

Article

Charisma and Moral Reasoning

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Abstract: Charisma is morally problematic insofar as it replaces followers' capacity to engage in genuine moral reasoning. When followers defer to charismatic leaders and act in ways that are morally wrong they are not only blameworthy for wrongdoing but for failing in their deliberative obligations. Even when followers defer to charismatic leaders and do the right thing, their action is less praiseworthy to the extent that it was the result of charisma rather than moral deliberation. Therefore, effective charismatic leadership reliably undermines the praiseworthiness and amplifies the blameworthiness of follower's actions.

Keywords: Charisma; moral reasoning; blameworthiness; leadership; followership

1. Introduction

Charisma is often described as a virtue of leaders. Even when a leader is immoral, his charismatic personality may be cited as a positive trait. Just as it would be a compliment to describe an immoral leader as handsome or intelligent, so too does charisma count in one's favor. In this essay, I argue that this perception of charisma is mistaken. Charisma is not a positive feature of a leader, nor is it 'value-free' as Weber claimed.¹ Rather, charisma is quite morally problematic insofar as people defer

¹ To clarify, Weber thought that charisma was value-free in that it was a trait that could in principle be correlated either with valuable or non-valuable consequences. Weber then argued that charisma was on balance instrumentally valuable because it legitimated revolutionary movements in an "anti-authoritarian" direction, but that it remained an open question whether such revolutionary movements were permissible [1]. We should distinguish between contingent and intrinsic traits that attach to charisma. I am arguing that charisma intrinsically plays a certain role in moral deliberation that is problematic, Weber argued that charisma often but contingently legitimated power. For a discussion of the relationship between Weber's various formulations of charisma and Weber's normative commitments see [2]. The

to charismatic leaders on the basis of their charisma rather than their moral or epistemic authority. A charismatic presence often inspires followers to bypass any deliberation of their own. Whether charismatic leaders are moral or not, when charisma is the reason for deference the motives followers are therefore morally worse. Recent theoretical and historical discussions of charismatic leadership have overlooked that charisma is intrinsically problematic from a moral perspective [5]. Yet, if we are truly to assess the ethics and effectiveness of charismatic leaders in history and literature, the alarming effects of charisma on followers' moral reasoning should be acknowledged and explored.

In this essay I proceed as follows. First I describe the nature of charismatic leadership and discuss the way that charisma influences followers' decision-making. Second, I argue that moral deference to charismatic leaders is problematic. I then consider two kinds of deference to charismatic leaders that are problematic in different ways. When a follower defers to a charismatic leader who is in the right, the praiseworthiness of a follower's behavior is diminished insofar as he only acted rightly because he was moved by a leader's charisma. When a follower defers to a charismatic leader who is morally wrong, the follower's actions are especially wrong because he not only failed in his moral duties, but in his deliberative obligations.

2. The Psychology of Charisma

Charismatic leaders, like any leaders, are people in positions of authority. They have practical authority, meaning that they use their authority to tell followers what to do. Similarly, charismatic experts have epistemic authority, meaning that they tell followers what to believe. In both cases, having charisma heightens authority—charisma makes followers more likely to do or believe what a leader instructs all else equal. By 'all else equal' I mean that charisma not only increases the likelihood of deference to genuine leaders and experts, it increases deference to people who actually have no particular grasp on what a group should do or believe.

Before I continue, I should clarify the kinds of traits that 'charisma' refers to. In Christian theology, charisma refers to an extraordinary power granted by the Holy Spirit. Modern definitions of charisma similarly reference exceptional abilities to persuade and motivate. Though Weber defined charisma as an unlearned property that was intrinsic to a personality, management psychologists have isolated several identifiable and teachable traits that are constitutive of charisma, at least to some extent [6]. For example, people who are identified as charismatic tend to lower their voices at the end of sentences, are hesitant to nod and slow to reply when spoken to [7]. Charisma is also identified with confidence and self-awareness [8]. Charismatic people also show that they have moral conviction, use a lot of anecdotes and rhetorical questions, make verbal lists, are good at using friendly bodily gestures and making eye contact, and modulate their tone of voice [9].

Charismatic leaders also frame the content of their speeches and proposals in inspirational, rather than instrumental terms [10]. The same proposal, if crafted by a charismatic leader will therefore sound very different than a proposal that is crafted purely to describe a set of goals, rather than to inspire. In addition, the actual effects of a leaders' decisions has little effect on perceptions of charisma, unless the leader is seen as blatantly self-serving, in which case perceptions of charisma are

thesis that charisma is ethically neutral has also been echoed by scholars in leadership studies, including Bernard Bass and Gary Yukl [3,4].

somewhat compromised [11]. This evidence comports with psychological measures of charisma that emphasize social awareness, confidence, body language, and personality, only when a person's behavior is inconsistent with these personality traits are perceptions of charisma compromised by her behavior [12,13].

Importantly, not one of these traits has anything to do with knowing the right answer about what people should believe or how people should act. Nevertheless, charismatic people are much more likely to be treated and perceived as authorities. For example, when management psychologists studied which job candidates were selected for positions from a college placement service, they found that GPA and job type did not predict whether a firm found an applicant suitable, but self-promotion and confidence was predictive for success [14,15].

In another study, Management researchers assigned math problems to groups. They found that group leadership was uncorrelated with ability in math. Instead, self-confidence and dominating personality traits almost entirely determined who became the group leader [16]. Mehrabian and Ferris's famous communication study also emphasizes the importance of presentation and charisma over content [17]. They found that the actual meaning of the words a speaker is using has a relatively small effect on the listeners' perception of the speaker in discussions of emotional topics. In contrast, tone and nonverbal cues influence the listeners' impressions the most.

Even scientific experts will find that their credibility depends on charisma. Physicians who are charismatic are less likely to be sued for malpractice [18]. Predictably, charismatic doctors are also better liked, and people are more likely to follow medical advice and receive effective care from a charismatic physician [19]. Most troublingly, patients are sometimes *less likely* to be satisfied by physicians who consult reference books before prescribing medicine and *most likely* to follow physicians who were confident rather than careful [20].

So charisma often dictates (at least in part) who is assigned positions of authority. Sometimes charisma plays a more active role in assigning authority than expert credentials or genuine moral authority. This practice of deference to charismatics is particularly troubling in light of the fact that there is no correlation between charisma and epistemic or moral credibility. For example, trained actors may be more effective at displaying charisma in a role than experts [21]. Worse, charisma may be *inversely* correlated with knowledge about the right thing to do. A famous study of corporate professionals found that workers who ranked highly on a psychopathy-screening checklist also had especially high rankings of charisma; where psychopathic workers fell short was in their 'team player' rankings [22]. Together, this evidence indicates that charismatic psychopaths may successfully seek advancement in order to avoid working in groups, and that their charismatic personalities will help them reach this goal despite the fact that they have a relatively weak grasp of moral norms compared to other workers.

This review of empirical studies of charisma is not meant to imply that charismatic authorities are never in the right, but only that when charisma is in the driver's seat there are no guarantees. We should therefore reassess the oft-repeated trope that charisma is not a particularly normative concept. I will now suggest that deference to charismatics is morally problematic, even when charismatic leaders happen to be in the right. Contrary to popular accounts of charisma, it is the very fact that the moral and immoral alike may possess charisma that makes charisma morally problematic.

3. Charisma and Moral Reasoning

Empirical evidence suggests that charismatic people are often selected for leadership positions despite the fact that they are no more moral than the rest of us, (and often they are clearly worse!) Even if the mere idea of charisma is, as Weber suggests, ‘value-free the role that charisma plays in moral reasoning is not. Morality requires that people do what is right, so it thereby requires that leaders instruct followers to do the moral thing and that followers obey ethical leaders. Plausibly, morality also requires that we do the right thing for the right reasons, on the basis of moral deliberation. Insofar as the reason a person follows a leader derives from the leader’s charismatic traits, rather than moral authority, followers act on the wrong kinds of reasons.² If charisma leads people to discount or ignore moral reasoning and do the wrong thing, then charisma is a but-for cause of immoral behavior as well.

As an illustration of the way that charisma interferes with moral deliberation, consider Peter Kaufman’s description of the Manichean elite [23]. The Manicheans had the mannerisms and all the social trappings that signify knowledge of divinity, but they failed to actually represent the truth. When Augustine wrote, “they kept saying ‘truth, truth’ and told me they had much to reveal, yet there was no truth in them” he is criticizing the Manicheans’ charismatic claim to epistemic authority in the absence of truth. Yet in this case, for Augustine to arrive at this conclusion, he must have rejected the Manicheans’ charismatic charms and engaged in independent moral deliberation in order to realize that the Manicheans were actually frauds.

This story illustrates the way that charisma raises an epistemological problem for followers who are engaged in moral deliberation. In order to decide what to do, people need to do some moral deliberation of their own, if only to decide to whom to defer to in deciding what to do. Empirical evidence suggests that charismatic leadership bypasses moral deliberation, including deliberation about who to follow. As one scholar of charismatic leadership writes, charismatic leadership extends beyond mere favorable perceptions; followers become mesmerized by charismatic leaders and suspend their ability to make critical judgments [3]. Even Augustine found it difficult to discount the Manicheans’ charms in deciding what to believe, even though those features had nothing to do with whether the Manicheans had genuine spiritual knowledge. As for experts, so too for leaders. Practical authorities, leaders, tell us what to do. As in the epistemic case, there is a right answer about what one ought to do and that is whatever is morally required. Therefore, leaders should instruct followers to obey moral requirements and people should follow leaders who are moral.

At this point, one may object that there is an asymmetry between reasoning about empirical facts and reasoning about normative facts. When people disagree about science or the existence of God, one of the two will be correct, but disagreement about ethics strikes many as intractable. Yet the fact that moral disagreement is especially difficult to settle does not give us a reason to abandon the belief that there is a right answer about morality. As Elizabeth Anscombe wrote in *War and Murder*:

² One might object that charismatic influence is not relevantly different from other forms of persuasive influence, like philosophical argument or instruction. If other forms of persuasion also motivate people to act on the wrong kinds of reasons, then similar critiques of those forms of persuasion would apply. For example, if I persuaded you to help someone based on my charisma or based on a bribe, both would wrongly bypass your deliberations to provoke moral action and would diminish the praiseworthiness of your action; so too for wrongful action. However, often persuasion effectively points us to the right reasons for belief, and in these cases ordinary forms of persuasion are unproblematic.

“Just as an individual will constantly think himself in the right, whatever he does, and yet there is still such a thing as being in the right, so nations will constantly wrongly think themselves to be in the right - and yet there is still such a thing as their being in the right.” [24]

This is not to say that Anscombe or any other moral philosophers particular commitments are the right ones, the only premise I am introducing at this point is what Tom Kelly and Sarah McGrath have termed *minimal realism*, meaning that there are some truths about morality about which one could be right or wrong [25].

Given that there is a right answer about what morality requires, leaders who instruct people to do the right thing exercise rightful authority, and those who do not are wrong. Charisma and wrongful leadership are related, because any time people follow a leader because she is charismatic, rather than because she instructs followers to do the right thing, leaders and followers are both more vulnerable to wrongdoing.³ Charisma and wrongdoing are fellow travelers in part because charismatic traits encourage followers to attend to features of a person’s practical guidance that are non-moral (*i.e.*, charismatic delivery), and thereby to overlook the moral features of a situation. This thesis is supported by empirical evidence, which suggests that charismatic leadership is associated with revisions to followers’ moral identities [27–29]. Moreover, charisma also is correlated in some cases with psychological dependence and disempowerment, which are at odds with independent moral deliberation [30].

The problem with charisma therefore is either that it inspires followers to act rightly but for the wrong reasons, or worse, that it inspires people to act wrongly for the wrong reasons. Some clear cases from Dickson’s overview of charismatic leaders will help to illustrate why this is a problem [31]. When charismatic leaders instruct followers to take action that is clearly moral—King, Gandhi, Mandela, Mother Teresa—charisma can only undermine the moral praiseworthiness of those who follow them.

Imagine a person listening to King’s “I Have a Dream” speech who thinks “Wow, what a wonderful speaker! He is so commanding and impressive he must be right, so I guess I’ll give up my racist attitudes because of his stellar oratory performance.” Surely it would be overall to the good if such a person then abandoned his racism, but something has gone wrong in this case. Would the racist-convert have maintained his racism if King had argued with similar skill and grace for a return to slavery? Had King not been charismatic when speaking, would the racist have maintained his commitment to racism even if all the arguments in his speech were the same? The praiseworthiness of a person who follows a leader depends on more than whether the leader instructs followers to do what is morally right.

Charisma is even more problematic when a leader’s edicts are immoral. Jim Jones and Adolf Hitler are Dickson’s two most prominent examples of immoral charismatic leadership [31]. In these cases, as

³ Some leadership scholars have addressed the distinction between ethical and unethical leaders. The most prominent discussion of this distinction is Jane Howell and Bruce Avolio’s “The Ethics of Charismatic Leadership.” But Howell and Avolio overlook the possibility that unethical charismatic leaders may not simply privilege their own interests over their followers’ interests, they may actively enlist their followers in an independently immoral project. Like most leadership scholars’ discussions of this topic, Howell and Avolio focus on the moral deliberation of charismatic leaders, whereas I am addressing problematic features of followers’ deliberation [26].

above, a leader's charisma does not make him more moral or legitimate. Insofar as Jones and Hitler ordered followers to murder people, their authority was illegitimate even if followers felt especially inspired by their personality traits. If anything, charisma aggravates the blameworthiness of immoral followers because they not only act wrongly, but they act wrongly as a result of epistemic negligence.

Followers have a duty to be conscientious; to deliberate about whether they are doing the right thing. Like leaders, followers are diverse, and some may be more disposed to be conscientious or moral than others. But for all kinds of followers, charismatic leadership undermines that deliberative process when it is effective. For example, transformative leaders are generally considered more charismatic than transactional leaders who appeal solely to followers' self-interest. Recent investigations have found that transformative leadership tactics have a greater influence on followers' moral identities in general, even though individual followers are varied in their susceptibility to influence [32]. In these cases, those who act wrongly in deference to a charismatic leader not only are blameworthy for doing something wrong but also are blameworthy for having false beliefs about the right thing.

Consider for example two members of Jim Jones' community, Ben and Anne, who murder a congressman because Jim Jones told them to. Suppose that Ben acts only on the basis of moving speeches that Jones gave to the community, which is to say he was motivated by Jones' charismatic presence and never considered the morality of murder. Anne acts on the basis of moral reasoning. She sees the congressman's presence as an act of aggression against the people of Jonestown and has concluded that her community is at war with a persecutory government. Like other holy warriors, she concludes that she is a just combatant and that the congressman is an unjust combatant, so she is morally justified in killing him. Ben and Anne are both making moral mistakes in this scenario, but Ben's mistake is worse because he has not only done something immoral, he was negligent in his duties to consider whether he was acting rightly.

In this way, those who act wrongly in deference to a charismatic leader are more blameworthy than those who act wrongly on the basis of flawed moral reasoning. Dickson paints over the moral challenges raised by charisma in his broad and fluid review of charismatic leaders throughout history. In what follows, I will shed light on the dark side of charisma.

4. Moral Deference and Charisma

Let us first consider charismatic leaders who are in the right, but who inspire their followers to act on the basis of charisma rather than moral reasoning. Some leadership ethicists have argued that charisma in these cases is a virtue because they inspire right action [33,34]. This view is mistaken. If people's racist attitudes were changed King's charismatic delivery of the "I Have a Dream" speech, rather than the arguments contained therein, then this kind of moral deference to King is intuitively problematic even though King advocated for a course of action that was morally right.

Sarah McGrath calls this the problem of *pure moral deference*. At first glance, it may seem unclear why this is a problem. Why not defer to King about morality without engaging in any firsthand moral deliberation of our own? After all, we defer to experts in other domains all the time and this practice is relatively unproblematic. I defer to physicists about the nature of the universe, and economists about the question of whether capital gains should be taxed at a lower rate than other income, so why not

defer to people who seem to have some moral authority (after all, King was giving a speech), when it comes to questions of ethics?

Yet unlike expertise about the nature of the universe or capital gains taxes, moral expertise is more difficult to assess. McGrath puts the problem like this:

Moral deference is in principle no more problematic than deference in other domains. But in practice, there are formidable epistemological difficulties that arise when one attempts to recognize or identify someone with superior moral judgment. Moreover, we (perhaps implicitly) recognize that this is the case [35].

The most formidable epistemological difficulty is that in order to recognize a person as a moral expert, one must be able to assess moral facts for oneself at least to some extent, but at the point that someone is qualified to assess moral facts on her own, then her need for a moral expert is diminished. Further, even if a person is herself a moral expert, she may not be an expert at assessing moral experts; so moral deference is problematic even for those who are skilled at first-order moral deliberation.

This is not to say that moral deference is always a mistake, but rather that moral deference only makes sense in the context of some do-it-yourself genuine moral deliberation.⁴ Unlike physicists and economists, whose expertise we can evaluate simply by waiting for telescopes to confirm their theories or waiting for the economy to disprove their hypotheses, we cannot evaluate whether or not to engage in moral deference by waiting for empirical evidence; we need to do some moral reasoning of our own.

It is possible for moral deference to be legitimate when it is informed by some prior moral deliberation, but charismatic leadership is problematic because it commands deference but bypasses moral deliberation. Say a person is moved to act by a charismatic speech or a confident leader, without engaging in moral deliberation. In such a case she defers to the charismatic leader, but she is *completely* unqualified to evaluate whether that leader is morally right or not. Her moral deference is therefore unjustified even if the leader she follows happens to be right.

One response is that deference to charismatic leaders, who are in fact morally right, is not very troubling even if followers do not engage in any moral deliberation. Mill, for example, thought that the moral psychology behind an action was irrelevant to our evaluation of the act itself [36]. People who are moved by charismatic speeches but happen to follow a moral leader on that basis are morally lucky in these cases. Their deliberative principle of ‘do what the charismatic person says’ could have caused them to do immoral things, but happily it did not.

Perhaps Mill’s is the right analysis of these kinds of actions, but intentions are also appropriately praised or blamed, even if a person is morally lucky. If I intended to kill you by putting a toxin in your drink, but unbeknownst to me it was just the antidote you needed to counteract an earlier poisoning, in some sense I got morally lucky because my action (providing an antidote) was not morally wrong [37,38]. But I could still be culpable because I intended to kill you.⁵ Similarly, if I follow whoever gives a charismatic speech in my neighborhood and people who are morally right just happen to pass through town more often than not, then I am morally lucky that I do not defer to immoral people and do anything wrong, but my intention may still be blameworthy in some way.

⁴ Here I depart from McGrath’s analysis. McGrath is much more skeptical of moral deference than I am. Instead, I am committed to the weaker claim that *some* moral deliberation is necessary for deference to make sense, not the claim that pure moral deference rarely makes sense.

⁵ For example, I may be fit for punishment for attempted murder.

In other words, I am suggesting that followers who act on the basis of charisma act for the wrong kinds of reasons, and so their motives are fit for blame to some extent even if their behavior is not wrong. Jonathan Bennett's famous analysis of Huckleberry Finn illustrates this point [39]. Recall that Huck decides to free Jim out of sympathy for Jim, though he believes that it is immoral to help slaves to escape. Clearly, Huck does the right thing. But does Huck's motive have moral worth? This will depend on the way that Huck's sympathy for Jim informed his decision.

Bennett suggests that Huck's actions were not as praiseworthy as they would have been had Huck acted on the basis of moral reasoning rather than emotion; though Huck acts morally, on Bennett's account his motive is a rejection of morality [39]. If Bennett is correct then Huck's right action was a lucky accident. Nomy Arpaly argues instead that Huck's motive was praiseworthy because by acting out of sympathy for Jim he is acting for moral reasons even if he does not know it [40]. On Arpaly's account, Huck's sympathy for Jim only makes sense if he has come to see Jim as a person with moral standing who has been wronged by slavery, so Huck's sympathetic motive has moral worth even if Huck does not see it that way.

This analysis is instructive for our evaluation of charisma because our responses to charismatic people are similar to our sympathetic feelings [41]. In both cases we are emotionally moved to act in virtue of some non-moral features of another person. But while it is controversial whether a sympathetic motive has moral worth even if Huck does not recognize its worth, there is no such controversy about charisma. If Huck acted to free Jim not because of sympathy for Jim (which could plausibly reflect an unconscious moral motivation) but because of Jim's charismatic presence, his motive would have no moral worth even if his action did. After all, in cases where people are motivated to do *immoral* things out of sympathy (e.g., killing one out of a sympathetic urge to benefit another) we judge that their action had no moral worth but their motives were worthy. Yet in cases where people are motivated to do immoral things because of charisma (killing because of a desire to benefit a charismatic person) charisma does not play a similarly redemptive role.

The conversion of Paul the Apostle is another illustration of this point. Paul reports that he was moved to stop persecuting the church after he was called by God's grace and Christ was revealed to him. Yet all else equal, it would have been morally better if Paul had not been moved by grace but rather by deliberation about Christ's message or the ethics of persecution. To see why, imagine that Paul had not witnessed Christ's revelation. But for the grace of God, Paul would have remained among the persecutors, which indicates that Paul's conversion did not stem from Paul's own deliberation, character or volition. Therefore, even though Paul's conversion was a morally praiseworthy act, insofar as his conversion was motivated by divine intervention, it is *pro tanto* worse than conversions that are motivated by genuine introspection.

And so, charisma may diminish the praiseworthiness of those who follow leaders out of admiration for their personality rather than a desire to do the right thing. Having raised the possibility that charismatic leadership may steer people towards immoral action, let us now consider this class of cases in more detail. When charisma aligns with immorality, as above, the blameworthiness of deference to an immoral leader is heightened as well.

5. Immoral Deference and Charisma

Return to the Huckleberry Finn case. Imagine that Huck knew that freeing Jim was the right thing to do, but was moved to turn him in because a charismatic pastor at his church expressed approval for slavery. In this case, as above, charisma substitutes for moral reasoning, but it is even more problematic because it moves Huck *away* from the morally correct course of action.⁶ Similarly, if Nazi's or followers of Jim Jones refrained from moral deliberation and committed murder because of their leaders' charismatic influence, then charisma heightens the blameworthiness of their action.

Of course, charisma does not always substitute for moral deliberation. Sometimes people know that they are doing the wrong thing and do it anyhow because a charismatic leader told them to. These are the (morally) worst cases of charismatic influence, but even if followers do not know they act wrongly, that they act from charismatic influence makes their action more blameworthy than it would be if it resulted from a deliberative error.

First let us consider the kind of follower who obeys an immoral but charismatic leader and bypasses moral deliberation. One way to interpret this follower is that he is ignorant of the moral facts, and just as a person who is factually ignorant can be excused, so too is the follower who is morally ignorant [24]. This gloss is intuitive in some cases. When a person gets wrapped up in the excitement around a charismatic leader and charges down an immoral course he may later reflect and say things like 'I didn't know what I was doing.' Charismatic leaders encourage this unreflective behavior when they frame their instructions in ways that discourage followers from engaging in moral reflection [42]. Just as factual ignorance can excuse a person who unknowingly unplugs a person on life support not realizing that the plug is keeping her alive, moral ignorance may excuse someone who did not know that removing life support was wrong [43].

Even so, moral ignorance is only an excuse for wrongful action if the moral ignorance itself is also excused [16]. That is, a person may not be culpable if she investigates all the relevant moral considerations and still makes the wrong choice. But in cases of charismatic leadership, followers do not even engage in moral deliberation, so they cannot be excused by virtue of their moral ignorance because they are morally responsible for their moral ignorance as well as for their immoral behavior.

For this reason, the followers of immoral charismatic leaders are doubly wrong. Not only do they fail to do the right thing when they act immorally, they also fail to do the right thing when they bypass moral deliberation.⁷ Charisma makes people epistemically negligent in a way that is itself wrong when that negligence results in wrongful action. Consider an analogy that illustrates this point. If a surgeon operates on the wrong side of a person's brain, he has made a mistake. If a surgeon does not check which side of the brain to operate on, he has also made a mistake. We do not generally blame surgeons who operate on the correct side of the brain for failing to check first, but when they operate on the

⁶ On some analyses, such a situation would be characterized as an instance of *akrasia*, because Huck broke down and acted on a lower order desire. I do not mean in this case to imply that Huck's decision is in any way was 'not his own' or moved by a charismatic force as some people claim that addicts are moved by a desire for drugs. Assume for this story that Huck is competent and willful enough to be responsible for his actions. See Holton for a discussion of these topics in relation to the Huck Finn case.

⁷ Some philosophers would argue that they are triply wrong in these cases. If for example, people have moral obligations to believe the moral truth as well as obligations to deliberate about the moral thing and to do the right thing [44].

wrong side the fact that they failed to check makes their mistake even worse. So too, if the followers of charismatic leaders fail to deliberate about the ethics of their action, their immoral action is even worse than if they deliberated but arrived at the wrong conclusion.

In some cases followers engage in moral deliberation, get the right answer, and do the wrong thing anyway because of a leaders' charismatic influence.⁸ There is some evidence that this is what happened at Jonestown. In a 2006 interview a Jonestown survivor describes Jim Jones's harmful and degrading rituals at Jonestown and states "I knew it was wrong, but I didn't do a thing to stop it" [46]. In these cases charisma is at its moral worst because charisma alone is the reason that followers behave immorally. Not only does charisma bypass moral deliberation at these moments it *silences* morality.

6. Conclusions

These considerations tell in favor of resisting charismatic leadership and discouraging charisma more generally. The foregoing argument may also justify some skepticism of charismatic leaders who claim the support of their followers, because it is likely that some of that support is motivated by the wrong reasons. At best, charismatic leaders use their power for good and a charismatic voice speaking the moral truth moves more people to follow him. Yet, even in these best-case scenarios, charisma does not make a leader's commands or a follower's obedience more praiseworthy; in fact it mitigates the praiseworthiness of deference to the moral leader because followers do not act on the basis of moral deliberation.

At worst, charismatic leaders use their influence for evil. As in the best case, those whose motivation to act is grounded in their leader's charismatic traits, are not praiseworthy, but in these cases their action is blameworthy as well. Worse, in these cases, charisma causes people to fail in their moral obligation to deliberate about morality and to act on the basis of that deliberation.

My thesis is that charisma is bad for moral deliberation, but I have not advanced an 'all things considered judgment' about the morality of charismatic leadership because charisma can have other morally relevant features that I have not addressed. For example, insofar as transactional and transformational leadership rely on follower's consent, they are morally better leadership styles than leadership by force. If charismatic leaders are more likely to secure consent, charismatic leadership may be correlated with a morally preferable leadership style. Or, if group solidarity is morally valuable, then charismatic leadership may be good because it promotes cooperation and solidarity [47].

However, if group solidarity is morally problematic (e.g., racism, nationalism) then charismatic leadership is problematic for this reason as well. Insofar as it is wrong to mislead people, and charisma misleads followers about the nature of their leaders, then charismatic leaders are morally worse. If

⁸ Some personality types may be especially inclined to engage in flawed moral reasoning in the presence of a charismatic leader, for example if people have especially dogmatic dispositions. Or, some personality types may be especially inclined to ignore moral considerations, such as people with relatively strong deference to authority. Research in social psychology, such as the famous Migram and Zimbardo experiments have shown that personality variations can also explain variations in the extent to which people defer to immoral commands [45]. My thesis is not that these considerations are irrelevant, only that charismatic leader can also heighten one's prepotency to act immorally insofar as it discourages independent moral deliberation and encourages deference.

charisma is used instead of morally better forms of influence (e.g., education perhaps) then charisma could also make leadership morally worse.

These hypotheses about the ethics of charisma rest on particular moral theories, namely moral theories that identify consent, group solidarity, and honesty as morally important. The argument I have advanced swings free of any particular first-order moral theory, but our overall judgments about the ethics of charisma will also depend on these considerations. Judgments about the ethics of charisma will also depend on empirical evidence. If further empirical research disconfirmed the current evidence that charisma influences followers' moral deliberation, then charisma would not be so problematic.

Despite our inability to render an overall judgment about the ethics of charismatic leadership, it is worthwhile to consider what would be lost by resisting charisma. Perhaps fewer people would be moved by King's message of racial tolerance or Mandela's arguments for equality. However, a rejection of charisma might have the opposite effect if followers and leaders then were left only with moral reasoning, rather than dazzling personalities, to guide their decisions.

Charisma is a distraction from the considerations that should actually inform the deliberations of followers—moral considerations. To some this fact may seem obvious, but it has been overlooked in scholarly and popular discussions of charisma, which emphasize that charisma can attach to good and bad leaders and therefore suggest that the trait itself is morally neutral [31]. Rather, the very fact that charismatic traits inspire people to follow without regard to right or wrong is morally problematic, because whenever charisma guides a follower's deliberations about what to do or whom to follow, morality does not.

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