characteristics that activate processes that can keep the instituting dimension of the social sphere open within what is instituted. Such an 'authorial' authority puts others in a position to continue contributing, without defining the path first set out by the author who authorised it. In this perspective, the 'being born to begin' - as Arendt wrote - can take place rather than be inhibited, with the awareness that every authentic birth event is, surely, discontinuous, and revolutionary while still providing a continuity that passes from generation to generation. The obsession with both novelty for novelty's sake and with stability as an abstract and absolute value has produced a sterile dualistic oscillation in which we can recognise the causes of our defeat and the impoverishment of social life (Arendt, 1963).

Moreover, authorial authority acts on power that tends to configure reality in its own image where power wants to take over and manipulate human beings' capacity to begin or define the conditions of their action. It constantly faces dilemmas around whether to stifle what it has brought into the world or to let it flourish; whether to determine the path of others or to back down. Authorial authority becomes a limit to power, rather than its legitimisation. The movement that best expresses this dynamic is that of 'letting go', which goes in the opposite direction to both restraining it and irresponsibly abandoning it. 'Letting go' implies a handover: not as a concession or moralistic act, but as a response to the dilemmas with which authority is confronted. It is a generative movement, according to the social generativity paradigm of social life (Magatti, 2017): authorial authority is a generative authority as it is fulfilled through this loss, in its exposure to the void which inhabits authority itself. In this movement, authority puts others in a position to become authors, realising that what is unchangeable is destined to die. This 'letting go' demonstrates an awareness of an intergenerational bond that can invest in the future.

Within a process of temporalisation that holds in tension the different temporal phases, the authorial authority contemplates the future that resides in the adventure of life, accepting what is unpredictable.

Authorial authorities drive the forces that challenge the mediocrity of conformist, flat societies. They are able to empower people's capabilities and their ability to always take an alternative into consideration in acting (Stiegler, 2020). This triggers a desire to involve both the intellectual and affective dimensions.

Such authority is capable of offering a genuinely educational frame to subsequent generations in the sense described by Arendt: "Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world" (1969: 196).

Authority that reflects the authorial position emerges from the swamp of domination, showing new generations how to be free and how to practice a freedom which consists of the awareness that, with their own actions within the reciprocity effects described by Simmel, each person modifies the life and history of the world and bears responsibility for it.

Starting from the dual nature of authority it becomes possible to rescue authority from the straits in which it has ended up and to move towards a recognition of other people's freedom and life. Held in a tension - which allows both what is new and what has endured, creativity and faithfulness to tradition - authorial authority does not avoid its debt to what has gone before, relieving the individual from all ties and responsibility. With respect to time, this authority does not sacrifice itself on the altar of instantaneousness but places the initiative in a longer timeframe, without ever being purely instrumental, so that the meaning inherent in the action can materialise in a creative manner, thus allowing depth and affection to be given to what is done concretely. Stretching over time, authority also expresses itself in space and becomes the interlocutor of surrounding social worlds. To become authorial, in fact, the initiative needs to refer to an otherness also recognised by those to whom it speaks. This recognition passes through generative persons who become mediators of possible worlds - worlds in which life reveals its own way of being: in instituting dynamics and instituted forms - capable of continually renewing social, political and symbolic relations in which actual existence takes place, and what we do acquires meaning for ourselves and for others (Esposito, 2023).

9. Conclusions

As I have tried to outline in these pages, both the established and the instituting, innovating aspects of authority are part of its nature. And this reflects social life itself, as this is interwoven by a reciprocal relationship between polar

opposites which nonetheless are linked - institution and process, organisation and creative action, bonds and freedom, etc.

However, the tension between the moment of initiating and the moment of upholding what has already taken shape, of increasing what already exists, has not always remained alive during authority's history: authority has repeatedly seen its impulse to institute something new collapse onto already established, instituted forms, to the point where society shows a preference for a conservative and repetitive logic, locked in the command-obedience binomial which is typical of power.

Recalling the importance of the coexistence of the founding, instituting moment and the forms already institutionalised therefore means escaping all repetition of the past and instead recalling the need to start rekindling the urge to generate something new; that is, human action's instituting capacity that constitutes the previous full meaning of authority – its transcendent source. When authority recalls this energy associated with beginning (which can be released on the basis of shared meanings and values, formative experiences, the demands of life, traumatic experiences and crises, awareness of the value of contributing, etc.), it increases the impetus for others to act in a generative continuity that remains an open process in which creative actions shape a structure, at the same time instituting something new. This 'authorial' authority is able on the one hand, to let human existence flourish in the social world and on the other side to nurture the growth of what has started. This keeps socially instituted forms porous, open to change (as Simmel taught us).

The dual nature of authority allows us to look at reality from the perspective of its creative, instituting dynamic, challenging the viewpoint that reduces reality to merely what has previously been established. However, it also allows us to look at reality from the side of what has been instituted: in this frame, the instituting impulse is not relegated to a specific, contingent moment with no possibility of continuity.

In his analysis of social life, C. Castoriadis (1987) points out that the instituting creation is not absolute but is always conditioned by given situations that channel its action into a hole that has already, at least in part, been dug. However, 'conditioned' does not mean 'determined', because what is initiated and brought into the world throughout history can never be fully explained by what pre-existed it. On this point, it is useful to cite Joas (1997) as he dwells on the creative character of human action. To recognise this character is not to exclude the fact that action is linked to a particular context or situation (action situation), but to emphasise the reciprocal influence of action and situation, social actor and social structures. For Joas, for the subject who acts, the appearance that the world takes on is not only determined by institutions and structured practices, as these in turn depend (in their existence and form) on the creative action of subjects. Here the two dimensions - the instituted and the instituting - typical of social life and human action return. For our discussion of authority, it is useful to consider how the creative drive that authority brings always bears a relation to a process that precedes it, even if the creative element can never be completely derived from pre-existing social and historical components. Also, the transformation brought about by what is begun concerns both what already exists and the instituting action. This aspect is useful for our discourse because it indicates how the *auctor* continually comes into existence along with the generative action they initiate, which modifies the reality by which they in turn are modified.

This authority becomes authorial as it resembles a 'door' to what remains open. In fact, as Simmel writes, while it establishes a direction, indicating a delimitation of something, it does not claim to extinguish reality: "So the door frees us from fixed points and must allow the wonderful feeling of catching a glimpse between heaven and earth, beyond the obtuseness", letting us experience the infinite beyond the delimitation (Simmel, 1957b: 4; my translation). The metaphor of authority as a door enables the progress of that journey that every generation can undertake, precisely within that 'metastable process' (in Simondon's expression, 1992: 306) between order and creation, individuality and collectiveness, tradition and innovation, stability and change, institution and human flourishing - as Simmel indicates.

Fifty years after the great rebellion against authority that occurred at the end of the 1960s, we are confronted with factors that push towards a violent return to the order of an authoritarian leader on the one hand, and on the other hand, with projects that imagine evading the issue of authority by resolving it within a technocratic paradigm. The knot remains unresolved. But there is also the difficult, and attractive, path of an authorial authority that regenerates the inter-subjective and inter-generational social bond as well as the social forms of our collective life through the perspective of authorising human flourishing, according to the dual nature of authority – its creative instituting force and its instituted forms.

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