

**POLITICIANS AS DISSOCIATIVE MANAGERS**

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## POLITICIANS AS DISSOCIATIVE MANAGERS

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This paper focuses on the difficulties individuals and societies experience when they attempt to ignore the obvious concrete results of actions or inactions on the physical plane. A profound dissociative split must occur and be maintained when there is a dominant social taboo against openly perceiving and acknowledging the debilitating effects of violence whether they are the markers of active violation or violation through neglect and abandonment. We focus specifically on the role of professional politicians in maintaining this cultural dissociative split and suggest a possible transformation of their role in creating and directing a social system designed for genuine need satisfaction as opposed to managing dissociation.

Several things need to be established to understand the basic premise concerning professional politicians.

- o We live in a violent society.
- o We hold a collective superstitious belief concerning an apparent causal requirement for sacrifice, pain and suffering as instrumental factors for survival.
- o A strong resistance is elicited whenever the status quo of superstitious suffering is threatened by exposure or transformation.

### The Magnitude of Violence

The maladjustment model of mental illness, discussed by Fromm (1955) and critiqued by Smith (1993), that has dominated the characterization of mental disturbances beginning with Freud and lasting to the present day holds that fantasy and misperception by mentally ill clients is the primary etiological factor in most psychological disorders. In the last ten years, there has been an explosion of evidence that trauma through active abuse or passive neglect is the primary etiological factor in such disorders. It is becoming clear that the categorization method used by the DSM is no longer adequate. Adult children of alcoholics, clients suffering from some forms of schizophrenia, compulsive and phobic conditions, and a number of personality disorders have been found to evidence a pattern of symptoms consistent with those found in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The following statistics from the FBI Uniform Crime Report give some indication of the degree of violence in our society. In the United States during 1990, 23,438 murders, 102,555 forcible rapes, 639,271 robberies, 1,054,863 aggravated

assaults were reported (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991). In 1991, there was an estimated total of 2,694,000 reports of child abuse according to Current Trends in Child Abuse Reporting and Fatalities: The Results of the 1991 Annual Fifty State Survey (Daro & McCurdy, 1992).

### The Dynamics of Irrational Living

During the evolution of societies, random experiences of cruelty, sacrifice and suffering are perceived as required for survival. The superstitious beliefs are passed intergenerationally without reinspection to see what is causally effective (Smith, 1987; Smith, 1989; and Smith & Jones, 1993). Concurrently with these superstitious beliefs is transmitted a reaction formation that in Szasz's words affirms, "the benevolence, glory, and power of society's dominant ethic." (p. 58) In violent societies, the dominant ethic is to disguise the fact that they are violent. In short, these societies value the preservation of an ideal image simultaneously with preservation of the social institutions which perpetuate violence. The pain caused by the vast incongruity between our ideal image as good and loving and our actual identity as supporters and creators of violence would be unbearable without well devised methods of personal and cultural dissociation. The role of professional politicians is to provide "meat and potatoes" and the wherewithal to maintain necessary mass dissociation.

### The General Purpose and Characteristics of Dissociation

Dissociation is a protective state of semiconscious awareness which permits members of society a degree of functioning and the preservation of some sense of control in the face of profound insecurity. Paradoxically, this defense mechanism against consciously knowing unbearable truths depends on continuing society's pattern of traumatization in order to maintain a familiar and predictable dissociative state. (See Smith, 1987 and Smith, 1989 for a discussion of individual and social neophobia -- fear of the new.) Politicians mediate and manage this balancing act for our culture.

1. Social dissociation permits the maintenance of a division of attention and energy between teaching reasonable behavior (do not walk in front of trucks) and providing the institutions, venues, goods, services, and beliefs required for living with insanity.
2. Individuals in society idiosyncratically synthesize patterns of dissociation using cognitive nonattention, exogenous substances, and endogenous substances usually released and modulated by creating conditions of negative excitement.

## The Relationship Between the Politics of the Family and the Primary Function of Professional Politicians

Politicians appear to be shaped not born to their role as social managers. Laing (1971) writes that: "To be in the same family is to feel the same 'family' inside." (p. 13) (emphasis in original) Dilemmas abound in a family socialized by violence. "If I do not destroy the 'family', the 'family' will destroy me. I cannot destroy the 'family' in myself without destroying 'it' in them. Feeling themselves endangered, will they destroy me?" (p. 14) Those in the family who strive the hardest to resolve these dilemmas are future politicians. They "map" their internal family onto the world and seek to resolve their conflicts in society using the skills honed in the family.

### Dissociated Violence and Apparent Determinism

Stanley Milgram (1974), in his work on obedience to authority, states that a prerequisite for social organization is a potential for obedience to authority: "...because organization has enormous survival value for any species, such a capacity was bred into the organism through the extended operation of evolutionary processes." (pp. 124-125) Milgram further states: "...we need to look at the inborn structures and at the social influences impinging after birth. The proportion of influence exerted by each is a moot point. From the standpoint of evolutionary survival, all that matters is that we end up with organisms that can function in hierarchies." (p. 125)

At this point, we sharply disagree with Dr. Milgram's analysis and propose that the social influences impinging after birth, both in degree and timing, have an enormous impact on the amount of obedience to irrational authority. This is a well understood principle in ordinary society as reflected in the following familiar quotes:

'Tis education forms the common mind: Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclin'd. (Epistle 1, To Lord Cobham, 1734)

Give me a give a girl at an impressionable age, and she is mine for life. (Spark, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, 1961)

The emerging evidence of widespread child abuse suggests that harmful dissociative patterns are the result of early modelling, constitutional predisposition, threat, coercion, and physical insult. Because of our need to uphold our ideal image through dissociation and reaction formations, much of this shaping is done early and covertly. This is based on the driving need to force children to accept without protest the unnecessary sacrifice and

pain believed to be necessary to ensure individual and social survival. Thus, what appears to be a biologically deterministic process in shaping children is actually a free choice by caregivers stemming from mistaken beliefs about causality and survival.

Milgram (1974), in using the idea of an automaton to parallel human function, notes that the automaton must be designed to allow sufficient flexibility "for two modes of operation: the self-directed (or autonomous mode), when it is functioning on its own, and for the satisfaction of its own internal needs, and the systemic mode, when the automation is integrated into a larger organizational structure. Its behavior will depend on which of the two states it is in." (p. 132)

The system modes of functioning Milgram calls the agentic state. A person who enters an authority system comes to see himself or herself as an agent for carrying out the desires of someone else, no longer acting out of a sense of personal purpose (autonomous state).

Judging from the disturbing findings from Milgram's sham-shock experiments (no one stopped before 300 volts -- labelled very dangerous), the agentic state is quite strong and, because of early traumatic shaping, a great number of people can be moved easily into this state. Thus, the politician's task of leading people by the nose is made simpler by early undetected and/or unacknowledged violence used to socialize infants and young children.

### The Politician's Art: Dissociative Techniques and Methods

I. The distractive technique of pandering to negative excitement.

A) The revolving perception of enmity (enemy of the month).

1) "Certain events in a nation's history, frequently of brief duration and generally regarded as peripheral or freakish, may reveal profound forces that customarily lie below the surface. The Dreyfus Affair was such an event in France. The Monkey Trial, McCarthyism, and My Lai were such events in America. These events were not aberrations outside the nation's history, but the result of a mix of elements essential to the culture and always present, not aberrations, but exaggerations of the commonplace, not the actions and reactions of psychotics or paranoids, but those of so-called normal men. Like verbal slips in everyday life, they reveal powerful but repressed fears and desires." (p. 3) (Levin, 1971) Levin continues: "The people are largely passive and approving. The active participation of the people in the process of repression is not even necessary." (p. 4) (Ibid.)

2) "The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil, and it followed that any past or future agreement with him

was impossible." "The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed -- if all records told the same tale -- then the lie passed into history and became truth." (p. 762) (Orwell, 1977)

B) The identification and stigmatization of scapegoats.

1) Szasz (1970) notes that scapegoats are symbols of evil, that may be shunned or persecuted by the social order. By their very existence, they confirm the remaining members of society as good, thus upholding our reaction formation that we are reasonable, loving people. Politicians exert considerable influence in identifying the malefactor (Szasz's term) through legal specifications for sanity and propaganda.

2) Wilhelm Reich as scapegoat: "The fact remains that Reich, in the name of desire, caused a song of life to pass into psychoanalysis. He denounced, in the final resignation of Freudianism, a fear of life, a resurgence of the ascetic ideal, a cultural broth of bad consciousness. Better to depart in search of the Orgone, he said to himself, in search of the vital and cosmic element of desire, than to continue being a psychoanalyst under those conditions. No one forgave him this, whereas Freud got full pardon." (Anti-Oedipus)

II. Deciding who are chosen to suffer or receive support, i.e., defense cuts, welfare requirements, price regulation, and creating legislation which promotes social dissociation: weapons, alcohol, pharmaceuticals, violent sports, escapism, and propaganda. To use Kovel's beautiful term, society substitutes an "arsenal of consolations," i.e., mass culture, drugs, gadgets, an insipid fiction called mental health, material success, religious submission, or a privatizing love. (Kovel, The Age of Desire)

III. Upholding the ideal image through lip service, token acknowledgment to "good citizenship," and rationalizing and minimalizing stupid and brutal behavior.

A) Desert Storm was an absolute necessity for protecting the security of the United States.

IV. Sensing and readjusting slippage in the status quo, i.e., conflict reduction without true transformation through band-aid diplomacy.

A) Moving homeless people from upscale sections of a city or a town to a less conspicuous area without attending to the basic needs of the homeless.

V. Maintaining conditioned cathection between genuine needs and displaced dissociative consumption of food, sex and excitement for love. (Smith, 1989)

### Politicians as Directors of Social Transformation

Politicians could shift from managing dissociation to managing well-being. They would first need to reunify their own dissociative self-systems.

1) Professional societies could work therapeutically and strategically with politicians to make clear and rational decisions regarding the well-being of society.

2) Politicians could commit to shifting personal and social resources to the tasks of socio-therapy.

### Three-Tiered Socio-Therapeutic Model

EDUCATE POLITICAL  
DECISION MAKERS

REALIGN RESOURCES  
FOR TREATMENT  
OF EXISTING PTSD IN  
GENERAL POPULATION  
(ALL ETIOLOGIES)

PREVENTATIVE  
MEASURES TO  
ENSURE AGAINST  
INITIAL  
TRAUMATIZATION  
OF CHILDREN

### Conclusion

An early attempt at sociotherapy was made by Wilhelm Reich who founded the Orgonomic Infant Research Centre which opened in 1949. He recommended that the centre provide the following services:

- 1) The care of pregnant mothers in the pre-natal period;
- 2) Supervision of the birth and the early weeks of the infant's life;

3). The recognition and prevention of armouring during the early years; and

4) Follow-up studies of children who had been seen in infancy through into adolescence.

Due to the massive attacks on Reich's work that were to develop soon after 1950, only the first two of the above four aims could be in any degree realised. (Wilhelm Reich, Free Growth)

In a 1979 seminar at UCLA, a politician and two mental health professionals explored the feasibility and the pitfalls of having professional politicians monitored by mental health professionals. There was candid agreement that this could be done and equally candid admission that implementing this process would be tremendously difficult. We feel that difficult or not, this possibility needs to be thoroughly addressed and irrational behavior be removed from human activity to the fullest extent possible.



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