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## Love, Law, and Disobedience

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## Love, Law, and Disobedience

### Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I find that a good stage to discuss the basic human concepts of love, law, and disobedience is found within the Torah or the "teaching of, or the law" of the Jewish bible. I find that the book of Genesis describes love, law, and disobedience in an elemental way."



*James De Siena*

### ***Love, Law, and Disobedience***

I find that a good stage to discuss the basic human concepts of love, law, and disobedience is found within the Torah or the “teaching of, or the law” of the Jewish bible. I find that the book of Genesis describes love, law, and disobedience in an elemental way.

I find that in order to be disobedient, either the agent in question or another group of people had to first be obedient. It is all based upon the foundation of rules and norms in our society. People are obedient when they choose to obey the laws and norms of the society. People are disobedient when they choose to abandon the laws and norms of their society and seek new or no governance. After reading the book of Genesis, chapter six, it would seem that disobedience was found in man- God’s creation. God saw “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”<sup>1</sup> Also stated in chapter 6 of Genesis, is Gods decision to remove such iniquity from the world with a great flood. I feel that the iniquity is a product of many things, but is mainly the result of the willingness of man to disobey his covenant with the lord. Looking outside of scripture, disobedience is mostly accompanied with swift retribution. For instance, terrorism is a form of disobedience against society and is typically the cause for violent retaliation from the authority of the society. Terrorism as a means to insurrection has roots of disobedience. When the Nazi regime took control of northern France and started to employ brutal tactics to control the French population, terrorism served the French resistance to disobey the German authorities. The problem though is that such terrorism and disobedience provokes an equal response and, in the case of the French, a deadly response.

Disobedience cannot exist by itself. If one is disobedient, then one is against some type of ruling or authority. Thus, disobedience coexists with the law of society. To highlight this relationship even more I offer the following example, albeit unusual- it is an odd to suggest, “it was wrong of Hitler to order the extermination of the Jews.”<sup>2</sup> What

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<sup>1</sup> *Holy Bible–NRSV*. New York, NY: ABS, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Harman “Convention.” *Ethics for Modern Life*, ed. Raziel Abelson and Marie-Louise Friquegnon. (Boston, MA: Bedford and St Martin’s, 2003) 54.

makes this statement odd is that by saying that it would be wrong implies that Hitler had a reason not to what he obviously did or ordered others to do. However, Adolf Hitler, from our own understanding of world history, did not have a reason not to do what he did. Hitler was willing to exterminate an entire group of people that leads the majority of people to believe that he had no such reasons. Thus, wrong is not the proper word; Hitler is simply evil and nothing more. Our understanding of Hitler is all based upon our own conventions of morality- our laws. If I were to simply judge his acts, then that could be considered wrong, but I cannot judge him. Hitler does not operate within the same moral conventions as the rest of society; people who comprise of the rest of society cannot assume that he accepts their morality and judge him based upon his disobedience. Disobedience is based more on the individual than the act and in order to have disobedience there must be conventions or laws that measure such disobedience. Thus, the rest of society cannot judge Hitler because Hitler lies beyond the scope of our morality and conventions.

When I think of the word love, I think of devotion and commitment to a cause. Continuing with the World War II theme, I will provide some insight into my distant cousin Clause Von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg was a German colonel who fought during the war and is remembered for organizing the plot to assassinate Adolf Hitler. Although his plan was never executed successfully, Stauffenberg can be best remembered for the love for his country and his family. He wanted to remove Hitler chiefly because he knew that it was only a matter of time before the allies would surround Germany and take control of the country. Stauffenberg recognized what Germany would be like without Fascism; he wanted to raise an aristocratic society apart from the Nazi regime. From one perspective, one could make the claim that he was disobedient against the authority of the state, but this is not true due to the acknowledgement that the conventions that are used to judge people by do not rest on the local laws of the state. The conventions that I speak of are greater than ordinary laws. Thus, there is no *real* disobedience with Stauffenberg's actions. From the dogmatic perspective of Nazis, he was disobedient, but that is not important. The only conventions that are real are those that all of humanity can accept. Referring back to my earlier example, we could say that it was wrong of Hitler to do the things that he did because such a claim would mean that Hitler accepted and knew of the moral rights and conventions of humanity and was willing to abide by them. People do not judge Hitler's actions in the context of Nazi law, but something more universal. We have to keep in mind that everything Hitler did was perfectly within the laws of the state at the time. Thus, some disobedience is necessary to appeal to a law greater than that of the country one inhabits. Whether it is Stauffenberg or the French resistance, people are sometimes called to a higher order of humanity.

Apart from the World War II theme, in America, the civil rights movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King can be thought of as a greater form of disobedience for a greater cause. The objective of Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK) was to disturb the norms of American society enough times so that they would be changed. This is disobedience, but it is not *real* disobedience because MLK was appealing to the greater convention of egalitarianism. Those who opposed the civil rights movement were the true disobedient agents of the society. The American Revolution and culture were based upon equality, why deny those of a particular color that equality? Thus, the agents of the civil rights movements out of devotion and love were disobedient and at times unlawful because

such obedience would give them nothing. Disobedience is only right when the cause is greater than the cause of the oppressors. The basic utilitarian statement, that the “ends justify the means” (King 349), is a calling to disobey so that the oppressed can stop the oppression forced on them.<sup>3</sup> MLK was an advocate of disobedience based upon non-violence. This fact is a good reason to explain the success of the civil rights movement. Could this tactic be used to rid the Nazis of Northern France? In all likelihood it probably would not have been a suitable means to that end. With the available options to MLK, non-violence was the most effective one because the oppressors could not break their basic laws.

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. “Love, Law, and Civil Disobedience.” *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986) 349.