

Argument of the 10th International Psychoanalytic Symposium of Delphi

What can psychoanalysis tell us today about ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘authority’? What relevance do these concepts have for the analyst-analysand relationship? What are their manifestations on a group and/or collective level, within psychoanalytic institutions as well as in society?

The first question that arises concerns the psychoanalytic relationship itself. We can think of the psychoanalyst as an authority on two interrelated levels: on a cognitive level, that of theory, as well as that which is related to psychoanalytic practice.

Psychoanalytic theory based on Freud’s work, offers us an extraordinary amount of richness today, as it did during its development, while now including many different viewpoints on the integration and functioning of its cognitive object, that of the unconscious, as well as on clinical practice. With such varied theoretical approaches, how would we today define at a cognitive level, the concept of ‘authority’? Moreover, the various clinical approaches deriving from contemporary psychoanalytic theories, lead us to the second essential question: what role does the ‘authority of the psychoanalyst’ play during the psychoanalytic session?

The concept of authority is first found in Freud (*Analysis Terminable and Interminable* 1937) who, when speaking specifically of the ‘authority’ of the analyst, writes that the analyst must possess ‘a kind of superiority’ in order to be a ‘role-model’ or a kind of teacher to his patient. But what does he mean here by ‘authority’ and ‘superiority’? Is it a relationship based on power and dominance? As he proceeds in the same text, Freud helps us to elaborate on these questions by adding another view of ‘authority’, that of truth, reminding us that we must not forget that ‘the analytical relationship is based on a *‘love of truth,’* and that it excludes any form of sham or deceit.’

Later in the text on *Constructions* 1937, extending the understanding of the term ‘authority’ in order to bring it into line with ‘authenticity’, he refers to the importance of recognizing developments as they occur in the analyst/analysand relationship. Here, Freud remarks that the analyst who has made a mistake, should confess this to his patient ‘without sacrificing the *authority* he possesses.’

Here, we come to the second term in our Symposium's theme, 'authoritarianism'. The analyst holds a 'position of authority' Freud maintains, but an authority who recognizes his 'mistakes and deficits', thus averting the dangers of authoritarianism, we would add. Such an analyst could hardly be considered authoritarian. To the contrary, he is an 'expert' whose role is not to impose his 'superior' form of knowledge on the patient, but to allow the analysand, through the interpersonal involvement of the psychoanalytic process, to come to know his own 'truth' ('Know Thyself') This is an *experiential* truth, one which via activation and enlivening of emotion, liberates and expands thought.

If we take into account the pluralism which, as previously mentioned, characterizes psychoanalytic theory and practice today, the concept of 'authority' presents itself in various ways. As for example in the metapsychological and clinical approach of W.R Bion, who speaks of an internal attitude within the analyst 'without memory and desire', one that allows the analyst to 'bear not to know.' That is, one advocating an attitude that thrives within the context of 'active curiosity' and 'analytical daydreaming.' It is under these conditions, that the possibility of waiting and patience is born, favouring the emergence of psychic material which when finally succeeding, ultimately gives meaning and integrates previously repressed and/or divided parts of the self.

Moreover, such a psychoanalytic approach of curiosity and anticipation indirectly resonates with the thinking of D.W. Winnicott, R. Britton, as well as with French-speaking analysts, such as P. Auglanier and J. Kristeva, when they warn us of the dangers of an eminently active attitude-intervention coming from the analyst. An intervention which, as Winnicott points out, can be experienced as a threatening encroachment-invasion, an *impingement* interrupting the sense of 'going on being' of a fragile self. Therefore, the concept of the authority of the psychoanalyst, as it appears in psychoanalytic practice according to Bion and Winnicott, is characterized by a wait-and-see attitude, ultimately allowing the unfolding of the analytical relationship and the emergence of the analysand's psychic material.

Finally, we will attempt to examine the place of 'authority' and 'authoritarianism' in the socio-political field. Freud had argued that rarely can individual psychology ignore one's relationships with others. He writes in *Group Psychology and Analysis of the Ego* (1921): that "... thus, from the very beginning... individual psychology... is also a social psychology." The psychoanalytic concepts to be discussed at the 10th Delphi Symposium undoubtedly concern society and humanity in general, where once again we are witnessing on a global level, the emergence of authoritarian leaders

and regimes, alongside the eternal competition between groups, often ending in violent conflicts. It seems as if our world is becoming increasingly hostile and dangerous.

Freud, living and creating psychoanalysis between two world wars, was fully aware of the destructiveness that exists within the human species. However, he does also strike a note of optimism when he writes ... 'the voice of the intellect is a soft one, but does not rest until it has gained a hearing ... This is one of the few points in which one may be optimistic about the future of mankind.' (*Future of an Illusion* 1927).

This optimism lies perhaps, in the fact that the voice needing to be heard, that asks for communication and understanding, never stops. Even if sometimes it is so low as to be almost imperceptible. Tirelessly not resting 'until it gains a hearing'; a voice that constitutes perhaps, the inexorable movement towards that which Freud considered to be 'a monumentous step' in the evolution of the human intellect, namely the final victory of the reality principle over the pleasure principle, but always at the cost of human suffering (*Formulations on the two principles of Mental Functioning*, 1911). This human (psychic) suffering psychoanalysis attempts to transform into mental freedom, allowing us to imagine and to dream.

At the 10th International Psychoanalytic Symposium of Delphi in 2026, Greek and foreign psychoanalysts will present and discuss, each from their own psychoanalytic perspectives, the themes of Authority and Authoritarianism.

Further relevant announcements related to the conference will be posted periodically on the Delphi Symposium website.