

Trump and the Authoritarian Personality by Pascal Christeller

Recent atrocities like the assassination of British MP Jo Cox by a Neo-Nazi who opposed her support for maintaining England's membership in the European Union and the Orlando shooting where prominently hispanic LGBTQ people were gunned down with a legally purchased assault weapon for their sexual orientation, it is getting harder to repress and ignore violent extremists in the world. Alienation and extremism which are at the root of these incidents, is similarly behind the support of the presumptive Republican nominee, Donald Trump. Donald Trump channels this energy in his speeches and continues to fuel more extremism with his discourse of fear and hate targeting anyone who he deems to be an outsider, meaning not American born WASP.

Even though he is popular enough to become the GOP frontrunner for President, support for Trump is paradoxical and a classic example of the Orwellian notion of doublethink: supporting two contradictory points of view. Even though mainly white working class voters support him, he would unlikely help them with their problems. In reality, Trump is merely an agitator. He plays into his supporter's fears, offering magic solutions and providing them with a space to let out their rage toward outsiders.

Psychoanalysis is a theoretical tool which emerged to understand the irrational aspects of the human mind at the end of the 19th century by Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis was not only used by governments to support docility of the masses, they were also expanded on by the Frankfurt School during World War II to describe the rise of the authoritarian personality. By using a social-psychoanalytical model of authoritarianism, we can gain insight into the Trump paradox, and these other atrocities, by glimpsing into the unconscious and irrational motivations of humanity.

Beginning with a brief survey of the discovery of the unconscious following the faulty ideologies of the Enlightenment, this paper suggests that the description of the authoritarian personality, developed primarily by the Frankfurt School with Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm,

emerges out of psychoanalysis as a social model to give a 'rationality to the irrationality' of the popularity of extremely fascistic figures such as Donald Trump.

The Enlightenment and the Discovery of the Unconscious

The authoritarian personality needs to be understood with regards to the psychological changes in Europe manifested during the Enlightenment. Compared specifically to the Middle Ages, the Enlightenment was one of the great cultural movements of Europe along with the Renaissance, Baroque and Romanticism. It was characterized by growing autonomy of man's capacity to reason, liberating themselves from traditional sources of power, guidance and thought. Kant proclaimed "Sapere aude! Have the courage to make use of your own reason!"(Ellenberger, 195).

The Enlightenment is what Fromm (1941) writes of when he suggests "the social history of man started with the emergence of a state of oneness with the natural world to an awareness of himself as an entity separate from surrounding nature and men"(39). Not only man as an individual where humans separate and individuate themselves from the foetal relationship with their mother, but also on the level of civilization, where the history of Enlightenment in Western civilization can be seen as the growing individuation and alienation of humanity as a whole from the Earth and God, in what Arendt (1958) refers to as "world alienation".

Enlightenment, despite claiming to challenge traditional myths, was itself a set new mythologies which fit those in power's belief systems reassuring them to take on the world. Although the wealth of technical discovers and the birth of liberalism created the illusion of progress, mainly for aristocrats and bourgeoisie, it was a flawed ideology. As Ellenberger(1970) notes, the Enlightenment tended to "underestimate the differences of physical and mental make-up, and cultural tradition. It furthered a one sided concept of emotions as being a disturbance of the rational mind, without acknowledging them in their own right. While furthering historical methodology, it lacked historical perspective"(198). Although people claimed to be rational, there was a mixture of both rational and

irrational aspects to the Enlightenment.

Furthermore, As Arendt (1958) notes in *The Human Condition* the process of the Enlightenment turned public identities into private experiences because the technocracy and the absorption of the family into the social realm dominated human identities. Arendt claims that this reality created the illusion of the unconscious. Pointing to Romanticism and the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Arendt writes that “the modern individual and his endless conflicts, his inability either to be at home in society or to live outside it altogether, his ever changing moods and the radical subjectivism of his emotional life, was born in this rebellion of the heart”(39).

Culminating in the French Revolution, by the 1880's, the Western world had been transformed totally by the Enlightenment for better or worse. The Eiffel Tower, showcased at the World Expo in 1887 came to symbolize the century of Industry and Science. Despite the Eiffel Tower being a celebrated symbol of human “progress”, the unconscious flawed aspects of the Age of Reason were there all along. Symbolic of the flawed logic of the period, as if the phallic ego ideal of Western Culture is represented by the Eiffel Tower, underneath it during the World Expo, repressed in the unconscious memories of Western society, was a human zoo with a real African village, where homogenized French citizens could gaze at the exotics who had been shipped in from Africa. The traumas of imperialism, racism, sexism and classism were all flawed aspects of the Age where god was dead, the first two books of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* speaks to these flawed ideologies.

Many critics would emerge by the 1880's in this Age of Reason who would give what Foucault(2004) refers to as the “rationality of the irrationality” such as Dostoyevsky, Marx and Nietzsche. Freud's theory, tracing its roots directly from Charcot and Mesmer, is a descendant of this aura of thought and comes to represent both the irrational and rational aspects of the Enlightenment. It challenges Mill's “liberty principle”, which assumes that people can make decisions that are best for themselves, yet attempts to rescue it at the same time. In the following section, I will offer a brief Freudian psychoanalytic model which emerges out of the collective unconscious of this era to explain

the unconscious libidinal forces which stir up the irrational love and frenzy for a figure such as Trump.

Psychoanalysis: a Social Model on Authoritarianism

The story of psychoanalysis itself begins with stumbling across irrational forces in the repressed love affair which manifested itself in the relationship of therapist Breuer with patient Bertha Pappenheim, who went by the pseudonym Anna O. in the case studies. Fink (2016) writes that “if not for the curiosity of Sigmund Freud, who encouraged Breuer to go over the details of the case with him again and again, psychoanalysis might have never been anything but the story of one unfulfilled, unconsummated, and even largely unacknowledged love affair”(2).

What makes psychoanalysis a useful tool for studying authoritarianism is both Freud's biographical historical milieu and his theories on depth psychology, the libido theory and dual-instinct theory. Freud's theories and life as a Jew in Vienna at the turn of the World War, helped give him a privileged perspective on the changing subjectivity of humanity. Instead of seeing humans as rational decision making entities as assumed by the ideology of liberalism, Freud highlighted the idea of the unconscious.

Marcuse(1955) writes, that for Freud “the history of man is the history of his repression”(12). Freud basically suggested people don't always know why they do, what they do, when they do it. Especially regarding love, people are not always rational, in fact love is an irrational force. Rather than focusing on the rational aspects of the mind, Freud envisioned a topographical model of the mind dividing it into three sections: conscious, preconscious and unconscious. Later on, Freud would change this theory to encapsulate the superego, ego and id.

The id is unconscious, amoral, works through the pleasure seeking principle, and represents the carnal desires. The superego is “watchful, judging, punishing agency in the individual, the source of social and religious feelings in mankind,” it can be cruel, sadistic and hyper-moral, enforcing the demands of the past(Ellenberger, 516). The superego originates on the child's dependency on the

parents and is dependent on how the Oedipus complex is resolved. The ego, is the source which tries to balance the two other forces of pleasure and past realities, based on the reality principle.

Marcuse(1955) writes that “the external world the ego faces at every stage of development is a specific socio-historical organization of reality, affecting the mental structure through specific societal agencies or agents”(35). It is the stage of anxiety balancing the past and the desire for pleasure with the reality of an authoritarian world to varying degrees. Through studying dreams and allowing patients to talk freely in a process called free association, Freud claimed to be able to uncover unconscious material linked to early childhood memories and traumas.

Another major contribution by Freud to the unconscious forces were the libidinal and dual instinct theory. Freud(1920) first introduced the dual-instinct theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The two instincts were: Eros, which is love and sexual energy and the death instinct which would be come known by many as Thanatos. Life was a battle between these two forces. Civilization is a result of the battle between these two instincts. According to Freud, humans are forced to repress these two instincts, and the repression turns into neuroses.

Freud's theory evolved as he found himself at an important historical moment as Europe was falling apart into Thanatos. Freud could see the links between his theories and the rising authoritarianism which accompanied the World Wars. In 1921, very much inspired by the collapse of the Hapsburg Empire and the mass panic it caused, Freud published *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. In it, he would lay the underpinnings on a social-psychoanalytic model on authoritarianism.

A common misconception about psychoanalysis is that it is only about the individual and the relationship to their mother. Although beginning with Anna O. and Breuer, as Freud's career progressed, the theory of psychoanalysis became a social model because Freud took into account the effects of civilization on the psyche. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud(1921) writes: “In the individual's mental life someone else is invariably involved, as a model, as an object, as

a helper, as an opponent; and so from the very first individual psychology, in this extended but entirely justifiable sense of the words, is at the same time social psychology as well.”(2). Psychoanalysis concentrates on the family but as Arendt notes in her private/public argument the family had been dissolved and incorporated into the nation, so by studying the family it was inherently social psychology.

Freud's(1930) statements on social psychology are expanded in *Civilization and its Discontents*, where he suggests that humans struggle to find happiness, the ultimate being genital love, thus suffering is inevitable and they need civilization not for survival but for the repression of the drives it entails or else carnal anarchy would prevail. Freud writes “on the one hand, love comes into into conflict with the interests of civilization;on the other, civilization threatens love with substantial restrictions”(56). Love can be good, however “in pleasure men disavow thought and escape civilization”(Adorno & Horkheimer, 105) as long as labor gets done which is required to maintain the species. However the denial of love, which is inevitable in the world because we are selective in our partners, causes a tendency towards aggression such as murder or rape which requires repression. Wherever there is civilization there will be discontent. That discontent helps to fuel the authoritarian personality.

Donald Trump and the Sketch of the Authoritarian Personality

The World Wars left the world with a highly industrialized military complex with elements of Fascism throughout disguised by a massive welfare state. Rather than a totalitarian state, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* would describe a culture industry of mass deception engaged in 'psychoanalysis in reverse' manufacturing people's desires and identities to fit into corporate agendas based on consumption. Edward Bernays, a nephew of Freud, is described in the *Century of Self* as a key figure for popularizing Freudian theories to American corporations and governments which helped to empower this new cult of Self. Despite the West seeing itself as quite

different from other totalitarian powers, the final book of Arendt's(1951) *The Origins of Totalitarianism* on Totalitarianism challenged readers to see the commonalities the West shares with the Third Reich. In the West today, the identities of people are superfluous leaving them alienated and prone to love a leader like Trump, the desires of the masses have become the dictator.

The sketch for a model on the authoritarian character, began to be developed during the inter-war period and World War 2. The Frankfurt School, who would pioneer the theory around authoritarianism, spent the War years in exile as political refugees reflecting on how a seemingly democratic system had led to their condition of losing their homes and community. Figures like Trump and Hitler, were seen as a psychological phenomenon to the Frankfurt School.

The concept of personality instead of identity was used when outlining this character to suggest the enduring traits one has throughout their entire life. For psychoanalysts, the emphasis of personality was on society's and the family's responsibility in manufacturing such personalities via the resolution of the Oedipus complex rather than purely biological factors.

By 1950, Adorno published the *Authoritarian Personality*, where he sketched out the fascistic individual personality out fully, giving it a research method of questionnaire and interviews in a thousand page book adhering it to the concept of personality. The book contained the F Scale with it's nine key dimensions of a fascist personality: “conventionality, submissiveness, aggression, subjectivity, superstitiousness, toughness, cynicism, the tendency to project unconscious emotional responses onto the world, and heightened concerns about sex”(Wolfe, 2005). Adorno suggests that personality is a “determinate of ideological preferences”.

Evidence suggests that Trump's authoritarian character has been a set of enduring traits throughout his life and not merely a show he is putting on for the public. Fromm and Adorno both agree that authoritarian personalities have oral characters with “a compulsion to speak incessantly and befool others”(Adorno, 16). Trump displays these characteristics and is also known for his narcissistic and dodgy business practices fuelled by aggressive litigation. These oral characteristic were evident

early in Trump's career in 1989, when the Central Park Five were wrongfully arrested for the rape of a jogger in Central Park, New York. Trump's actions during that incident were evidence of authoritarianism, such as using his power and influence to alter the view of the public on the boys by taking out full page newspaper ads calling for the boys to be executed. With the help of Trump, the Central Park Five were found guilty on the charges until DNA evidence overturned their sentences fifteen years later. Trump never apologized for the incident.

Libidinal factors are central to the authoritarian personality beginning with the dual instinct theory. According to Freud(1920), in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, the libidinal forces hold together the group because they lose their individuality in the erotic jouissance of the group. Reich's (1933) *Mass Psychology of Fascism*, claims the authoritarian repression which creates a “conservatism, fear of freedom, in a word reactionary thinking”(31) results from sexual repression of libidinal energy in the family.

Evidence of Trump's libidinal energy is that overt sexuality has been a constant element of his personality: such as his need to protect a rape victim with the Central Park Five, his several different divorce and marriages or his active participation in the Miss Universe pageant. He has heightened concerns about sex, seeing himself as a powerful sexual father figure, bragging about the size of his penis during a Republican primary while referring to his daughter's value in several interviews as a sex object. Recently Stephen Colbert joked that all the skyscrapers he builds may be to compensate for something else.

Trump plays into this libidinal force as a fascist demagogue. Freud(1920) discusses how the Church and the Army hold power through love of their leader and the illusion that he loves them back. People are clearly in love with Trump and hypnotized by his spectacle evidenced by the massive rallies and media obsession. His rallies have the form of frenzies and are reminiscent of George Wallace or episodes from Morton Downey Jr. Trump says he loves his supporters and would protect them from immigrants and Islamists. He appears as a magic helper who agrees to save the country's real problems

on war and immigration with magical solutions of building walls and putting boots on the ground in the Middle East.

Adorno(1949) discusses the concepts of identification and idealization with regards to the Fascist leader and the Group. Trump is the great little man and his narcissistic personality is what people love about him because Trump is in love with himself and they idealize him.

Fromm (1941) helped to give a foundation in describing not only the creation of Trump's authoritarian personality but also the supporters of Trump when he wrote *Escape From Freedom*. Using a Weberian psychoanalytic account, he suggests that with the Protestant reformation, Europe was given freedom from the traditional bonds of Medieval society at the same time driving them to a basic anxiety feeling of being alone, isolated and driven to irrational activity to escape that freedom.

One mechanism of escape from our freedom, Fromm writes, is authoritarianism. Similarly to Karen Horney's(1945) work *Our Inner Conflicts*, Fromm suggests that in order to escape these feelings of aloneness, people have masochistic and sadistic strivings, people do this in order to “get rid of the individual self, to lose oneself, to get rid of the burden of freedom”(173). The Trump campaign offers an identity for mainly white working class voters who feel like outsiders so they can join with others who believe they want to 'make American great again'.

Fromm also suggests that the authoritarian character has a powerful attraction towards power while powerless people disgust them. Fromm writes that the very “sight of (powerless people) makes (the authoritarian character) want to attack, dominate, humiliate”(191). Fromm's theory explains why people attach themselves to Trump because he represents power and they seek his protection. At the same time, Trump is disgusted by the weak, he attacks migrant workers playing on the in-group/out-group dynamic and is famous for calling people losers. Adorno writes that this is the agitator's 'unity trick', “they emphasize their being different from the outsider but play down such differences within their own group”(Adorno, 15). There is something sadistic in supporting someone who has nothing in common with you and resents your own weaknesses.

The description of the authoritarian character described by Fromm, is very much the hero of modern capitalism, someone who owns their fate and is able to suffer without complaining. Trump's name is a synonymous part of the American collective business conscious, whether or not he is truly an accomplished businessman he has come to represent one to the masses. His name is everywhere, reminiscent of Orson Welle's *Citizen Kane*, owning real estate across New York City, he is now even on the largest building in Vancouver, BC. Trump's media presence over the last few decades has continually increased, he had a show on prime time television where he was portrayed as the powerful successful businessman who would fire people who weren't up to snuff while having an annual coronation of a new Trump apprentice. He even hosted a *Celebrity Apprentice* show where America's favourite celebrity contestants would compete to gain his approval.

Authoritarian characters, according to Fromm, also have a tendency to defy authority from above and be a rebel. In this increasingly diversely racial middle class in the Western world, exemplified by the presidency of Barack Obama, Trump was encouraged and promoted by the Republican establishment as being someone to challenge Obama's legitimacy and stir up doubt and fear about the safety of the country. Trump publicly challenged Obama's American nationality fervently seeking out his birth certificate. He has publicly suggested that Obama has links to terrorist organizations. Trump personifies the discontent that white uneducated men feel towards a growing racially diverse bureaucracy which leaves them alienated and powerless, despite it not being the fault of immigrants but of the economic system that was put in place by white imperialists.

Fromm notes that being a rebel to the establishment is a sign of authoritarianism. Trump is the Republican party's Frankenstein, as he turned on his creator in the Republican primaries bringing only Thanatos to the party's future. Completely decimating the competition, bringing every candidate who competed with him to new lows, he became a rebel of the authority of the Republican party to the point where no major Republican leaders will acknowledge or discuss his statements publicly until after the election.

One can only wonder what it would be like to have Trump take the F scale test. However if we take messages from his rallies we can see that he fits all the dimensions of the fascist personality as described earlier. Trump is the authoritarian personality, a mini-Hitler, a Frankenstein of Western civilization, who will only bring Thanatos to his creator. The world should be scared and take action to prevent more authoritarian characters from dominating the political landscape.

Conclusion

This essay has sought to give a historical justification for a social-psychoanalytic sketch of Trump as the authoritarian personality. Psychoanalysis developed at a time when the collective consciousness of Western thinking was challenging the assumptions of the Enlightenment. Following the completely irrational forces which dominated the World Wars, psychoanalysis became a useful tool in offering an explanation for the rise of figures such as Hitler, Mussolini and Trump.

According to the theory, Trump has an authoritarian personality and it has been an enduring trait throughout his life. Attraction to Trump as a presidential candidate is tied to his followers through a libidinal energy, people are in love with Trump and they want him to save them from their lives' misery. Other authoritarian personalities will be attracted to Trump because they have an attraction towards power and revulsion to the weak. Trump's anti-immigrant statements will fuel authoritarian supporters who feel like outsiders in an increasingly multi-racial world with a highly educated biracial President of the United States with whom they cannot identify. By focusing on fear and hate, Trump has come to be idealized by the alienate white working class masses and they are hypnotized by his speeches where he lets out id dominated theories tapping into unconscious libidinal energy.

Further research could be done on Trump, and perhaps there has been resistance to delving deeper into a psychoanalytic account of this phenomenon. However, this research is desperately needed. Trump and the recent atrocities makes it clear how vulnerable the American and Western experiment is right now to authoritarian politics. The traumas of the World Wars, imperialism and

racism have still yet to be fully addressed. Trump may not succeed in becoming president, but what about the next Trump who is just smart enough to fool more people. In order to combat authoritarian personalities we need good schools and communities. However, this is the conundrum with regards to psychoanalysis, the three impossible professions according to Freud are: governing, education and psychoanalysis.

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