

THE NAME-OF-THE-FATHER; PSYCHOANALYSIS AND DEMOCRACY
ERIC LAURENT

How to link together, with a conjunction, psychoanalysis and this predominant form of modern politics that is democracy? There was a time when democracy co-existed with other non-democratic forms of politics. After the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 there are no credible alternatives. It does not mean that China and some others are not the exception, but everybody affirms, at least from the tip of their tongues, to want only democracy. This unanimity made it possible for some authors such as Francis Fukuyama to think that the end of history had arrived, little time before some events seriously questioned this. Let's more prudently note that there is a desire for democracy. It can be sustained from the published results of a Pew Research Center survey, Center of independent research of Washington made in 2002 on 38000 people in forty-four countries that showed the very large adhesion of the world public opinion to democracy. Madeleine Albright recently commented on it: "I find very interesting this vast support of democracy. I have longtime sustained that democracy is not only an occidental value. This survey proves it"¹

Surely Psychoanalysis could not enjoy such a global transference as democracy does. It is only practiced in certain regions of the world. They are precisely democratic regions. It is a fact that only democracies have allowed, tolerated, and sustained the emergence of psychoanalysis as a discourse. Psychoanalysis was at first accepted as a clinical discipline and Freud used the medical authorization to make it exist. Once psychoanalysis was accepted, Freud did not fail to extricate the critical thoughts this practice inspired him about civilization. Going beyond traditional medical humanism, he highlighted the antinomies of the subject satisfactions and the "exigencies of drive renunciations" imposed by civilization. Psychoanalysis was positioned very fast as a critical discourse. Only the democratic form welcomed it. Elsewhere it was denounced as "bourgeois science" or ignored.

Nevertheless, democracy and psychoanalysis don't make a good pair. When democracy identifies to bureaucracy watching over the regulation of all that can be consumed in a commercial space, homogenous and global, it worries about the strange character of the psychoanalytic practice. It aims to make it enter in the ragbag of psychotherapies and stifle it under regulations. Under the name of psychoanalysis, in the democratic countries that have adopted these regulations, only the shadow of what it was subsists.

The shelter that psychoanalysis has found in democracy is necessary but not enough. It remains precarious. This is by a structural reason that derives from the nature itself of the social link according to psychoanalysis. To approach it Freud started first from the other side of democracy: the primitive horde, the monarchy, the Church, the army.

Freud's approach of the political dimension is not separable from his theory of religion. The question of power is indissociable from the interrogation on the sources of belief. Since the *Interpretation of Dreams*, discreetly, the role of the father is stated in the genesis of the forms of power and in the religions². In a way, from the moment Freud

¹ Bortin, M., "In war's wake, hostility and mistrust", International Herald Tribune, 4 juin 2003, p. 6

² "It is said that the prince is the father of the people. The father is the most ancient authority, the first one; he is for the child the unique authority. All the other social powers developed from this primitive authority (except matriarchy)". Freud S., *L'interprétation des rêves*, Paris, PUF, 1973, p. 192, note

perceived the place of the father as the bearer of the prohibition of incest in the psychic economy, he makes it the pivot of the construction for the social and religious building, indiscernible in a first approach. It will be his first word and also his last as he resumes it in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Freud's political anthropology is a political theology. It is by identification to the place of the One, that Freud will deduce the possibility of democratic equality. In *Totem and Taboo's* fiction, social contract projected at the edge of history, the so-called Freudian Darwinism has very Hobbesian tones. The Freudian social contract allows to be delivered from anxiety at the cost of renouncing to repeat the murder of the father. The Freudian fiction makes of the murder of the original father the real moment of the contract, the moment where the transmutation is effectuated. In that sense, it is Christian, as Lacan notes it³. It is secondarily that the horde or group⁴, equal social form, is produced⁵. The organic link of law and crime doesn't allow Freud to think that the charisma of the chief could institute a peaceful source of authority; neither that the original murder could be reabsorbed by the system of rules of civilization. The Freudian death drive is like a nature estate that always menaces civilization. At the core of the contract, is the grounding terror that made the father of the horde reign in the nature estate. "The leader of the group is still the dreaded primal father, the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force"⁶. The establishment of a social link, the drive foundation of the identification, does not allow contemplating peace. The father of the horde had access to all the women. This unlimited jouissance dwells in the chief that inherits it.

In 1921, after formulating the second topology that gives its entire place to the superego, Freud resumes this question of the group and the ego in their reciprocal dialectic. He begins from the mechanism of identification that regulates the psychological life to approach very structured groups⁷. It is the padding of mechanisms identification by the leader that allows the production a new social link constituent of the organized group. The Church and the Army, eponymous organizations, remain groups and their chiefs are homologous to the leader of simple groups⁸.

The heart of these organizations conceals the same boundless principal drawn from the primitive group. Freud can thus explain the discipline of the Army and the savage killing

³ "It is because of the secret curse of the Great Man, whose only power derives from resonating at the bottom of the inaugural murder of humanity, that the Christian redemption... is accomplished. Only this tradition takes to the last consequences the work of revealing what is at stake in the primitive crime of the primordial law" Lacan, J. *Le Seminaire*, livre VII, l'Ethique de la psychanalyse, Paris, Seuil, 1986, pp. 205-206

⁴ Note of the translator: Where in the French text the word mass or masses appears we will translate it by group, following the tradition of the Standard Edition,

⁵ "A primary group of this kind is a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal and have consequently identified themselves with one another in their ego" Freud, S., "Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego", (1921) Standard Edition, vol. XVIII, P.116

⁶ Ibid. p. 127

⁷ "And, in complete opposition to the usual practice, we shall not choose a relatively simple group formation as our point of departure, but shall begin with highly organized, lasting and artificial groups. The most interesting example of such structures are Churches-communities of believers- and armies". Ibid. p. 93

⁸ We have already heard in the discussion of the two artificial groups, Church and army, that their necessary precondition is that all their members should be loved in the same way by one person, the leader. (...) All the members must be equal to one another, but they all want to be ruled by one person (...) that is the situation that we find realized in groups which are capable of subsisting". Ibid, p. 121

power that accompanies it. In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1929) he designates the shadow of the war of religion that follows each one of them. The profoundly disquieting character of the organized group allows him to think the hateful functioning of the single party in the thirties. He will refer to the national-socialist anti-Semitism as well as to the exaction of soviet power⁹. In his analysis of the place of the leader, Freud finds the roots of what Max Weber highlighted in 1921 as “charisma” in the three sources of legitimacy that he distinguished. Monarchy finds legitimating in tradition, bureaucracy authorizes itself from the rational commandment. After the 1920 defeat, Germany was hit in these two registers. That’s why in the modernization of the Bismarck system Max Weber is partisan of a parliament sustained on a charismatic chief. He yearns for it and unconditionally believes in it¹⁰. It’s all the difference with Freud. Weber can discern the logic of the future and the path German politics will take. Only Freud was able to report on the possible swing of the charismatic leader into the enemy of humankind. The charismatic supplement is necessary in democracy insofar as the French revolution undermined the traditional status of the Father. The rupture with tradition allowed distinguishing what was mixed in it. It allowed distinguishing the logical function of the father and the existence, one by one, of fathers that fulfill this function. Freud presented this function under a mythical form: “the Oedipus Complex”. Lacan, on the thread of the results obtained by social anthropology only had to give it a logical form. The plurality of fathers is also that of the diverse communities that form contemporary societies. The logical function, good for “all” the fathers is the “Name-of-the-Father”. It doesn’t fit well with Human Rights. The first effect of this discontent is to decompose the “Name” in the multiplicity of different functions attributed to the father. Lacan call this pluralisation “the Names-of-the-Father”. One goes from a political-theological discourse on the essence of the father to the review of the component of a “wide specter concept” as the philosopher Hillary Putnam would say. The democratic leader aims to justify the exercise of his power either over the necessary administration of things, or over the maintain of public space as an space of always open debate. In France, the school of Claude Lefort, in the USA that of John Rawls, in Germany that of Jurgen Habermas, share this research of a support point founded on the irreducibility of conceptions, over an impossibility to obtain the good form of government. From this “nowhere place” could be found the equal solicitude of the State towards the citizen. The empty regulating fiction thus created would be particularly adapted for post-totalitarian and post-modern societies. It expresses a conception that renders compatible the irreducibility of everybody’s wealth conception and the existence of places for arbitration and decision. It is the place of the dead father. This dream of a fictional regulating space is proposed to us while we assist to strident religious manifestations, frenzy populism of ferociously juxtaposed communities, little linked to the public space. Forcing the line, only the common market and legal rules reduced to the minimum instrumental language status, seems to link them together. The

⁹ “All the Middle-Age massacres of the Jewish did not make it a more peaceful or safer period for the Christian brothers” and “one asks with anxiety what will the Soviets undertake once all the bourgeois are exterminated” Freud, S. *Civilization and its discontent*, Paris, PUF, 1992, p. 68

¹⁰ One must read the 1919 conversation between Weber and Ludendorff, documented by his wife, Marianne Weber. The main part is translated by Raymond Aron in *Etapas de la pensee sociologique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967, 5 1, notes

communities in withdrawal danger risk to speak only through *passages-a-l'acte*. They are there to remind us of the mystery of the social pact, of murder and terror that it conceals.

The subjects identify themselves less and less to family stories full of holes, made more of break-ups than continuity. There still remain the communities. New religious communities, founded on the individual and brutal adhesion at the rupture points, make the ancient ceremonies grow pale. The communitarian adhesion thanks to the moment. The call for respect of the social pact justifies every day the birth of new “authorities”. The more they authorize themselves of the ideal the more they are inflexible. The devotion to the community is verified in the obedience until death. The finality of the sect is to exterminate its members. In a civil society the judge can punish. One loves him or hates him for that. The transfer on the judge makes him a democratic hero. He remains always on this side of what is requested of him. However much he punishes it is never enough. He will never quell the thirst of punishment that can lead to massacre. The superego wants always more. Thus, far from assisting to the extension of a politics conceived as procedures of arbitration and respect of the norm, we assist to the extension of the state of exception. The “new authorities” declare willingly the suspension of Human rights in their community of discourse. Likewise, the supreme guarantor of the state of law, the president of the United States, declares the state of exception for more and more people.

The resort to the new authorities reveals a pathological nostalgia of the Name-of-the-Father in a new configuration of civilization. J.-A. Miller defines it as “burst, dispersed, un-totalisable, an “inconsistent multiplicity” (Cantor), a *not-all* (Lacan)”¹¹. The current form of civilization is perfectly compatible with chaos. This is what Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s essay calls the “absence of limits of our civilization”¹². Civilization doesn’t need a harmonious whole and doesn’t even dream of it. Alain Joxe summarizes in his title *The Empire of chaos*¹³.

The common markets, bureaucratically regulated, are from the past. We are in the realm of incertitude of the global market. The markets seek a master signifier and don’t find it. The great regulators disappoint each one by one: audit offices, the State, the directors of central banks. Even Alan Greenspan, the director of the American Federal Bank, the *ne plus ultra* is touched by suspicion. The best way to characterize the situation of the global markets is to qualify them as *unreadable*. This is a way for us to understand Lacan’s statement according to which a master signifier is indispensable to read writing¹⁴. That is why we have to take into consideration the two faces of contemporary subjectivity. On one hand, the authority of the Name-of-the-Father fades, we have the phenomena of “twilight of duty” as Gilles Lipovetsky calls it, and on the other hand we have the most diverse push-to-enjoyment (*pousse-au-jouir*), the generalized overdose. The phenomena that come under the “twilight of duty” are very lively presented by Gilles Lipovetsky: “The duty was written in capital letters, we lowercase them; it was severe, we organize recreational shows; it ordered the unconditional submission of desire to the law, we reconcile it with pleasure and “*self-interest*”. The “must” has ceded the path to the

¹¹ Miller, J.A., *Le neveu de Lacan*, Paris, Verdier, 2003, p. 165

¹² Hardt, M, Negri, A., *Paris, Exils*, 2002, p. 363

¹³ Joxe, A., *The Empire of chaos*, Paris, La decouverte, 2002

¹⁴ Lacan, J. *le Seminaire, livre XVII, L’ envers de la psychanalyse*, Paris, Seuil, 1991, p. 218

happiness incantation, the categorical obligation to the stimulation of senses, the irrefragable prohibition to *a la carte* regulations”¹⁵. The author perceives well that the decline of the ideal is accompanied by exigencies of jouissance. Let’s follow his descriptions adding ourselves that hedonism doesn’t remain on the limits of the pleasure principle. The true nature of the superego is a drive exigency with power of unlimitedness beyond any pleasure. The drive reveals there much more its mortal face. The manifestation of the death drive can wear many masks. The overdose is not reached only on the evidence of the suicidal behavior of substance abuse of hard drugs. The subject can kill himself at work, choose to practice dangerous sports, strange trips, want to be amateur astronaut, present a multiform appetite for risk. He can also choose political suicide, become a human bomb, surround himself with dynamite and enjoy (jouir) of his death. In all this bacchanal we find the manifestations of the search of presence of the Other in us, The same bad jouissance is at work in neo-totalitarian repressive fantasy and in suicidal bacchanal.

To be really democratic, can psychoanalysis pretend to bring to the contemporary subject a relief of his lack of enjoyment of existence? How to bear the inconsistency of the Other without yielding to the imperative of jouissance of the superego? The answers that the different psychoanalytic currents contribute to this question constitute the most interesting contribution to the democratic challenge we are confronted with.

Translated by Maria Cristina Aguirre

¹⁵ Lipovetsky, G. *Le crepuscule du devoir*, Paris, Gallimard, NRF essays, 1992., p. 48