

# The obedience to authority

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## Obedience to Authority and How It is Evil

Two short stories tend to shock people with their endings and implications: Jackson's "The Lottery" and LeGuin's "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas." These stories underlie the darkness present in humanity, a darkness that has been too "old" to be completely removed. This essay analyzes how following authority produces evil. Obedience to authority results in evil in the stories "The Lottery" and "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas," because of appearance of convention, cowardice, and ordinariness of violence.

Convention and law are common sources of authority, which many people can follow mindlessly, however evil their outcomes may be. In "The Lottery," Old Man Warner stresses that the lottery cannot be removed, simply because it has always been done: "There's always been a lottery" (Jackson).

Furthermore, he emphasizes the saying: "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (Jackson). It does not matter if this ritual results to the suffering of one person, since the society focuses on its "positive" outcomes. In "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas," people believe that in order to maintain the joy and wealth of Omelas, they have to preserve a "child's abominable misery" (LeGuin). Omelas has made it a law to never let the child out, because it will result to the loss of "prosperity and beauty and delight" of Omelas (LeGuin). Some residents feel the injustice of this law, but the majority follows its law nonetheless.

Simply obeying authority is a form of cowardice, which results to evil too. Some people in "The Lottery" consider scrapping this tradition, but they do so in "suggestive" tones. Mrs. Adams says: "Some places have already quit

lotteries" (Jackson). No one among the people, nevertheless, boldly calls for the eradication of this bloody and senseless ritual. They all participate, even when they feel uncomfortable about it. For instance, the niceties are all forced, such as when Mr. Summers and Mr. Adams "grinned at one another humorlessly..." (Jackson). There is also cowardice in how people in Omelas uphold a child's misery. They rationalize the co-existence of their happiness and an individual's suffering: "They all know that it has to be there" (LeGuin). They think this way to free themselves from guilt. Rationalization is a coward's way out of his/her conscience.

People follow authority, even when it results to violence, because violence has become too commonplace that no one questions its morality anymore. Children and adults alike participate in the violence of the lottery, as part of their "numbing, commonplace everyday activity" (Breakthrough Writer). Everyone is in a hurry in getting it done, so that they can all go "back to work" (Jackson). Violence has become the norm for Omelas too. It is present in how they treat a helpless child, whom they barely feed. Furthermore, they have to be cruel to the child: "The terms are strict and absolute; there may not even be a kind word spoken to the child" (LeGuin). People commonly visit the child, as if to make sure that he/she remains in his/her "proper place." Most of them have stopped asking, if they are doing the right thing at all.

Obedience to authority culminates to evil in the stories "The Lottery" and "The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas," because of convention, cowardice, and ordinariness of violence. Majority of the residents in both stories accept that what they are doing is part of their conventions and laws.

They are also too cowardly to challenge these laws. Finally, they have become numb to violence. As a result, they condone evil that exists in their everyday lives. Hence, as they obey authority, they obey their inhumanity.

#### Works Cited

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