

IS OPPRESSION A NECESSARY CONDITION TO DEMOCRACY? A PSYCHOANALYTICAL APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

History seems to confirm the following logic:

Oppressive law of the strongest → Reaction of the constrained people → Progressive liberation.

Indeed, the oppression applied by one man or a few men in a government detaining the decision power can entail a state of depression in those who endure it, resulting in a counter-repression (counter-power), which uses its only weapon—violence—in response to a feeling of aggression, disregard and oppression. Consequently, the government regulates through different means of action and reflection, surrendering to the demand for liberation.

The struggle oppression/liberation never stops. It simply changes form.

In this sense, democracy is the relationship between those who hold the power and those who react to this power.

As time goes by, more and more people have the right to exist and to participate to the life of his/her nation. For example, the right to vote was granted to women only fifty years ago.

With time, everyone is given the same rights, which means that democracy progresses, and each century brings new liberties, winning over authoritarianism. Laws have abolished slavery, racism, social inequalities and more in many parts of the world; and the truth is that democracy is now increasingly advancing for everyone in the world.

The power of those “above” is fought today by the counter-power of those “below” in society. Oppression in all its forms is increasingly considered “abnormal” as the world moves toward more rights, and less oppression. *Indeed, the evolution of humanity is an unlimited conflict between a form of oppression and a reaction of liberation.*

This can be compared to the conflict in each person between the parental language of the Unconscious, which leaves us as children, and the language of becoming conscious, which makes us evolve from being reacting children to being active adults wanting to defend their personal values. From our birth until our old age, we go more and more toward liberation; meaning that the “natural” story of each one of us, each human life, is a progressive passage from oppression and dependence toward a state of liberation and autonomy. *Each person has his or her own story of liberation.*

However, this does not mean that democracy is winning yet; it is rather a reaction to oppression. Having more freedom does not mean that democracy is achieved; it is only a way toward the liberation from oppression. Today, we talk a lot about democracy and equality of rights for everyone, but *we do not think enough with a democratic mind*; instead, we think against an authoritarian mind. It is not the same: *The democratic idea cannot be reduced to being a collection of guaranties against authoritarian power and against oppression.*¹

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THE UNCONSCIOUS AND AUTHORITARIANISM

The Unconscious is the place of the parental authoritarianism and the child's reaction: oppression/reaction (rebellion or reaction: in both cases, it is submission).

The Unconscious is the place of our drives, lacks, dependence, and beliefs. It is the place of our childhood story, and thus necessarily the story of our language of immaturity, lack and suffering.

We are fundamentally marked by the other. And our mind is driven by this way of functioning of dominator (parental voice) / dominated (reaction/child's voice).

We grow up with this antagonism between what we feel is oppression—what is prohibited to think and do—and what we feel is a liberation--the reaction to submission or revolt. We depend on this process, and construct our neurotic mind based on it.

At the beginning of our life, we are the object of the other, and we may well remain in this position and way of functioning (being object of someone else) all our life. This is *affective immaturity, and it has no age*. But it is also possible to become subject of our self some day. This is not a given though; it requires to work toward affective maturity, *based on the consciousness of what our desire is, and not what our lack is. This change, this movement* can only be achieved if we change the basis of our language and give most value to our desire to really be somebody else: an adult thinking and doing by his/her self, and not always reacting to somebody else. *This is the real democratic way of being.*

Today, democracy is a choice and a sign of developed countries in the West.

Tomorrow, democracy will become a necessity everywhere in the world: A real democratic state will be when every child in the world will be able to eat everyday, to be safe and healthy; it will be when children's rights will be respected and fulfilled.

The biggest enemy of democracy is a revengeful and hateful mind.

The way of functioning based on reaction is the result of frustration and oppression from "above," meaning from somebody or something (the state) imposing its decisions. Reaction is always associated with a feeling of violence; it creates aggressiveness against the other; and it is in no way a source of peace for our self. It is comparable to the Unconscious' way of functioning, which involves a parental voice imposing its decision and a child's voice refusing it.

The same model—model of "jouissance": dominating/dominated—can be found at all levels of society, from the bottom to the top.

- In the family: parent/child;
- In business: supervisor/subordinate;
- In the state: government/people;
- In society: rich/poor;
- In the past: master/slave;
- In education: professor/student; ...

In all these cases, we can find the same way of functioning, based on one who has the position of "*I know*" and one who has the position of "*I don't know*." It is a structure of power of one over the other. This verticality cannot be democratic in any way, not individually, not politically and not socially. It is the opposite of relationship, which is "horizontal."

¹ See Alain Touraine, *Qu'est-ce que la démocratie ?* Fayard, Paris, 1994.

THE DEMOCRATIC CULTURE AND THE NOTION OF “SUBJECT”

Becoming subject of a nation means becoming first the subject of our self.

The concepts of freedom and subject go together and have an essential link.

What is culture? Culture is a form of knowledge partly transmitted—moral, religious, political, social values are transmitted to all children—and partly acquired through personal experience as we grow up. The cultural knowledge we learn during our life sometimes makes us question what was transmitted to us by our parents.

Some of the values transmitted to us remain inscribed in our Unconscious, thus constituting a memory that determines our behavior and beliefs without questioning them. Later in life, we may find our self in conflict and divided between our transmitted symbolic culture and our experienced real culture.

How to deal with this? **How to become subject of our self?** How to become a unit when we depend on a structure inside and outside that splits us into two parts fighting one another? How to become one with our self instead of being two halves? **How to get out of oppression to become a subject?**

When the other oppresses us, we are obligated to obey, especially when we are young or later weak or scared. But any time, any day, we can decide to get out of this state of oppression, and to start viewing it as something we have to get out of the best we can instead of regarding it as an enemy.

We must decide to make the effort, and later learn to love making this effort every day, to resist this sensation of domination. The psyche we build this way is a very positive one for our self, and, with time, it becomes more important than this of oppression and the feeling of persecution it generates.

Deciding to make this effort marks the beginning of the process leading to belonging to our self; it is the beginning of an Adult Identity, made by our self; it is a new culture that puts all of our transmitted identities (parental I, social I, economic I, religious I, national I, etc.) after our *Real Identity* of human being. This way, we become more and more the master of our self: the only one we are truly responsible for, the only one truly depending on us.

The real and strong movement of liberation is both inside and outside; it is a change in the process of interpretation: when someone is forced to obey someone else, it does not mean that the oppressor *has* the power over the one who obeys; it only means that the oppressor *takes* the power over him.

Who is responsible for the action of oppression? The oppressor; but the oppressed is free to decide not to feel oppressed, to make sure not to do the same mistake or want to become an oppressor later, and to stay focused on refusing an oppressive way of functioning.

The one liberty we have is to construct a subject, thereby liberating our mind of its logic of persecuted/persecutor. The *persecutor/persecuted* way of functioning is similar to this of the manipulator/manipulated, as it is always in reaction to someone else, never in action toward something else, i.e. the values of life (peace, liberation, justice.)

The memory of today has to become of greater value than the memory of yesterday and its suffering. Each day has to cure the suffering from yesterday and to make peace with it, in order to build today with strength, energy and a real desire to make it a success.

What does it mean to succeed? *It means to give real value to what we do and how we do it, so as to be able to feel in peace with our self. It requires work. An action is the result/success of liberation, because an action is always an effort to change something to make it better, by our self. Rebellion, however, is the result/failure of liberation, because it is always a reaction to somebody else.*

When we know what we want, we have no time to lose making opposition; we have to focus all our energy on succeeding in what we want: this state of mind is the key to freedom. This is not “jouissance;” this is a very exciting journey, based on courage and humility in front of difficulties, so we can win over them. *Hope is courage.*

Our function defines us and gives us our value. As Aristotle said, a carpenter must make a success of his function, but perhaps the man himself has nothing to succeed in.

Democracy will be when we all have the same language, the same way of thinking our life, made by each one on his own. Only this way will a feeling of Equality - Fraternity - Liberty, a real feeling of solidarity and unity, become truly possible. We need the same qualities: determination, decision to make efforts, not being afraid of time, not being in a hurry, feeling that we are a subject and never more an object of somebody else.

This level of consciousness, this desire to succeed in becoming our own subject is the only way to put the Unconscious at the service of the conscious; past time at the service of present time; symbolic values at the service of real values; drives of violence, death, lack, and hate at the service of the instinct for life; thus making peace with the past and working on changing what our predecessors could not.

Our master is Time; we are not the masters of Time; we can just use Time to make of it something useful, meaning using it toward the realization of an action.

Master or servant: Is this the only choice we have in our life? Today, yes, because in our societies, too many people are the masters or servants of others. What a misery! But by becoming subject of our self, we can get out of this way of functioning, as we learn to give most value to our function, and to become its servant.

Within each individual, there is an object and a subject: we are the object of what we have to do (our function), and what we achieve this way gives us access to become subject of our self and our life. *The quality of our action makes our quality as a subject.*

In our societies, power is more over somebody else than over our self. Here is the mind's big mistake: *To believe that we are important if we have power over many people; this is the root of manipulation used by all forms of authoritarianism: “One for all and all for one.”*

Democracy is: “One for one and one with all.”

We need to learn to have the power over our self, one by one: unit by unit.

A democratic state is the application of a democratic mind.

What is a democratic mind? It is a way of thinking that wants to change the basis of the mind we were born with, which is not our real mind but a “transmitted” language/mind that obeys the Laws of the other, responsible for the position of another's object (the basic model being the power of the parental voice, resulting in the reaction of the child's voice.)

It is essential *to get out of this immature model of Language of Power, which obeys the Laws of the Other, and to build a mature Language of Relationship, teaching us how to obey the Laws of Life (laws that depend on something, not someone, and on Real, not Symbolic, Time.)*

The democratic mind will be:

- To act, not to react;
- To make the effort to do things on our own;
- To not suffer from oppression, meaning to not react to it with more oppression or submission.

COLLECTIVE & INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Humanity's real revolution, in the future, will result from *a revolution in mentalities*, which is the only revolution that will not make heads fall, and that will, instead, make the well-being of everyone its essential aim, and of the government the guardian of society's good health. This revolution will require a system of regulation between collective and individual consciousness.

The future of the Unconscious is to lose its power over our self.

The future of the Symbolic transmission is to lose its power over our life.

The future of real time is to give each conscious being the ability to take the power over the Unconscious' power.

Real democracy will be when a new language, obeying the *Laws of Life*, is created and makes *the obedience to the Laws of the Other (power of one over the others) become the obedience to the Laws of Life.*

As long as the power of economics, the "laws of money," will control political interests, people will sacrifice the meaning of their lives to profit, instead of dedicating their lives to quality of work.

In France, the government refused to give money, as usual, to the people of the suburbs. The reaction (counter-power), against this oppression (power), was that young people burned cars everywhere in the country. This was a reaction based on many years of oppression and devalorization over two or three generations. Such violence comes when a situation becomes unbearable (« la goutte qui fait déborder le vase »). These young people felt deeply humiliated, as they were discriminated against and not awarded the right to the same identity as the others: French. This position creates hopelessness, and when there is no more hope, what meaning does life have?

The reaction of the government was to agree to give money, and the revolt of the suburbs' youths stopped. Money was the price of silence, meaning that the termination of violence was financed. But the problem is that the violence remains, underground; violence grows; and the government still does not take care of its young people's well-being; it only thinks of its own security and continuity. This is not democratic; it is very dangerous, because young people do not need only money; they essentially need hope. Young people need to really love values and to respect what is shown to them by the adults. People need to have hope and to trust in their life. The pressure becomes oppression when the government does not give the same value to each one of its citizens.

In such situations, drives of death, destruction and lack take the power over, and the place of, the desire to live. These strong reactions of violence are the sign that a society is not in order

or united. France is constituted of a mosaic of cultural identities, but it lacks a *unifying factor* necessary for the people of a nation to feel united.

When people have faith in their country's representatives, they feel united and they have hope for their own life and can identify with this model of strength and values.

For example, in the monarchy of Spain, King Juan Carlos participates to the life of his nation, and of everyone who is Spanish, thanks to his personal qualities as a man who wants to make his country grow, and to develop real values of life. He also shows real interest for the well-being of the Spanish people, still taking into account social, economic and religious conditions that influence the government's actions. Monarchy and democracy can work together.

PARALLELISMS BETWEEN WAYS OF FUNCTIONING

At all levels, there is a story of oppression/liberation:

- State: people/government
- Business: subordinate/supervisor
- Family: child/parent

This way of functioning is not democratic of course; it is an authoritarian model of the mind. To obey or not to obey someone else is a reaction to oppression, and not necessarily a desire of liberation. *To obey or not to obey our self is an action toward liberation.*

Reaction goes with authoritarianism and loss of hope.

Action goes with democracy and hope.

Resistance is not a reaction; it is an action to make other values win: values of liberty, justice and autonomy.

There is no real democratic state in the world today, because there is no real democratic mind. Actually, *we often see dictatorial systems in the name of democracy.* For example, newspapers are supposed to represent a form of free expression; but they are becoming more and more a form of oppression and manipulation of the media, as they communicate information based on what they "want" instead of just giving the information to the people, which is what the press is essential for. In the name of freedom, the media sometimes uses oppression to influence people's Unconscious: this is a dangerous form of power that influences people's position for or against some communities. This is why *it is more important than ever that every individual learn to think for him/herself instead of letting his/her opinion be made by the media.*

DEMOCRACY AND EDUCATION

We have the child that we deserve. Parents who always blame society, the government, etc., and never take responsibility for their own actions and their failures are not adult and cannot transmit strength to their child. They transmit their own dissatisfaction, demands, position of oppressed and victim, and they expect to be avenged by their children.

Education is an essential form of transmission.

Every child gets two kinds of transmission: this of the Unconscious, uncontrollable, and this of the Conscious, which every parent transmits to his/her child.

Education (from the parents) can be essential to transmit real values of life, such as love; work; desire to succeed, to make efforts, and to win everyday over our drives of destruction and our negative thoughts, which make us feel unhappy and make us lose our trust in our self.

The enemy of education is the Unconscious' transmission, as the Unconscious is a place of violence, frustration and conflict, because the Unconscious' way of functioning is one of reaction, not action: The Unconscious always is and speaks the language of dependence, and suffers from this immaturity. The language of the Unconscious is necessarily inhuman, and tells us about a way of functioning based on the power of one over another. This is why the Unconscious has a mind structured as a language, to which it is subjected: nobody knows his Unconscious or is conscious of it functioning. This is why violence, aggressive drives and conflicts manipulate us more than anyone can: we are manipulated by our Unconscious because it knows what we are better than we do consciously.

OPPRESSION AND LIFE IN THE 21st CENTURY

Acceleration of time → Acceleration of changes → But not acceleration of liberation

1. Progress

Internet, or the revolution in communication technologies, gives more independence to many communities to change their ways of exchanging products, information, etc. It is an opening to all the possibilities without having to ask for authorization or to comply with administrative restraints.

Now, with a computer, we can go around the world and we have access to an extraordinary amount of information of all kinds. Is this democracy? No, not at all: this is the result of the electronic revolution, which radically changed our space-time references. Each form of progress has its cost in terms of our way of thinking and living, and it can even be a source of pressure and be a factor of oppression for everyone: We have no time to think quietly. Today, to find quietness is really difficult, and this is one of the origins of aggressive and violent reactions, as people feel pressured by this progress, of which they forcefully become the object.

Today, time becomes oppression, not liberty. Modernization, Internet, globalization: everything goes too fast; and no one can follow this acceleration. Our regulation process is overwhelmed, and adapting to these new measures of space-time is very difficult. *Liberation is not necessarily democracy*; it can bring more solitude and distance between people.

2. The Laws

It is not enough for a law to be legal for it to be well accepted; it is absolutely essential to believe in the necessity of this law, but it is also important not to believe that the law can replace our conscience and experience. For example, the abortion law is a true liberation for women, but it does not mean that all women who do not want to have a child at a particular moment in their life must not use their conscience and heart to make that decision. The state and legal law cannot take the place of each person's conscience and consciousness.

This example is used simply to show that legal law needs to be at the service of conscious Laws of Life, because legal law can often conflict with spiritual or religious law, and this conflict results in guilt. But *guilt is the door to suffering, violence, and hate. It is the opposite of our desire to be responsible, in action, and to love.*

What meaning can the value of work have, for example (even if in France it is not a value), if the logic of making laws is made by men who do not truly believe in this value and say instead that "work is necessary to live well"? What is necessary--the one essential value--is to love; and to love means to make efforts, to struggle, to take the time, to not be scared of the result, and just to be present, to give our best to what we do. *The way we do things is more important than the result/end.*

Does liberation from oppression lead to a democratic state?

Not necessarily at all.

The word “democracy” is an old word. Originally, it was meant to be a system in which the people had the power; but what “power”?

The most essential form of power should be the one we have over our self, and the one that comes from the experience life teaches us.

The idea of democracy is one thing; the reality is another.

For the people to truly have power over the government and over social laws, every one must become conscious, responsible and adult.

A NEW FORM OF OPPRESSION: FUNDAMENTALISM

We entered a clash of civilizations with the 21st century; and it is difficult for the word “democracy” to keep its positive meaning in people’s minds, as if it were at the end of its existence. Why is this?

The 20th century was:

1. The end/failure of the big ideologies (Nazism, Fascism, Communism);
2. The failure of politics: corruption, difficulty to find solutions to social problems, etc.;
3. The loss of tradition and the fear of globalization, of losing one’s identity, and of becoming nothing, nobody, within a large gathering submitted to external forces;
4. The development of liberation movements, which, even though they were positive in many ways, also gave people a feeling of solitude and of mental de-structuring. The sexual revolution for example pushed many women to have sex without love, and sex is dangerous, like a drug, if we do it without being conscious of what our real needs are.

This is all causing a revival of spiritualism and religiosity everywhere in the world. As André Malraux said, “The 21st century will be religious or will not be”: Vision of a reality that already seems to be proven correct.

People are losing faith and respect in politics and in the men heading their country. So, at the beginning of this new century, people are going more and more toward spiritual values, at the expense of democracy—concept that speaks of politics, state, power organization, values of equality and liberty—which is losing its power in front of this religious movement.

The problem is that the revival of religiosity is taken to the extreme in some cases, and *religion is replacing politics. Religion is becoming the Law*. What meaning should we give to this *new form of oppression*? What kind of balance does it establish? What liberation?

The most dangerous example today is the terror brought by Islamist fundamentalism.

Is God so angry that he could want to annihilate life on this earth?

Could God want to make the “Shoa” of humanity?

Does God really expect that everyone on this earth will commit suicide for his glory?

Fundamentalism takes the power over people’s lives and uses God to achieve its goal. But we cannot use God and take the power over God; God is not a human being; human beings are relative; God is absolute. And each individual should fulfill his/her relative humanity in relation to God. This means to succeed in winning on our own part of inhumanity, located in the Unconscious and its transmitted drives of death and destruction.

To trust in God is a real necessity in order to be humble, and to become conscious that we are all relative, and that we all have a “fragment of truth” to discover, learn and feel during our life. If men gave more value to their “fragment of truth,” rather than to rivalries among themselves and to their feeling of powerlessness, it would make them want to give up on violence, which aggravates oppression and makes them forget the possibility of an authentic life.

THE FUTURE: OPPRESSION/LIBERATION → DESIRE OF PEACE/LIFE

The symbolic order erupting into reality and wanting to take its place (to the extent of terrorizing life and the right to life), as we see today, is catastrophic. What future can there be? In other words, *what is the future of the symbolic order, of the Unconscious and its violence?* It is easier to resist against a targeted oppressor than to resolve a collective phenomenon of mass. In psychoanalysis, the eruption of the symbolic order into reality is called delusion. But there is hope in the fact that this may be the end of a history of repression, a history of guilt, accumulated over the centuries and whose future was necessarily leading to suicide and death; and the evolution of this delusion may lead us to a wonderful realization that will make us accept past history, and more importantly make us choose present history and live it fully, as responsible, not guilty, beings.

To be alive is to be conscious of our actions. We might be on the eve of a fundamental change in the thought of mankind; and men may finally have this amazing freedom to enter an era of language that will not depend on the Laws of the Other anymore, and may finally be able to fulfill their faithfulness to the Laws of Life, which depend on no one else but our self and what we will do with it. This will be a religion of life.

Today the political way of functioning of oppression/liberation, which defined democracy for so long, seems not to function anymore. The conditions have changed, religion is replacing politics, and *it is now time to ask ourselves what is our real desire, and not anymore what are we lacking.* We entered a war between the Laws of the Other and the Laws of Life: *which one will win?* Will it be life and consciousness, or destruction and drives of death, which come from the only true killer: the Unconscious, asking for vengeance from the past, and destroying all humanity? For the moment we cannot answer, but what we know is that each one of us in this world has to become conscious of our desire to live, and perhaps God will have the last word?

We cannot desire war and death. It is therefore time to work on relationship and not power struggle, work on desire of peace and not oppression/liberation. No fundamentalism will be able to find ground on desire; it is a severe form of oppression. *If we want to win this war against terror and fanaticism, we have to defend Laws of Life and to make them pass before the laws of any other man.* This might be how we will arrive to a religion of life, of aliveness, and a *new form of organization*, made not by one man but by *the evolution of a realization by a large number of people that priority must be given to the achievement of a life project, which will give a meaning to the time we spend on this earth: with God, against God but not without him.* We cannot find an interlocutor as real and logic as God, above us, just because we are an infinite little part of this entity.

This religion of life will perhaps end the power of an old language, tired of a world without humanity. The enemy of humanity, of the solidarity among people, of the consciousness and love of life, is first of all in the Unconscious, both individual and collective. Each person's enemy is inside him/herself.

When life is in danger, we get out of the oppression/liberation cycle, and we enter the real conflict between *drives of death and hate and the instinct of life and love*. The drives are in the Unconscious, they are “natural” (it is so easy to hate), and we have been working on them for a long time. The instinct is conscious, it is not natural (is needs to be learned), and we only recently started to work on developing it. The instinct of life asks us to grow, because love requires real work and determination, every day.

Our life is a story of effort, everyday, to be in peace with our self, and not feel oppressed by what we are not. Fear is the biggest enemy of our instinct of life. The oppression we feel because of fear is dramatic, because fear prevents us from daring new experiences and from trusting our feelings first and thinking after. To become really human might require us to take the power over our fear, to become the way we can be happy. To be unhappy is to be dissatisfied with our way of functioning. To become conscious of this is the first key to changing something. Then, we need to learn a new language, based on our desire to live. This is the solution to cure a misery worse than this of economic poverty: the inside poverty, the lack of curiosity and interest for something in life. Boredom is the true poverty.

Government people need to focus their work on serving people, regulating their action with people. The higher we are in a society, the bigger our responsibility. *But everyone has a responsibility both to himself and to the other*. We cannot believe that a government, someone else or anything exterior can give us peace and love without our own determination to make values of life win in every action, every work, we engage in: we need to depend on our self instead of on the other, and to pay attention to the effects each one of our actions has on our self and on the others.

True freedom is being able to think on our own and learning to be responsible for our own actions. This means working today to build a new language for tomorrow, which will make what we want win: to love, to be in peace and to make of our life a unit, each one on our own. Peace is the hope for peace.

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