
Authoritarianism : 26th January 2023 : Domenico Cosenza

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Authoritarianism – Domenico Cosenza

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A discourse that excludes domination The crisis of authority, which characterizes the contemporary world, in the different functions and figures that represent it, has been revealed by psychoanalysis since its origin. The hysteric, by which Freud started the *talking cure*, was in fact presented as a subject crossed by a symptom, which neither the patriarchal authority centered on the power of the *pater familias*, nor the authority of scientific knowledge of the time could manage. As regards to such defaillance, incarnated by the impotence of the father and the psychiatrist to answer the enigma embodied into its symptom, the hysteric opened a breach by giving rise to a new discourse, which focused on the function of the divided subject. In hysteria an ambivalent movement is brought into play: the unmasking of the imposture of the father and of each figure of authority joins their rescue. It is assumed that the master at work has to present himself in the form of « ...a master she can reign over » [1]. Faced with the discourse of the hysteric, two paths were opened to Freud: he could turn it off through responding to the suggestive side of his question that aims to find a master; or give him the word, so as to allow the subject to articulate the matter to the heart of his suffering. The first path, which Freud himself followed in his preanalytic approaches to the treatment of hysterical patients, consisted in the authoritarian use of the therapist's suggestive power (following, in that sense, the most illustrious experiences of his time, from Charcot to the hypnotic care of Barnheim), which stands at the basis of any therapeutic authoritarianism. That was meant to be a way to bring back the hysterical insubordination. But Freud soon realized that suggestion does not have enough power to permanently affect the reality of the hysterical symptom: the hysterical insubordination does not lend itself permanently to return under the authority of the master. Freud decided to take the second path, following the emergence of the key-signifiers in the discourse of the hysteric, which revealed the unconscious dimension at the base of his symptoms. As Miquel Bassols [2] recently pointed out, through this act Freud opened the way to an unprecedented form of authority, proper to the analytical discourse. An authority that, as Lacan himself said, and as Miller [3] has repeatedly stressed, is characteristic of the analytical discourse, which is a discourse that « excludes domination » [4], unlike other discourses, and for this very reason cannot be taught.

The roots of authority (and authoritarianism) are not linked with the father but with the language

The young Freud recognized, even before founding psychoanalysis, that there is a power in the word, a magic of the word, which when used produces surprising effects of change. Freud's effort, with the start of the analytical practice, will be to allow a talking cure that holds off the ineliminable quotient of suggestion that it entails by structure – and upon which magic and authoritarian-suggestive therapies make profit –, highlighting the symbolic-revealing scope of its operation. Giving the floor to the analyser's unconscious, who speaks up through its formations (dreams, slips of the tongue, Witz), and to its symptoms, will be the way that will create the space of the analytical authority. This allows the analyser to come to recognize, in their repetition through the symptom, the key-signifiers to which he is subjugated and exercising their unconscious and inexorable authority over him. Lacan allows us to grasp this aspect more radically than Freud, who remained in part subservient to the father's religion, and to the belief in Oedipal law as the last word in the process of building authority. But not only that, Lacan right from the start in his '38 paper upon Family Complexes, placed the « social decline of the paternal imago » [5] in relation to the appearance of psychoanalysis itself [6]. Lacan, in fact, more and more, in the course of his teaching, leads the authority of the father to the law of language and the function of naming. Indeed, beyond the father stands the language which dominates the life of the speaking being, not only for what it seems to mean to the subject (his elucubration of knowledge S_1 - S_2), but rather for what commands him silently, imperatively and meaninglessly (S_1). We can read along these lines the enigmatic phrase of Lacan in *Subversion of the subject* where he states that « the first word spoken decree, legislate, aphorize, and are an oracle; they give the real other its obscure authority » [7]. On this side of the father is the S_1 who commands in the life of the speaking being, and who confers his obscure authority to the real others (including the father) who dot the picture of his relationship with the Other. Such an authority is conferred not by the place of a guarantee, which can be given only because of an imposture, and the father can only incarnate it as a semblant.

Degraded authority and new authoritarianism

These considerations allow us to grasp the state of advanced deconstruction of the central nucleus of patriarchy, as a family and social order founded on the undisputed authority of the father, in Lacan's teaching [8]. At the same time it allows us not to fall into the trap of making the father the sole target of a criticism against the authoritarianism of power. We risk the fate that Lacan points out to the university students during the protests: blame the master on duty just to establish, unknowingly, a new master in power perhaps worse than the first. Patriarchy is perhaps a long historical season of the adventure of both human society and family, which is by now approaching its sunset; event though the father's nostalgia are imposed on our times under the forms of fundamentalism of various kinds. It is not only the return of religious fundamentalism, but also the rampant scientism, the populism that rises from the ashes of every economic and social crisis. In all indicated cases, these are forms in which, under very different semblants, the figure of an Other of the guarantee that covers the structural absence of guarantee in the place of the Other, is reaffirmed. As Bassols [9] points out, authoritarianism establishes itself when authority is degraded, and the horror of the absence of guarantee in the place of the

Other, pushes towards the establishment of a new Other of the Other. In this regard, even the so-called authoritarian or illiberal democracies of the present-day are nestled within the context. Likewise, the ideological intransigence that are often present in the speeches made from representatives of the woke movement – who feed the cancel culture and stigmatize as patriarchal any discourse that critically examines their positions – as uttered from the place of an indisputable truth, they produce the effect of a resurrection of authoritarianism, which is precisely what they fight in their attack on patriarchy. As in the myth of Actaeon, they end up being devoured, becoming the prey they are hunting.

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- [1] Lacan J., *The Seminar*, Book XVII, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Russell Grigg. New York, Norton, 2007.
- [2] M. Bassols, *Autoridad y autoritarismo*, Madrid, Gredos, 2022.
- [3] Miller J.-A., Conference during the presentation of the next WAP 2024 congress « Everyone is mad ». Conclusion of the Great International Online Conversation of the WAP, *Woman doesn't exist*, on 3th April 2022. Unpublished.
- [4] Miller J.-A., *Todo el mundo es loco*, 2007-2008, Paidós, Buenos Aires 2015, p. 325-329.
- [5] Lacan J., « Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l'individu », *Autres écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 2001, p. 60.
- [6] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- [7] Lacan J., « Subversion of the Subject and Dialectic of Desire », *Écrits*, London, Norton, 1966/2006, p. 684.
- [8] See Poblome G., PIPOL 11 Argument, Clinic and Criticism of the Patriarchy.
- [9] Bassols M., « Autoridad y autoritarismo. Una lectura desde el psicoanálisis », www.zadigespana.com/2020/11/18/.

Availability of References - See www.LacanianWorks.org
References

[1] As Lacan (2007a, p. 129) puts it, the hysteric “wants the other to be a master, and to know a lot of things, but at the same time she doesn't want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master she can reign over. She reigns and he does not govern.” 18th March 1970, Seminar XVII pIX 15 of Cormac Gallagher's translation, www.LacanianIreland.com /Seminars, But as soon as you ask the question: *What does a woman want?*”, you are situating the question at the level of desire, and everyone knows that situating the question at the level of desire for the woman, means questioning the hysteric. What the hysteric want – I say this for those who do not have this vocation, there must be many – is a master. That is absolutely clear. This is so even to the point that the question must be asked if it is not from this that the invention of the discourse of the Master started. This would complete what we are in the process of tracing out in a very elegant manner. She wants a master. This is what resides in the little top right hand corner, to give it no other name. She wants the other to be a master, to know many things, but all the same not to know enough not to believe that she is the supreme prize of all his knowledge. In other words, she wants a master over whom she reigns. She reigns, and he

does not govern. It is from this that Freud started. She, is the hysteric, but this is not necessarily specific to one sex. As soon as you ask the question *What does so-and-so want?* You enter into the function of desire, and you bring out the master-signifier. 18th March 1970, Seminar XVII