

Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere: Authoritarianism

Speakers' Abstracts

Panel 1.

Susie Orbach, *title and abstract tbc*

Lene Auestad, *The feelings of those who matter - "soft" authoritarianism and Erna Solberg.*

Jill Gentile, *Summoning the Witch: Thoughts on autocracy and the trinitarian feminine*

Luke Ali Manzarpour, *title and abstract tbc*

Panel 2.

Karl Figlio, *The Authoritarian Superego*

This paper argues that, within a psychoanalytic frame, authoritarianism has to be seen in terms of internal dynamics. Within such a frame, an authoritarian leader gains his (!) authority from the match between internal and external dynamics, a process described by Freud in 'Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' and the 'The Ego and the Id'. In 'Mass Psychology', Freud posits the leader's authority in the projection of the individual ego-ideals of group members into a common leader-ego-ideal, with an accompanying massification of the individuals by identification in their egos. In 'The Ego and the Id', he speaks of the superego as a 'grade in the ego', laying the foundation for an analysis of an intimate relationship that can become highly destructive of the ego. Freud's account remains the most powerful account of the formation of groups and their subservience to leaders who can become destructive to them while remaining the object of their subservience and devotion. I will explore two aspects of this domination: the consolidation of superegos across generations into a superego lineage that threatens guilt and loss of love; and the capacity of destructive misuse of leadership, in the form of lying, which, counter-intuitively, consolidates dependence on the leader. Their combined centripetal force destabilizes potential apostates; guilt and an anticipation of the precarious state outside the group pulls them back.

Barry Richards, *The authoritarian/libertarian hybrid*

This paper suggests that we need to see authoritarianism as a more complicated phenomenon than it was when the first psychoanalytic understandings of it were put forward in the C20. In particular, it is now becoming more manifestly interwoven with its apparent opposite, namely libertarianism. The most important instance of this fusion is probably Trumpist insurrectionism in the USA, but here I will focus on a couple of other examples of this: some British developments in the territory of conspiracism, that is of beliefs that the world is controlled by hidden and malevolent powers, and some positions in the global territory of culture wars, specifically in the transgender debates. The psychoanalytic concept of the 'core complex' can

help to make sense of this paradoxical hybrid, since both -isms can be seen as expressions of phobic anxieties.

Bob Hinshelwood, *Authoritarianism – From baby to second childhood*

In discussing authoritarianism, we imply there are two kinds of authority – good or bad. What is the difference? I shall try to make a distinction between the two in terms of the psychoanalytically understood dynamics of both the authority (and authoritarian) and those of their subjects. Authoritarians cannot be understood without understanding the interactive relationship with their subjects, and the social determinants of those roles that are set up in any given society. The psychoanalytic contribution is to understand the internal dynamics on both sides, while social scientists can determine the external interactive forces that induce the internal dynamics of both sides on a collaborative basis. I shall be interested to start with Freud's comment on "His majesty the baby". This can be taken two ways, and in this conference it is when his majesty, the monarch, demands like a baby.

Carla Penna, *Building "authoritarian states of mind": psychoanalytic, group analytic and critical theory cross-fertilizations*

The Western sociopolitical scene has recently changed dramatically, and polarization ranging from right to left on the political spectrum divided people. Authoritarian thinking and populist nationalism have been recrudescing, triggering radicalism and *in-group* and *out-group* psychodynamics that led to the emergence of massification processes. Moreover, we are experiencing complex forms of psychosocial coexistence that cause uncertainty and psychic suffering. This state-of-affairs contributes to reducing democratic leadership in the world, influencing followership processes in the personal and sociopolitical spheres. In this direction, this paper aims to discuss the state of the art of contemporary "authoritarian states of mind." To do so, the presentation is grounded in cross-fertilization between classic and contemporary psychoanalytic theory, critical theory and group analysis. The investigation builds on Rickman's reflections on czarist communities in 1917, Freudian mass psychology, and Adorno's contributions to critical theory, including inputs from Pichon-Rivière, the Swiss-born Argentinian psychoanalyst, in connection to recent psychoanalytic and group analytic theorizations on the topic.

Panel 3.

Samir Gandesha, *"White Supremacy Culture": The Hidden Racism of Anti-Racism*

The idea of "wokeness" is closely tied to identity politics. Identity politics can be succinctly defined as the idea that the interests of individuals are tightly indexed to: (a) collective historical experiences of domination, suffering, exclusion and marginalization; (b) the epistemic claims these experiences generate; and, finally, (c) the articulation of such epistemic claims will transform members of oppressed groups from objects into subjects of historical processes. In my talk, I will critically assess these claims by paying specific attention to an exemplary document of "wokeness," namely: an extremely influential article published by Tema Okun in 1999 simply entitled "White Supremacy Culture." My argument is that in this form, wokeness

not only fails to achieve what it sets out to do, namely contribute to dismantling “White Supremacy Culture,” it promotes an identification with the aggressor and consequently harms the very people it intends to empower.

Don Carveth, *Superego: Our Inner Authoritarian*

The superego is composed of reactive aggression turned back against the self, plus internalization of and identification with parental authorities. It is an intrinsically authoritarian structure. In our masochism we submit to it; in our sadism we identify with it and, marching under its banner, deploy its aggression against scapegoats. Only by aligning ourselves with our biologically grounded conscience (true self) are we empowered to stand up to inner and outer tyranny.

Daniel Burston, *Left-wing authoritarianism and anti-Semitism*

The concept of Left-wing authoritarianism was largely discredited or ignored by researchers until recently, when it has suddenly regained respectability as a topic of inquiry. This paper attempts to discern some of the traits that Right and Left-wing authoritarians share in common, including dogmatism and dichotomous thinking. Another feature of contemporary Left-wing authoritarianism is tacit or open support for Islamist organizations and authoritarian regimes and/or the tendency to embrace conspiracy theories, of which anti-Semitism is one. Left wing anti-Semitism often cloaks itself in the guise of principled anti-Zionism, and while other conspiracy theories are also adopted by some Left-wing activists, this one is particularly notable because Left and Right wing authoritarians share an anti-Semitic ideology that has been remarkably persistent, but takes on new and disturbing forms through the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries.

Lauren Langman, *Mimetic Inversion: “Woke” as Denigrated “Other”*

In 1976, Dawkins coined the word *meme*, as “a unit of cultural transmission”, a common symbol or trope that condenses a string of meanings, “an idea, behavior, style, or usage that spreads from person to person within a culture.” We can think of it as a cultural shortcut when a word or symbol conveys certain broader meanings. Today, thanks to the Internet, and the explosion of a vast number of “virtual public spheres,” often quite insulated from each other, a variety of memes can very quickly find wide appeal. Many are simply humorous, dancing cats, but today, some memes can become politically dangerous, misinforming, and mobilizing certain actors whose actions can indeed be harmful. Consider the case of “woke” as meme of disparagement. To “stay woke” appeared in the 1940s and was first used by African Americans to “literally mean becoming woken up, or sensitized to issues of racial prejudice and injustice. But today, much like such similar memes as sheeple, liberal, libtards, snowflake, “hey Brandon” it has become weaponized as a toxic designation by the right wing applied to a plethora of “enemies”, that includes nefarious subalterns such as women, minorities, immigrants, gays especially transgendered, as well as socialist, globalist elites allied to the “deep state”, who hate America, loath its “freedom,” reject God, embrace Satan and seek to implement a totalitarian communism. WOW. And many corporations like Disney or Budweiser

have targeted these despicable 'Others', aka likely consumers. And many cities celebrate perversion and pedophilia in "pride" parades. How did this happen? The pioneering and pathbreaking approach of the Frankfurt School, influenced by Freud and Weber, with hints from Karl Abraham and Sandor Ferenczi, and the rarely cited Wilhelm Reich, found that authoritarianism, as character structure and/or a response to capitalist crises, disposed a variety of palliatives to structural crises that migrated from this system to the life worlds of experience and identity. Authoritarians, especially at times of economic crisis and cultural changes that challenged essentialist, hierarchical privilege granting identity, prone to submission, domination and projection of aggression had an "elective affinity" for ideologies, leaders and movements that assuaged their fears and anxieties, provided communities for the marginal, meanings and "explanations" for their duress, amelioration through submission to "powerful", undemocratic leaders who would halt, if not reverse onerous conditions and most importantly, foster "moral panics" and designate the "enemies of the people. Thus "woke" has been transformed into an amorphous meme of despicable Others, typically weak and powerless, by corrupt elites as well. Thus, "woke" as meme became the shorthand for parasitic minorities and their supporters, ugly "nasty" women who would castrate men, gays who groom children for pedophilia, trans who unfairly beat cis-gendered women in a variety of sports, etc. As the studies in authoritarianism have shown, such people need to have an enemy "responsible" for their adversity, a target for their anger, aggression and *resentment* of a "group worthy" of harsh punishments-up to and including death. Historically, Jews have often served as blameworthy targets. To paraphrase Sartre, if "wokes" did not exist, authoritarians would have to invent them. We have seen this movie before. It didn't end well.

Panel 4.

Sabby Sagall, *Fromm and 'The Ego and the Id'*

Freud's 1923 essay 'The Ego and the Id' offers an analysis of the human psyche as a tripartite structure, dividing it into its constituent elements of ego, id and super-ego. The ego is the rational part of the psyche, while the id is the unconscious repository of our instinctual drives. The super-ego, which is the unconscious part of the ego, is a repressive force that regulates the external acting-out of our instinctual drives.

Freud also analyses our two basic instinctual drives - the love instinct or libido and the death instinct - the former needing to create, the latter to destroy. Humans also possess energy which can drive either of these two instinctual forces. Another key concept is the Oedipus Complex, stemming from the individual's identification with the repressive father, both opposing and identifying with him.

Erich Fromm criticised Freud for failing to see that unconscious repression has social roots. Freud was wrong to base human psychology exclusively on individual factors instead of seeing humans as social beings that interact within a given socio-political framework. Humans' instinctual make-up is fundamentally influenced by external historically shaped structures. For example, we cannot understand the racism of Israeli society simply by analysing the internal

psyches of most Israeli Jews. We need to put that racism in the context of 20th century antisemitism, in particular the Holocaust, and our failure, so far, to overthrow neo-liberal capitalism.

Rye Dag Holmboe, *title and abstract tbc*

Nini Kerr, *Revisiting Taiwan's Authoritarian Past Through Freud's 'The Ego and the Id': A Contemporary Exploration*

This presentation emerged from a sore spot – the kind of sore spot that pulses with an ancient ache, refusing to find stillness. The pain caught me in a passionate unrest, turning my pages and engulfing me in a subdued fury. Revisiting 'The Ego and the Id' goes beyond its role as a theoretical composition; it becomes a dialogical and affective quest, unveiling the complexities of psychosocial troubles of identity, desires, and oppression – not solely of individuals but of an entire nation. Historical reiterations of dictatorial 'thou shalt' (Freud, 1923: 55) echo resoundingly throughout contemporary Taiwan. If Japan stood as the foreign father – stern but devoid of the embrace of love – the subsequent rule of the Republic of China, the 'biological' father of Taiwan, was characterised by militarisation and violence. My inquiry repositions the father, the manifold 'authoritarian fathers' of Taiwan, who fixed social relations into precise configurations of dominance and submission. It delves into the influences of these preceding fathers, who assume everyday guises as ego-ideals, dictating how one should be in order to be loved.

John Keene, *'The Ego and the Id' 100 years on*

Freud's paper invites both sporting metaphors and polarizations. I first read the paper around 1983, 60 years on, and so a while after 'half time' in 1973, while controversies raised by the paper in 1923, came to a head by 1943, and still clearly reverberate to the present day. It is a book of two halves, moving one might almost say from the sublime to the ridiculous as it shifts from remarkably forward looking thinking, anticipating many key developments in psychoanalysis and psychology, to a hardening of Freud's self-confessed wild speculations from 1920 which cast a powerfully regressive pall over the work, and distract the modern reader from the insights in the paper which have been powerfully developed in modern object relations focused versions of psychoanalysis. There is so much of value in the first half dealing with the ego, the body, the crucial role of affects, perceptions and identifications including with both parents and their protective and threatening functions to form a super-ego.

The second part on instincts loses a lot of its impact through Freud's change in his focus from the ego[=self]'s main preoccupation as dealing with fear and threat, and the need for fight-flight or repression in the individual's pursuit of getting what it needs in order to survive; to a bizarrely certain statement of the self-confessed wild speculations he introduced in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' [1920]. The making of sadism and the wish to return to the inanimate central to his argument about instincts/drives, detracts and distracts massively from the helpful forward-looking contributions. While partly understandable in the aftermath of the mass slaughter of World war I, Freud's obsession with dualisms invites questions as to its religious

rather than scientific origins and his own experiences of loss and forebodings about his own deteriorating health.

Panel 5.

Michael Chanan, *'Some of my best friends are anti-Zionists': An exercise in identity politics by a secular Jewish anti-Zionist*

Hilary Westlake, *Introducing "Wrong Sort of Jew: A Documentary"*

Sally Sales, *Hierarchies and Exclusions: Authoritarianism within Psychoanalytic Institutions*

This contribution will explore authoritarianism within psychoanalytic institutions. Institutional transferences onto the masters and mistresses of psychoanalysis seem to produce a docility in members within an autocratic governance that can be very protectionist. Given that we might think that analysts would produce 'better' institutions, it is interesting that they usually don't and instead reproduce techniques of governance that psychoanalytic accounts commonly critique – splitting, dissociation, no toleration of difference, aggressive defensiveness. This short presentation will ask two questions: (1) How can we understand the institutional reproduction of techniques that analysis is meant to mitigate? (2) Is there something endemic within psychoanalysis that produces such institutional authoritarianism?

Les Levidow, *The UK Labour Party as a centrist authoritarian counterinsurgency, 2017-2022*

From 2015 onwards the Labour Party's Left-wing anti-imperialist leadership caused alarm in the British political class, especially after gains in the 2017 general election. A public smear-fear campaign demonised the leadership as dangerous, disloyal and antisemitic, or as at least tolerating 'rampant antisemitism'. This was systematically conflated with pro-Palestine views through false allegations. Coming from Right-wing forces, a clever authoritarian strategy pressurised the Left-wing leadership to discipline and silence its 'antisemitic' members, as well as apologise to 'the Jewish community', a category based on an antisemitic stereotype of Jews. All this pressure was internalised by the Left-wing leadership. It accommodated its enemy, undermined its own supporters and promoted measures silencing their criticisms of false allegations. The Left-wing authoritarian self-sabotage laid the groundwork for its pro-imperialist successor to complete the task. It eliminated or silenced Left-wing forces in the Labour Party, while justifying its actions through banal language such as 'quality standards'. In all those ways, a Right-wing counterinsurgency shifted Rightwards what counts as 'the Centre'.

Dick Blackwell, *Authority and Ideology*

All power tends to corrupt. Power is frequently if not invariably interwoven with authority. Together they generate both anxiety and excitement. Authority is routinely sought as a rescue from anxiety while its exercise may then be driven by the further anxiety it generates complicated by the excitement. History can be read as a dialectical struggle between rulers and ruled. Capitalism and colonialism have shaped that struggle in recent times, up to and after WW1 and after the Russian Revolution when Hitler and Franco were encouraged by European ruling elites. WW2 led to a new anti-authoritarianism that peaked in the late 1960s-early 1970s. Central to the project of Thatcherism has been the reversing that development. As MT herself said, 'the economy is the means but the real goal is to change people's souls', and, 'we must get our people in everywhere'. Her definitive act on being elected was to reject the traditional delegation from the TUC and with it the long tradition of negotiation between capital and organised labour, replacing it with a new political and managerial authoritarianism that has penetrated every level of society. This includes, notably, Human Rights Organisations and Psychotherapy Training Institutions where an unstable and potentially dangerous distinction may be made between 'benign authority' and 'authoritarianism'. Authority cannot be legitimated by benevolence but only by its accountability to those over whom it is exercised.