**"Since authority always demand obedience, and is commonly mistaken for some form of power of violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed."**

The title quote, made by Hannah Arendt in "Between Past and Future", asserts that the use of power to maintain authority undermines authority itself, as true authority would not need any kind of external force to exert itself, but rather rely on blind, total obedience. To evaluate this philosophical claim, I will first try to establish a philosophical definition for the concept of authority, and then evaluate Hannah Arendt's claim in relation to this definition. The philosophical questions that will be discussed in this essay are therefore (a): What is, and how can one measure authority, and (b): does the use of violence or other external means of coercion mean that authority itself has failed?

A generally accepted definition of authority would be a position of power wherefrom one holds the means to direct and command others. However, problems arise when trying to formulate a more precise, less vague definition of authority.

One lack of precision would be the question of where this authority stems from. Is it institutional, based on charisma, physical prowess, or on traditional social family bonds? Furthermore, is the character of authority vested in the leader of a totalitarian country very different from the authority of a husband in a patriarchal society?

To answer the first question, I will for the sake of making the discussion comparative include all means by which authority is derived for. This is because I do not see any substantial difference in the relationship between the holder of the authority and the "subjects" of the authority due to if the authority is based on prestige, economical power, traditions or a combination thereof. I will therefore define authority as any relations between the holder of the authority and the people subject to this authority. However, this also leads to the question of how comparison of authority between for instance a dictator and a traditional family patriarch can measurably be compered. Obviously, the powers stemming from this authority would not be the same, as the dictator, for instance, would use it to control for example the economy and education system of his country, while the patriarch would use it to get the ability to choose his daughter's bride, or dictate the exact carrier path taken for his son. Does these differences inherently mean that the dictator welds more authority? I believe that is not true, as authority is better measure by the control of the authority over the subject, seen in the context of the social or political relationship between the two parties. In the quote by Hannah Arendt, she mentions the word obedience as the demand of authority. Therefore, I will measure authority by the obedience displayed, seen in context of the nature of the type of Authority-subject relationship.

Arendt states that, by use of power, authority has failed. To examine this, we must find the inverse of this; what is pure, "un-failed" authority? Referring back to the measuring of authority by the obedience of the subjects, pure authority would be a relationship where the subject blindly follows the commands and wishes of the authority, even if it inimical to the subject itself.

This, however, raises an interesting issue: does an authority hold "more authority", if the subject is aware that their actions are inimical to themselves, than an authority that relies on their subject believing they act in their own self-interest? To use an example, does a dictator able to deploy troops who are willingly knowing that they are sacrificing themselves for their leader command more authority than a democratic government whose troops believe they are fighting for their own sake and own rights? If we are to use Arendt's definition as authority gauged by obedience, the answer would be yes, as the former example displays obedience by self-sacrifice, while the latter, while being the exact same action, is not driven by blind obedience, but rather by self-interest.

With definitions of authority, types of authority, and distinctions between obedience cleared up, we are equipped to discuss question (b), the center of Arendt's claim: that authority is failed if having to use force to assert itself.

By using the previous measurement of obedience, the logic of Arendt's claim becomes apparent. If the subject(s) follow obedience by free will, they are displaying more obedience than subject(s) displaying obedience to the authority due to the threat of physical violence. In the former case, obedience is demonstrated by consciously swapping free-will for obedience to the author, while in the latter case it is derived only from the subjects' distress and fear of reprisal. The former case of obedience is also more stronger than the latter, in that the latter authority would disappear by removing the forces of coercion, making the authority and obedience conditional, conversely, the former case display a type of "pure" obedience. To again use an example of political authority (I do this because this was the context in which Arendt discussed authority), a democratic country where it populace willingly and consciously supports its government displays more obedience than the populace of a totalitarian state where only the monopolization of violence and arbitrary arrests prevents the population from defying authority, that is, not being obedient.

A relevant case of this being discussed in history, is how the German historian Hans Mommsen claimed that Hitler was essentially a "weak" dictator, as he only held authority provided that the "real" authorities, the industrialists, army, and SS, deemed him beneficial to their cause. This would therefore be an example of Arendt's "failed authority", as obedience is not derived solely from the authority, but rather from external factors.

A possible limitation of the argument that to use force to exact obedience undermines authority, is that the use of force itself represents a form of authority: However, this is to me not that important in assessing Arendt's claim, in that force would be unnecessary if the obedience was "pure".

Furthermore, I would claim that "pure", or "real", authority also could exist in a form where no external forms of coercion or even threats therefore, exists. For instance, blind obedience could be showed to a politician based on prestige and charisma alone. This further underlines my point that coercion and authority are essentially separate from each other; one can exist without the other. I must stress that this is opposite from Arendt's "common mistake" of mistaking power from violence as authority, With the addition that I also hold the inverse to be equally true; that it is a mistake to assume power without violence as no authority.

As my argument has revolved around distinction of blind obedience from coercion-induced obedience, I must clarify that certain ambiguous cases could exist, such as a woman of a patriarchal society voluntarily choosing to be socially, economically, and fiscally dominated. However, I do not see this observation as detrimental to my conclusion, as a distinction between forms of obedience still exists. Furthermore, one could claim that the obedience displayed in this example is not necessarily "pure", as the social expectations themselves act as a kind of external, coercive force.

In conclusion, by defining authority and outlining a possible method of measurement of obedience, I agree to Arendt's argument that authority commanded by violence or threat of other coercive forces is "failed" authority, because it is conditional on the existence of these forces. It is not authority by total, blind obedience.