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Parental compromise

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ABSTRACT


I examine how co-parents should handle differing commitments about how to raise their child. Via thought experiment and the examination of our practices and affective reactions, I argue for a thesis about the locus of parental authority: that parental is invested in full in each individual parent, meaning that that the command of one parent is sufficient to bind the child to act in obedience. If this full-authority thesis is true, then for co-parents to command different things would be for them to contest one another's authority. The only course that respects the authority of both parents is for co-parents to agree to command the same thing. Further, what is commanded must not result from a 'capitulation' by one co-parent, rather, it should result from a compromise. Parental authority involves a duty to deliberate about which commands it is best to give the child. If a command results from a capitulation, one parent will rightly think of themselves as not having fulfilled their parental duty. Parental compromises are not best understood as bargains or conflicts, but by the metaphor of gifts given by each parent out of respect for the other's authority.

KEYWORDS Compromise; authority; disagreement; children's rights; family ethics

Introduction

How ought co-parents handle their disagreements about how best to raise their child? I argue that co-parents ought to compromise. I begin by characterizing compromise. I then outline and argue for a thesis about the nature of parental authority that I term the *full-authority thesis*, on which parental authority is invested in each co-parent, rather than in 'the co-parents' as a collective agent as the *shared-authority thesis* holds. I show how on the full-authority thesis co-parents must, to give one another their due as parents, agree to give their child the same commands, and commands that are the result of compromise.

Though my argument pertains to parental disagreements in general, I use the disagreement between vegan and omnivore co-parents as my running example. This is because it is a disagreement about which there is an immediate and concrete practical upshot, and because it involves commitments that both co-parents often consider very important, about which they

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are often uninclined to compromise. I assume the case in which a vegan parent is committed to the idea of raising their child on a vegan diet, and their omnivorous co-parent is committed to the idea of raising their child on an omnivorous diet. That is, prior to factoring in any reasons relating to the commitments of their co-parent, each co-parent has differing commitments about what diet their child should have.

Compromise

I take it that an interpersonal compromise involves an agreement of some number of parties to pursue some shared policy (or activity) that all parties regard as intentionally failing to instantiate some of their commitments, or intentionally violating some of their commitments. A compromise involves all the parties agreeing to do something other than what they believed themselves to have the most reason to do *ex ante* to the compromise, or when excluding reasons pertaining to compromise. For instance, suppose half the legislators hold the commitment that abortion should ideally be illegal in all circumstances. The other half hold the commitment that abortion should ideally be legal in all circumstances. Eventually they compromise and agree on a 12-week limit, and no legislator sees their will about what should ideally be the case instantiated.

To illustrate the nature of compromise by contrast: a consensus involves the parties reaching interpersonal agreement about which commitments are best or true (Rostbøll, 2017, p. 621), a capitulation involves one party unilaterally abandoning any instantiation of their commitments in a shared policy (Lepora, 2012, p. 5), and a settlement is a shared policy brought about not by agreement but compelled or exacted by differences in power (Weinstock, 2013, p. 539). Once a compromise has been made, the parties have significant moral reason to abide by it given that it is an agreement. Making compromises about morally important matters ought to involve feelings of moral anguish and consternation (Lepora, 2012, p. 15) and should only be made once attempts at reaching consensus through moral reasoning have been exhausted, since one should not lightly agree to intentionally fail to instantiate or violate some of one's moral commitments. Though some compromises are impermissible, it seems that some are not, and that compromises are an inevitable and often beneficial feature of our moral lives (Hoffmaster & Hooker, 2017). Though the person who makes a compromise commits (by their own lights) a *pro tanto* moral wrong, compromising can be all-things-considered permissible.

There are different types of reason for making a compromise. There are 'pragmatic reasons' for compromise: a compromise may be valuable as a means in pursuit of some end external to the compromise itself. These pragmatic reasons can be divided into the prudential and the moral, depending on the nature of the end being sought. There are also 'principled reasons' (Jones & O'Flynn, 2012; Kappel, 2018; May, 2005; Weinstock, 2013) for compromise: the

attainment of a certain compromise may be morally valuable for its own sake, itself instantiating certain values or being fitting to a certain relationship, regardless of any consequences the compromise may bring. These are all *pro tanto* reasons to be weighed together with one's existing commitments, meaning that sometimes one's existing commitments can be outweighed by these reasons in the formulation of a shared policy. For instance, it might be that despite legislator's commitment to legal abortion in all circumstances, a compromise might be favored for the pragmatic-moral reason of being the most realistic means of preventing many backstreet abortions, and for the principled reason of showing respect for the deep convictions of fellow legislators and citizens. I suggest that all three types of reasons are present in a compromise between vegan and omnivore co-parents over their child's diet (and indeed in other cases of parental disagreement, though I will leave any elaborations to the reader).

In the political case, some decision procedure or other is required for arriving at shared policies in the face of differing commitments. The same seems true of parental life. Compromise is an alternative decision procedure to majority-rule. Whatever the virtues of majority-rule as against compromise in political cases, it seems that majority-rule is not a feasible decision procedure in the standard case of two co-parents. Therefore, barring some other fair option (such as a lottery), compromise seems like a prudentially useful decision procedure for co-parents to adopt as they attempt to navigate the quotidian disagreements of life. In the political case, compromise can also be a means of attaining social peace and a means of lowering the enforcement costs of rules (Wendt, 2017). The same is true in the case of a child's diet. Imagine what it would mean for there to be an absence of compromise between the parents: parents would be continually at odds over what their child should eat (a daily recurring issue), and time would likely be wasted and good-will drained on tortuous bickering. Similarly, each co-parent would be liable to enact their own commitments in an *ad hoc* manner, for instance a 'secret' slice of pepperoni-pizza after the ball game, a week of tofu scrambles whilst mother goes on a business trip. It is difficult to imagine such a basic facet of the child's life, over which the parents have a sharp difference in commitments, not being the subject of a shared policy without this generating disharmony. Were the shared policy not a compromise, but instead a capitulation or a settlement, this would likely engender resentment on the part of the 'losing party.' These same facts give rise to pragmatic-moral reasons when viewed in terms of their effect on the child: it is not fair to the child that they not be subject to a consistent policy, and it is regrettable that they should suffer in any way from parental discord.

The full-authority thesis

There is also principled reason for compromise. People who are in a conjugal or committed amatory relationship may have principled reason to compromise

with each other on many matters rather than pursuing differing policies. I set these considerations aside. It remains that the co-parents of a child bear a relationship to one another, that of co-parent. I suggest that compromise is what is fitting to this relationship, or the treatment that is due between its parties. Co-parents are both parents of the same child. Each therefore bears a morally symmetrical relation to the same child, by which they are linked together as co-parents. To understand what is due between co-parents we must say a little more about what is due in the relation of parent and child, since it is this relation that co-parents ought to recognize one another as having and have respect for this relation.

I will suppose that one important part of parenthood is having a weighty but defeasible right to determine, within certain limits, various aspects of the child's behavior and mode of life: what will be obligatory, permissible, and forbidden for them. I term this parental authority, and the specific exercises of this authority as addressed to the child I term parental commands. Insofar as a child is able to recognize parental commands, the child ought to take them as binding them to act in obedience: providing very weighty *pro tanto* moral reason to act in some way, or even, by supplanting the child's own immature faculties, providing all-things-considered moral reason to act in some way. Likewise, insofar as the child is unable to recognize these commands as commands or is unwilling to obey them, parental authority means that parents have a right to shape the child's behavior through the child's other faculties: emotional appeals, prudential appeals, certain sorts of physical coercion, and determining various aspects of the child's environment.

It is my contention that each co-parent has parental authority. Each co-parent can give the child a parental command, and each co-parent has the authority to otherwise shape the child's behavior. The will of one co-parent alone is sufficient for the provision of parental authority. I call this thesis about the locus of parental authority the *full-authority thesis*. The contrary thesis is the *shared-authority thesis*, on which only 'the co-parents' as a collective agent have the authority to give the child a parental command. On this view, the agreement of both co-parents is necessary for the giving of a parental command. On the shared-authority thesis, co-parents can give one another an ongoing permission to utilize their share of the authority to command, perhaps allowing it to be presumed over a given range of cases but not others. Only in the case of a single-parent is there no practical difference between the full-authority thesis and the shared-authority thesis: in such a case on either thesis the will of a single-parent is sufficient for giving the child a parental command.

I support the full-authority thesis by thought experiment. Imagine a state with a 2-person legislature. The constitution requires a majority vote of the legislators (meaning both legislators) in favor of any bill for there to be a command that the civil service act in some way. Suppose that legislator

A votes for some bill, perhaps in many different sessions, expressing the utmost conviction and emotion as she does so. In a like manner, legislator B votes for some other bill, contradictory in its intent. Separately, neither legislator has the authority to command the civil service. Of the relation these legislators bear to the civil service an analogue of the shared-authority thesis is true. Until both legislators vote for the same bill the civil service will not have received a command and it can continue with its *status quo* activities as if no legislative controversy were going on. Except as evidential hints about the nature of any future commands, the various votes and exhortations of each individual legislator will be a matter of indifference to the civil service.

Now compare this with the case of two co-parents and their child. Parent A tells the child to eat the ham sandwich placed in front of them (feel free to imagine a structurally identical case in which something different is at stake). Intuitively, this telling is a command that binds the child to eat the sandwich. So far, this does not distinguish the full-authority thesis from the shared-authority thesis, since it might either be that parent A's telling is by itself a command, or it might be that parent A's telling is only a command given the presumed ongoing permission of parent B that parent A can utilize their share of the authority to command in cases of this sort. Suppose the child starts to eat the sandwich. Parent B then tells the child 'No – don't eat that!' If the shared-authority thesis is true, then with parent B's telling it is revealed that no command was given with parent A's telling, or indeed parent B's telling. This, I suggest, seems wrong. Whether the child eats the ham sandwich or not, it will not regard itself as being back in the *status quo* position prior to either telling, as the civil service would regard itself in light of the contradictory votes of the legislators. With parent B's telling it seems that the child, rather than being subject to no commands, has been subject to two contradictory commands. Unlike the civil service, such a child would aptly feel themselves to be in a practical dilemma – they are bound to both eat and not eat the sandwich. Whichever they do, they would aptly feel confusion and moral anguish – the emotional pain that arises from facing a moral dilemma and from the sense that one will commit a significant *pro tanto* moral wrong whatever one does. The child would aptly seek to clarify which it is they ought to do, or ask one parent to reconsider their command, or come up with some clever way of fulfilling both commands – such as picking out the ham and eating the bread. Nothing analogous could be said of the civil service. It is perhaps very wrong for two parents to subject their child to differing commands in this way – but this only shows that parents can misuse their full-authority, not that each parent does not have full-authority.

Though I rest my case for the full-authority thesis on this thought experiment, I note that it explains a motley collection of intuitions and practices relating to parenthood or is more consistent with them than with the shared-authority thesis.

First, it is the simplest explanation for our judgement that there are numerous cases in which one parent can give commands to the child. If the shared-authority thesis is true, then another layer of explanation is required to account for the fact that parents often do not seek one another's permission to utilize their share of the authority to command. Presuming that such an account could be given, the full-authority thesis nevertheless explains more simply than its alternative why the quorum for many parental commands is 1.

Second, it helps explain why disagreements between co-parents about how their child ought to behave can be exceptionally acrimonious. Both parties conceive themselves to have full-authority to command the child. Therefore, for each parent the child is 'mine' or 'ownmost' such that the contradictory commands given to the child by another feel like a usurpation in a domain where one's command is determinative. That is, parents are liable to confuse their full-authority with an exclusive authority. If the shared-authority thesis were our conception of parental authority, we would expect disagreements over how to raise the child to cause less ire, since child-rearing policies would be a matter in which each parent conceived themselves only to have a share of the say – often seeing things not go one's way would be our default expectation, not so much of an apt ground for sourness.

Third, it explains why we rarely qualify the role 'parent' or seek to distinguish the moral relations between a single-parent and their child from the moral relations between a co-parent and their child, which if the shared-authority thesis is true are very different.

Fourth, it explains why a decrease or increase in the number parents that a child has does not seem to alter a parent's conception of their authority over the child. In the case in which a co-parent dies, it seems that the surviving co-parent does not usually conceive themselves to have 'inherited' or 'assumed' the deceased parent's share of authority over the child – because they already had full-authority. Likewise, it explains the oddness of the claim that a single-parent might be diluting their authority over their child by becoming a co-parent. Likewise, although psycho-sociological evidence is absent, it seems plausible to say that a parent in a multi-parent family does not feel their authority over the child to be less than that of an ordinary co-parent. For instance, in a three-parent family in which parent C always differed from parents A and B over various decisions regarding the child, I imagine that parent C would not be satisfied to be like the minority in a 3-person legislature and recognize that, since authority is shared, they can never command as a minority. Rather, I suggest C would find such an arrangement completely intolerable, because they would never be able to exercise the full-authority over the child they conceive themselves to have.

Fifth, we might take it as a general claim that the more important a right is, the more important are the reasons required to justify stripping someone of it, suspending it, or violating it. Only if the full-authority thesis is correct would we

expect the justifications required for stripping a co-parent of their parental rights to be no less than the justifications required for stripping a single-parent of their parental rights. If the shared-authority thesis is correct, then what a co-parent loses by being stripped of their share in the authority over their child is less important than what a single-parent loses by being stripped of their authority over their child. I take it that, intuitively, we would require no less justification for the stripping of parental authority in the co-parental case. Whilst a court of law might require a higher threshold of justification for stripping a single-parent of their parental rights, this seems to be motivated purely by a concern for the child's well-being in the eventuality that they end up with no parents, rather than any notion that a co-parent's rights are different or less important than a single-parent's rights.

Sixth, there is a burden on would-be opponents of the full-authority thesis to explain how it is that the rights a parent has in virtue of their relationship to the child can be altered by changes that seem extrinsic to that relationship, in this case whether the child has, or loses, or gains, a similar relationship to someone else or not. Analogously (bracketing opportunity costs and other empirical considerations) it seems that we do not take the moral character of friendship, siblinghood, employeeshood, and so forth, to vary in any essential way depending on whether the person to whom we are related in one of these ways also has other friends, siblings, employees, and so forth.

How the full-authority thesis favors commanding the same thing

We noted previously that in their morally symmetrical relations to the same child, co-parents ought to recognize one another as and treat one another as parents of the same child. We can now say that, on the full-authority thesis, this means that co-parents cannot refuse to recognize one another as having full-authority over the child and find ways of acting that are consistent with this recognition. Consequently, just as the child ought to show obedience to their parent's commands, a co-parent likewise should show the respect appropriate to their co-parent's authority over the child and their commands for the child.

In cases where one co-parent has no differing will about some matter, it is easy to show this respect. To take a twee example, if one is indifferent as to whether one's child should be allowed to eat chocolate immediately before dinner one respects the will of one's co-parent and defers to their command. One takes their command as being binding for the child and one acts to uphold their command oneself. Note that one is liable to apt criticism for failing to live up to the values of the co-parenting relationship if one does not do this: hence the importance of the question 'Did dad say you could have that?'

The harder case is where the co-parents would like to command the child to do different things: eat meat, do not eat meat. How can co-parents show respect for one another's commitments for the child in such a case? Conceptually it seems there are 4 possibilities. (1) the parents could agree to command nothing about the matter. (2) the parents could agree that one of them will make commands that instantiate their own commitments and that the other will command nothing. (3) the parents could not agree and command different things. (4) the parents could agree to command the same thing.

(1) seems unsatisfactory. Parents have to make commands or otherwise shape their child's behavior with regards to an indefinite number of matters: where the child is to live, where they are to go to school, brushing teeth twice a day, sleep at 9pm, homework before dinner, and so forth. It is difficult to conceive in what sense there is parenting going on if there is not an enormous slew commands bearing on almost every facet of the child's life. There seem to be some cases where it is possible for both parents to agree to command nothing: parents who disagree over the inculcation of certain abstract values or beliefs can agree to not shape their child in either direction ('Let's agree to just not talk about climate change with her'). This is itself a compromise to refrain from commanding or otherwise shaping the child's behavior and seems to often be a permissible strategy. But in the case of diet, as in most cases, this answer is unsatisfactory since the parents must give some food or other to the child and this food will either contain animal products or not.

(2) resembles a capitulation in that only one co-parent's commitment about some matter is instantiated, but here by way of one parent not commanding their child to do anything. It seems that (2) is problematic insofar as it involves one co-parent asking the other to not be a parent in some respect: not provide the child with their own commands about some aspect of the child's life where commands are necessary and where the parent has some will about the matter. Similarly, (2) seems to involve the 'losing party' not helping to uphold the commands of their co-parent, which is to act as if the other parent were not an authority for the child ('Mom said you could have a pepperoni pizza for lunch? Interesting. Pity she's not here to make it herself'). (2) is therefore a sort of dissociative response to the problem of differing commitments on which neither co-parent is given their due.

(3) is also unsatisfactory. As noted, it seems unfair to the child to give them contradictory commands. Further, it seems that for co-parents to issue commands that they know to be contradictory, or contradictory to the sort of commands that their co-parent will or would like to give, is for the co-parents to practically contest and deny each other's authority over the child. To sneak the child beef jerky despite the other parent's command that they not eat meat, or to give the child an impromptu day off school for the

purpose of having a fun day out together despite the other parent's command that they go to school, are cases of acting as if the other parent did not have authority over the child and were not their parent. This is to fail to give what is due in the co-parenting relationship: a respect for one another's authority over the child.

By elimination, the only way for co-parents to give one another their due is for them to both command the same thing. The crux of the argument is that if this is done, neither parent contests or fails to respect the authority of the other over the child. Indeed, both will be acting to uphold one another's commands and authority in upholding their own. Likewise, this is the only way to avoid the practical dilemma that arises for the child when differing commands are given to him or her.

The role of co-parent is extraordinarily strange and unstable since there seems to be an almost unlimited scope for conflict and dilemma between parental commands. My account of how two parental authorities co-exist shows that in a sense the problems posed by their co-existence are never permanently resolved. The attempt of the two parents to command in a way that respects the authority of both is a balancing act that must be continually renewed and which is always in danger of breaking down – something I take to be consistent with the phenomenology of co-parenting under the conditions of differing commitments.

How the full-authority thesis favors compromise

It seems that the only way for co-parents to give what is due to one another's authority is for their command to be the result of a compromise, rather than a settlement or a capitulation. That compromise is necessary is shown by further reflection on the nature of parental authority. I assume that a parent's authority is a temporary substitute for the child's as-yet undeveloped and developing faculties (Archard, 2004, pp. 77–84). This means that parents ought not give their child capricious or ill-considered commands. Rather, having parental authority imposes a significant duty on the parent to exercise their intellectual and moral faculties, to deliberate about moral and other reasons, to determine how best to command the child. The parent's commands ought to be guided by such things as a concern for the child's best interests (Buchanan & Brock, 1990), or the preservation of the child's open future (Feinberg, 1980), or whatever other normative standards the parent's deliberations deliver. That is, parental authority involves not only a right to command, but also a parental duty to deliberate about which commands it is best to give. So, in recognizing one another's authority co-parents must recognize each other as being under like duties to deliberate about how best to command the child.

Negatively, of a command that results from a settlement or a capitulation, the parent whose commitments are not instantiated at all will rightly think of themselves as having not fulfilled their parental duty, since the commands they give the child will, in terms of their content, be entirely heteronomous, imparted by the other co-parent, rather than being a product of their own deliberations. Therefore, to give what is due to the authority of one's co-parent one ought not to force them into a settlement, or even allow them to capitulate. To do so would be to disjoint such a co-parent's right to command the child from the deliberative duty that is a part of parental authority, the exercise of which duty and the implementation of the results of which justify the practice of parenthood.¹ Likewise, out of respect for one's own authority one ought not to accept a settlement or capitulation, since to see the content of one's deliberations not at all instantiated in the commands given to the child would likewise be to undermine the justification for one's having parental authority at all. It would in effect be to lose one's moral parenthood. The parent whose commitments do not get expressed in the commands given to the child is plausibly better described as a proxy or cypher of the other parent, a relay station for the other parent's commands, than as a moral parent. The elimination of capitulation and settlement as incompatible with the respect of each co-parent for the authority of the other itself suggests compromise as the only alternative.

Despite the evidently unappetizing nature of the alternatives of settlement and capitulation, it might nevertheless seem puzzling how compromise for principled reasons can be made sense of, since it might seem like a case in which both parties must both, to some extent, abandon the implementation of the content of their deliberations on how best to command the child, and therefore both parties will have to somewhat fail to live up to their parental duty. One way of thinking about parental deliberation and compromise is that both parents deliberate as if they were not co-parents and as if they did not know the content of their co-parent's deliberations, their commitments, and then find that the output of their reasoning faculties must have an exogenous constraint put on its implementation. On this way of thinking, compromise is like capitulation, differentiated only by constituting a constraint just half as harsh as the total constraint of capitulation.

I deny that compromise involves any such an abandonment or exogenous constraint, or that compromise is merely 'quantitatively' different from capitulation. Another way of thinking of compromise is that as part of their deliberative process each parent is able (and ought) to take into account the fact of their co-parent's full-authority and the nature of the commitments that their co-parent has formulated in their deliberations. This is not done for epistemic reasons, conciliating in one's beliefs about what it is best to

command as if one's co-parent were an epistemic peer (Christensen, 2009). Instead, given that the proper exercise of the authority of one's co-parent must always remain deliberative and must see its content instantiated in the child's life, one must not will to see only one's own commitments instantiated in the child's life. Rather, in one's capacity as a co-parent linked to another co-parent by a morally symmetrical relation to the same child, one must also will that the authority of one's co-parent and their commitments be expressed in the commands given to the child, out of respect for that authority which mirrors one's own. One's co-parent ought to wish the same of oneself. The mutual concessions of compromise are therefore not best understood on the model of bargaining, conflict, or stalemate, but rather are gifts or oblations given by each party out of respect for one another's authority. That is, an important item for consideration in each parent's deliberations about how best to command the child ought to be 'What does their father/mother will for them?' – an item which, where prior commitments differ, ought to lead both sides to favor some intermediate command as being the command it is best to give the child. In other words, the commitments of one's co-parent concerning the child ought to be incorporated into one's own commitments for the child, merely in virtue of the fact that they are the commitments of one's co-parent, and vice versa. That the child is better commanded when the will of one's co-parent is taken into account than when it is not – not better on some external metric, but better purely because the command respects the authority of one's co-parent – is the heart of parental compromise.

Here is one thought favoring this respect-based model of parental compromise. It seems intuitively plausible that a co-parent could aptly compromise by taking into account what the will of a deceased co-parent was or would have been – perhaps one is against hunting but permits the child to hunt because their deceased parent wanted them to be a hunter, even if one never agreed this with, or promised this to, the deceased parent before their death. It seems that a respect-based model of parental-compromise can accommodate this intuition, but it seems that a bargaining or a contention model could not.²

I note that once the full-authority thesis is shown to require co-parents to compromise where they differ in their commitments, much of the intuitive evidence that might be offered in favor of the shared-authority thesis is made consistent with the full-authority thesis. That is, it is surely the case that co-parents ought not give certain important commands without consulting one another, that it is a wrong to the child and one another for co-parents to tell the child to do different things, and so forth.

I note that I do not deny that there may be some argument to be made for compromise between co-parents if the shared-authority thesis is true. Indeed, if the shared-authority thesis is true then it follows conceptually that

co-parents can only command the same thing. However, if the shared-authority thesis is true, co-parents need to command the same thing for an institutional reason (like the two legislators), whereas in the case of the full-authority thesis the need to command the same thing is derived from moral considerations. Likewise, if the shared-authority thesis is true then plausibly the ground of compromise is merely pragmatic rather than principled: pragmatic-prudential insofar as compromise will be a decision procedure that helps resolve disputes, and pragmatic-moral insofar as the child is owed some command or other. By contrast, on the full-authority thesis compromise is mandated by the principled reason of mutual respect between the co-parents for one another's authority (the difference being shown by the notion that since the pragmatic reasons concern compromise as a means, some alternative means to the same ends could be devised, whereas on the full-authority thesis compromise is grounded in what is due between co-parents and so cannot be supplanted). Lastly, I note that the full-authority thesis explains why it is that respect for parental authority must express itself in a compromise that affects the content of what is commanded. Given that each co-parent has the right to command, that it is this authority and its content which is the object of respect, parents need not be satisfied with only procedural fairness. By contrast, respect for a shared-authority may plausibly only require procedural fairness (May, 2005), that is, each party merely being allowed their say or their vote even if this has no ultimate effect on the nature of the commands given.

To enter into the relationship of co-parent is to commit oneself to compromising. To co-parent at all is to voluntarily undertake a vast and indefinite enterprise with someone who will bear the same authority over the child as oneself. To co-parent at all is a compromise as compared with raising the child as a single-parent in precisely the manner one sees fit. At the juncture at which the issue of the child's diet and various other issues arise it is, in a sense, too late to refuse to compromise since one has already compromised by agreeing to raise a human being with another human being. I note that the details of every compromise co-parent are bound to vary enormously depending on the specificities of the commitments of each party and that practical wisdom is called for.

Responses

I will pose and respond to some apparent difficulties with my recommendation of parental compromise, focusing on cases where compromise may seem impermissible or not possible. I will continue to use the veganism-omnivorism disagreement as my main running example, but my purpose is not to give a detailed exposition of vegan philosophies as they might relate

to parental compromise, it is just to use such co-parents' predicament as illustrative of how various sorts of difficult cases might be approached.

Extreme commitments

One difficulty might be that compromise is wrong when one is faced with extreme commitments. For instance, faced with a 'pro-murder' co-parent one ought not to compromise and, say, agree to command the child to conduct the occasional savage beating. Perhaps, by the lights of some vegans, eating animal products is an extreme commitment about which compromise is not permissible.

In response, I want to concede there are cases of extreme commitments. There are different ways in which we might try to characterize what makes for an extreme commitment, but here I take this to mean just any commitment that makes a parental compromise impermissible. I suggest here that such cases are quite rare.

That such cases are quite rare becomes apparent when we consider what it is that a co-parent ought to do when their counterpart has an extreme commitment. If one is already a co-parent, one should not compromise. One should not respect the authority of one's co-parent and should instead force them into a settlement on the issue at hand, or otherwise ensure that the child does not heed the co-parent's commands. Doing this does not perhaps require a total dissolution of the co-parenting relationship, but it is a denial of the authority of one's co-parent over some aspect of the child's life, and therefore a significant rupture of both the relationship between oneself and one's co-parent as well as of the morally symmetrical relationship between one's child and one's co-parent. Similarly, if one is not already a co-parent with someone with an extreme commitment, then one should not become a co-parent with them since it is a wrong to enter into a relationship or agreement whose terms one reasonably foresees having to rupture (Moller, 2003).

I would suggest that, intuitively, the two courses of action outlined above are very serious. Rupturing a co-parental relationship or refusing to become a co-parent with someone (most obviously, an existing conjugal or amatory partner) simply on account of some commitment of theirs are not things one should do lightly. Indeed, given the morally symmetrical relationship one's co-parent bears to one's child, a useful heuristic question is 'Should I will my co-parent to rupture these relationships if I came to hold such a commitment?' Taking such courses of action because one's actual or prospective co-parent was committed to taking the child to well-run zoos, for instance, would be a tremendous overreaction by most people's lights, even among those who believe that visiting zoos is morally impermissible. That these courses of action are so serious implies that the threshold for being an 'extreme commitment' is quite high.

That the threshold here is high becomes clearer when we consider that people often change their commitments about how best to command the child or find themselves developing new commitments. The socio-psychological research here is vast, complex, and incomplete. But we might note, for instance, that the length of commitment to a vegan diet is often only a few years (Schüpbach, Wegmüller, Berguerand, Bui, & Herter-Aeberli, 2017), that increases in implicit bias appear to be a typical part of the aging process (Stewart, Von, & Radvansky, 2009), and that political beliefs appear to be significantly influenced by which neighborhood or city one happens to move to (Lyons, 2017). This is to say that the commitments of one's co-parent are likely to change in at least some respects over time. Again, becoming a parent is a life-event that impacts on one's psychology in a huge variety of ways that people are not very good at forecasting *ex ante*. One dimension of this appears to be changes in political and moral beliefs, with parenthood being significantly correlated with social conservatism, though current research does not 'definitively establish a causal link between parenthood and social conservatism' (Kerry & Murray, 2018). Similarly, becoming a co-parent may draw one's attention to minor and major controversies one had never previously considered: co-sleeping, child harnesses, extended breastfeeding, and so forth. Similarly, note that it is very difficult in a rapidly changing society to predict which of one's existing commitments relating to child-rearing will become controversial, or what new commitments one might develop. For instance, the parent of a child born in 2010 could perhaps not have reasonably foreseen that over the coming decade they would find themselves embroiled in vociferous disagreements about their child's access to social media, their child's gender expression, how best to inoculate their child against the conspiratorial or pseudoscientific ideas that they might encounter on video-sharing websites, and so forth.

The import of these empirical observations is that when we think about the tension between our assessments of various common and shifting commitments and the co-parental relation, we must either admit that the former are not extreme or admit that we must be much more willing to disrupt co-parental relationships and radically narrow who it is that we are willing to form them with. The latter admission seems by far the more revisionary. One way of putting this point is that since co-parenting is a long-term project undertaken with another person, a project of central personal and social importance, and one so widely practiced, it would be very revisionary to find that co-parenting is, as it were, 'modally fragile' with respect to commitments and so readily beached on the shifting sands of the moral disagreements that are familiar in contemporary society. Whilst there is a penumbra of ambiguous cases, I take it that the commitments that are widely agreed to be extreme are, luckily, quite rare: a parent who is

committed to the child being raised as a violent bully, or to the child being raised to torture animals, and so forth.

Note that this response to the question of extreme cases is not to deny that much discussion and contestation should occur between parents who find themselves at odds over their less than extreme commitments before deciding on any compromise, and note that regarding many of the controversies involving the inculcation of abstract values or beliefs the agreement not to shape the child in any particular direction is an available option.

The vegan interlocutor might respond that they are willing to bite the bullet and say that omnivorous commitments are extreme, that they will rupture co-parental relations or not establish them for the sake of this commitment. Though I think this response is deeply implausible and that most philosophical argumentation for veganism might not support such a line – care-based (Engster, 2006), virtue-ethical (Alvaro, 2017), relational (Diamond, 1978), or utilitarian (Singer, 1989) groundings of veganism allow for a wide range of countervailing moral reasons – this vegan interlocutor's response is a consistent one against which there is little further to say, since ultimately it is up to each parent to decide what commitments they regard as extreme in the specified sense.

Lack of intermediate policies

One difficulty might be that, as a conceptual claim about compromises, for compromise to be possible there must be a scale of intermediate policies available. As a further claim, it seems that for some issues there is no such scale of intermediate policies. Rather we are sometimes faced with a 'non-scalar' choice about which we cannot compromise even if we would like to. The most obvious examples here is religion: although a child can be taught about Hinduism and Islam, taught to respect the teachings of both, taken to a temple and a Mosque, it seems that a child cannot be raised as both a Hindu and a Muslim, and raising them in some third religion instead is not really an intermediate policy, so no compromise is possible here. Likewise, the choice between veganism and omnivorism may be a non-scalar choice in which no intermediate policies are available.

I concede the conceptual claim that compromise depends on the possibility of a scale of intermediate policies, and that there may be some cases in which there is no such scale available. I also recognize that, especially as it concerns religion, this is a thorny area that cannot be fully addressed here. However, I offer some remarks suggesting that the number of issues about which there is no intermediate scale of policies is much more limited than it might at first seem.

For one thing, recall that on my account parental compromise is most centrally justified by the principled reason of respect for the authority of

one's co-parent over the child, and the resulting conviction on the part of each co-parent that the commitments of both ought to be instantiated in the commands given to the child. Whether some policy even counts as a compromise is therefore dependent only on the specificities of what it is that the co-parents willed for the child, or cared about, *ex ante* to the compromise. For instance, if parent A wills the child to be a vegan but does not care at all about what we might call the vegan aesthetic or an 'animal-loving' attitude, then seeing these latter not instantiated in the life of the child due to parent B's dislike of them is not a compromise for parent A.

This way of understanding compromise shows that there are often more intermediate policies available than other conceptualizations might allow. We might instead have begun by asking for general definitions, or a community's definition, of certain terms: for instance, we might say that being 'a vegan' is in part defined by abstinence from animal products or that being 'a Mormon' is in part defined by abstinence from hot tea. We might then say that one cannot be 'a vegan' if one eats fish three-times a week and cannot be 'a Mormon' if one regularly drinks hot tea.³ When we think in these terms it might seem like animal product or hot tea consumption cannot be matters of compromise for the parent who wills their child to be 'a vegan' or 'a Mormon.' However, we can see that the child who eats a diet that is plant-based save for three servings of fish a week is in an important respect an intermediate case between the child whose diet is entirely plant-based and the child who eats veal every day, and likewise the child who sometimes drinks hot tea but is frequently told stories acclaiming Joseph Smith is an intermediate case between the child who is told these stories and not given hot tea and the child who has never heard of Joseph Smith and drinks hot tea all day. That is, if what a co-parent cares about are the moral reasons that recommend abstaining from animal products, or what they care about is their child having a certain connection to Mormon culture or being aware of Joseph Smith's life and works, then there are lots of compromises and intermediate policies available that partially instantiate each parent's will for the child.

For another, consider that a parent's commitments for their child are usually very pluralistic: parents are usually interested in how their child behaves, but also their beliefs, and, more broadly, their affect or attitude towards various things. Behavior seems like a category where there are often intermediate policies available. The same is true of affect or attitude, where someone can be more or less reverent, more or less friendly, more or less experimental or laissez-faire, and so forth. Between two belief systems there are typically fewer intermediates since it is perhaps neither possible nor often desired by co-parents to induce a child to have credences in two belief systems or an incoherent patchwork of beliefs. Drawing from Mills' discussion of religion, we might also mention things like identification with a community, identification with a tradition, and

maintenance of a prescribed set of rituals (Mills, 2003), as the things that parents often care about and can have differing commitments over.

Co-parents likely care about many aspects of their child's life: their behavior, beliefs, affect. Some policies are aptly described as intermediate policies and compromises, even if a compromise does not involve alterations to each of these aspect of the child's life. For instance, I take it that children who are raised by co-parents who both belong to one religion are typically not taught about other religions in nearly as much detail, not involved in the festivals of these other religions, not taken to such places of worship, nor taught to regard the founders of these religions with as much awe or admiration as the founders of their own. I take it that this typically happens because neither co-parent has a commitment to doing such things or is positively committed to not doing such things, even if one or both co-parent think it important that their child know a little about other religions, be taught an attitude of respect towards them, and so forth. By contrast, take the case of the child with co-parents from different religions who is raised to be very familiar with both religions, and so forth, even if they ultimately are taught to believe just one of the religion's teachings. In many such cases this child is being raised on a compromise: though one parent had no *ex ante* commitment to teaching them in detail about the religion of their co-parent and indeed was quite opposed to such a policy, they ultimately agree to it as a compromise. Though such a compromise may be deeply difficult for one parent insofar as it does not include the child being raised to have certain religious beliefs, is not entirely valueless to them or entirely unreflective of their will for the child: certain aspects of their will for the child's behavior, affect, knowledge, and perhaps even partial-identification with a community or tradition, are instantiated.

Though it may be true that the choices between raising 'a vegan' or 'a Mormon' or not are scalar, this does not by itself mean that there are no intermediate policies available here, because a compromise is best characterized in terms of what parents care about and because parents can care about a plurality of things.

Non-moral commitments

Another potential difficulty is that perhaps a permissible compromise must involve moral commitments on both sides. If one party's commitment is non-moral in nature, then perhaps compromise is impermissible since moral reasons should typically not be overridden by non-moral reasons at most margins. Even if omnivores reject arguments for veganism, vanishingly few omnivores think that eating animal products is morally required or supererogatory, or that there are moral reasons for not raising children as vegans

(though see (Hunt, 2019)). Rather, omnivorous commitments are matters of mere habit, tradition, preference.

In response, I accept the empirical claim that the relevant commitments of most omnivores are not moral commitments but deny the normative claim that one should only compromise when there are moral commitments on both sides. Compromise between co-parents is not primarily based on an evaluation of the worthiness of the other party's commitments. One compromises with the authority of one's co-parent, not with their reasons *per se*. The content of the will of one's co-parent for one's child is apt to be compromised with simply because it is the content of the will of one's co-parent for one's child, not because of any excellence in the reasons there embodied (which must seem to oneself, *ex hypothesi*, to be lacking). There seem to be grounds for refusing compromise when one's co-parent makes an insincere or frivolous representation of a 'commitment' merely to derail the instantiation of one's own. Such criteria may capture the intuition that compromise ought to involve sincere and well-considered commitments on both sides, but these are criteria that I suggest most omnivores do not violate.

Grand compromises

Perhaps co-parents can compromise in a way that preserves a vegan diet for the child, by making diet one aspect of a grand compromise ranging over multiple issues. Perhaps parent A is a committed vegan and atheist, and parent B a committed Christian and omnivore but they reach the compromise of raising a vegan and Christian child.

In response, this seems like a permissible compromise. But if this is so then, likewise, a compromise to raise the child as an omnivorous atheist would also be permissible. So, this thought is no general defense of a vegan diet for the child, or of any other outcome in particular.

Conclusion

I have explored one aspect of the ethical life of the family and argued that each parent is endowed with full parental authority but that co-parents must, out of respect for one another's full parental authority and the morally symmetrical relations they bear to the same child, agree to give their child the same commands and commands that result from compromise. Other authors have addressed many questions about parental authority, such as how it is acquired and its limits *vis-à-vis* the child and *vis-à-vis* the state or the community (for an overview see Austin, 2013), though I believe the question of the precise locus of parental authority is addressed here for the first time. It seems that the full-authority thesis and the shared-authority thesis are both ecumenical regarding the other questions of parental authority addressed in the literature in that

neither one seems to presuppose or to rule out any particular account of how parental authority is acquired or any particular account of its limits, and so forth. Aside from the issue of compromise, which of these theses one endorses may bear on how one addresses a range of applied ethical questions. For instance, the literature discussing disputes between parents and the state with regards to the child's medical treatment seems to without exception make the simplifying assumption that the co-parents are in agreement about their wishes for the child (McDougall & Notini, 2014), but the distinction between the full-authority and the shared-authority thesis helps address cases in which the parents disagree.

Notes

1. A settlement or capitulation might allow a parent who is better at tracking the truth of 'what command it is best to give the child' and who knows they are (a rare person) to give a better command. However, although in an ultimate sense the practice of parenthood (as opposed to, say, a Platonic collective child rearing system) is perhaps justified by being the best means of giving children good commands, within the practice of co-parenthood each co-parent ought to respect the authority of the other even if one of them is worse at tracking 'what command it is best to give the child.' Cf. Rawls' distinction between the practice and the summary concepts of rules (Rawls, 1955). Within the context of the parental practice each parent can justify their right to command simply by discharging their duty to deliberate about how best to command, even if as a matter of fact their deliberations are not highly truth-tracking. I remain neutral on whether parental rights are justified entirely, or only in part, by child-centered considerations (Shields, 2016).
2. A full account of why it is that we should sometimes respect the will of a dead person would take me beyond the bounds of this piece. I note simply that there are long and widely established practices of doing what dead people willed, and that these practices seem largely motivated by respect for the dead. Respect as an attitude does not seem to depend on any ongoing exchange with the person respected: respect can be offered unilaterally and be passively enjoyed. By contrast, the idea of bargaining with or contending with the will of a dead person seems confused, since bargaining and contending seem to involve the idea of an ongoing exchange, where these are activities two parties must take part in.
3. Further qualifications can be added if necessary: eats fish or drinks hot tea and asserts that doing so is morally or ritually permissible, or does these things openly, or without shame, and so forth.

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