

10th Delphi International Psychoanalytic Symposium

Authority and Authoritarianism

What can psychoanalysis tell us today about "authoritarianism" and "authority"? What is the meaning of these concepts and how do they appear in the analytical relationship?

What are their manifestations at a group or collective level, such as in our psychoanalytic institutions or in society?

Freud writes in 1937, in *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*, that the analyst "*must possess some kind of superiority, so that in some analytic situations he can act as a model for his patient and in others as a teacher.*" However, what does he mean by the word "superiority or authority"? Does it concern a relationship of power and supremacy? He himself seems to give an initial answer to this question: "*... we must not forget that the analytical relationship is based on a love of truth - that is, on a recognition of reality - and that it precludes any kind of sham or deceit.*"

Later, in the text on "Constructions" (1937) he writes: "*...if nothing more develops, we may conclude that we have made a mistake and we shall admit as much to the patient at some suitable occasion without sacrificing any of our authority.*" Such an analyst does not sound particularly authoritarian, but rather one who is a kind of specialist, and in that sense an authority. He is not someone who imposes his superior view or supremacy on the patient, but one who stands by the analysand from a certain position of benign neutrality. He will thus allow his analysand, through the interpersonal interaction of the psychoanalytic process, to know his own "truth" ("know thyself"), an *experiential* truth which through an enlivening encounter with the other, releases and expands thinking.

These concepts are an important concern not only for society, but for mankind in general, where we observe the emergence of

authoritarian leaders and totalitarian regimes, now as well as in the past during transitional periods of uncertainty, alongside the eternal competition among rival groups, often erupting into violent conflict.

However, Freud at this point also provides us with a somewhat more optimistic note (The Future of an Illusion, 1927) when he writes: *"The voice of the intellect is a soft one, but it does not rest till it has gained a hearing. This is one of the few points on which one may be optimistic about the future of mankind"* ...and the future of psychoanalysis we might add.

At the 10th Delphi International Psychoanalytic Symposium of 2026, psychoanalysts from Greece and the international psychoanalytic community will present and discuss from their own psychoanalytic perspectives the topic of "Authority and Authoritarianism".

From the Association's Symposium Board of Directors:

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