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DEMOCRACY AND DICTATORSHIP

Their Psychology and Patterns of Life

by
ZEVEDEI BARBU



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Part One

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEMOCRACY

Je vois que les biens et les maux se repartissent assez également dans le monde. Les grands riches disparaissent; le nombre des petites fortunes s'accroît; les désirs et les jouissances se multiplient; il n'y a plus de prosperités extraordinaires ni de misères irremédiables. L'ambition est un sentiment universel, il y a peu d'ambitions vastes. Chaque individu est isolé et faible; la société est agile, prévoyante et forte; les particuliers font les petites choses, et l'État d'immenses.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

Introduction

History is a picture gallery containing few originals and a great many copies.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

ONE of my first concerns, in the present study, was to find or to build up a common ground between sociology and psychology, and thus to look at the problem of democracy and totalitarianism from two points of view at once. From the very outset I felt the need to escape a purely political approach and to speak about democracy and totalitarianism as ways of life. Needless to say I have been aware of the difficulty anyone has to face when working with such a general and vague concept as that of a way of life. But, on the other hand, it was obvious to me that a common ground between two disciplines so different and opposed in their approach could not be found without resorting to a less specialized and less precise vocabulary. The concept of 'way of life' included both a specific social and political structure, and a specific type of behaviour and personality.

It seems to me that many difficulties involved in the study of the democratic and totalitarian ways of life can be considerably diminished by acquiring the technique of thinking on two planes, sociological and psychological. Consequently, my next concern was to establish a series of correspondences between the sociological and psychological aspects of the democratic and totalitarian ways of life. Thus, starting with the analysis of a series of phenomena characteristic of various periods of democratization both in the ancient and modern worlds, I was led to the idea that democratization is closely associated with a series of processes by which the common pattern of life of a group of individuals becomes flexible. The transitions from the medieval to the modern economic system, from the rigidly organized medieval community to the dynamic society, gradually created in the Western world since the Renaissance, from a stable spiritual world dominated by religion to a world permanently open to changes and revisions, as science progresses, are in fact aspects in the process towards flexibility of the culture-patterns of Western societies. Democracy is consequently defined as a flexible

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society, that is, a social structure open to change and novelty, and yet preserving its own basic character.

Since flexibility has thus been established as one of the key concepts in the sociological aspects of the process of democratization, I transplanted it on to the psychological level and applied it to the mental structure of the individuals living in an historical period of democratization or in a constituted democratic society. It seemed to me that the transition from a non-democratic to a democratic period is also closely connected with an increased degree of flexibility in the mental structure of man. Thus, the mechanism of adjustment of the medieval man—if one can speak in such general terms—was dominated by more or less fixed types of reaction and his mind was more rigidly organised than that of modern man round certain habits, prejudices, sentiments, and ideas. On the other hand, the mind of the individuals living in the modern era becomes more and more dominated by mental functions and structures which makes it possible for them to adjust to a complex and changeable world. One of these structures is reason, which I described as the individual's capacity to grasp the order in change, and the unity in variety. Intelligence is another function required for the adjustment to a world dominated by change and novelty. Consequently the individual living in the modern world, that is, the man who creates and maintains the democratic way of life, makes more and more use of intellectual, and less and less of emotional and instinctive functions in his adjustment. As the result of this his own mental structure is rendered more flexible, that is, more adaptable to a changeable environment.

The analysis of the same historical periods revealed the fact that the process of democratization led gradually to an individualized social and cultural pattern. Economic and political individualism, religious individualism since the Reformation as well as individualism in art which started with the Renaissance and culminated in Romanticism, are basic features in the culture-patterns of Western societies. And here again I transferred the concept of individualization on to the psychological plane. I therefore endeavoured to prove that the mind of modern man becomes more and more dominated by structures and traits which individualize his behaviour. I have borrowed from psycho-analysis the concept of the ego with the intention of covering under one term the main individualizing traits and structures of the human mind. The growing tendency noticed in the members of modern societies to individualize their adjustment to the various aspects of their world led me to the conviction that the ego became more and more dominant in their mental structure.

All periods of democratization are characterized by strong ten-

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dencies towards the rationalization of the pattern of life. The tendency towards a rational type of economy, towards a rational type of social authority, expressed in its purest form in the authority of law, and a rationalistic type of thought are the main aspects of this. On the psychological plane one can easily observe that the mental structure of the individual belonging to these periods is dominated by reason; rational attitude towards authority and towards his fellow beings, rational attitude towards things and towards the world as a whole are the main characteristics of this type of man. The combination of the processes of individualization and of rationalization, both being characteristic of the historical periods of democratization, leads to a crucial point regarding the mental architecture of the democratic personality. The behaviour of this type of personality, his social behaviour in particular, is guided by a rational and individualized type of authority. One can call it the authority of reason, of conscience, or simply, inner authority.

I have noticed also that almost all periods of democratization are periods of social and spiritual prosperity. This led me to the idea that one of the mental characteristics of the individuals living in democratic societies consists in a strong feeling of security. This is displayed as self-confidence, and trust in the power of the human mind. The conviction that his own mind is a reliable guide to his actions is deeply rooted in this type of man.

DEMOCRACY AND TOTALITARIANISM

Fascism and Communism are products of our time. Many processes, sociological and psychological, which were necessary for the democratization of the way of life in Western Europe, have, in different circumstances, contributed to the creation of a totalitarian way of life. The creation of a flexible and individualized social structure, the weakening of tradition, the decreasing importance of prejudice and emotionality in the social life of contemporary man, the confidence in reason have all led directly or indirectly to the creation of a totalitarian way of life. Change and fluidity in the structure of society are important traits of the democratic way of life; the feeling and the desire for change are also important categories of the democratic frame of mind. They are, however, counter-balanced in the mind of the individual by the deep conviction that he can understand and master his environment, however rapid its transformation. Hence the feeling of security and freedom characteristic of the democratic man.

But not all social groups and sub-groups belonging to our contemporary world could adjust themselves to a flexible pattern of life. Moreover, in many individuals and groups the change and fluidity of

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEMOCRACY

the pattern of life aroused the feeling of instability and insecurity; the desire of change has thus turned into anxiety of change, the feeling of freedom has become fear of responsibility. Thus, the frame of mind of modern man suffered a radical change which in the long run resulted in a new type of adjustment, individual and collective. Fascism and Communism are two of the most characteristic aspects of this type of adjustment.

The basic trait of the Fascist way of life and of the Fascist personality consists in an increased importance of the emotional factors in individual and group behaviour. Since reason proved incapable of organizing a changeable and complex environment the whole pattern of life underwent a process of derationalization. A social structure based on emotional primitive bonds, emotional attitudes towards authority, irrational and magic ways of thinking in the field of culture are aspects of this process. Compared with the drive towards rationality, characteristic of the democratic way of life, Fascism is a symptom of regression in group behaviour.

Communism is rooted in the same human situation. The solution is, however, looked for in a different direction. The anxiety created in the modern working class by a series of disruptive changes in Western Europe in the early nineteenth century, the tension created in various sections of the modern Russian people by a long series of inner conflicts characteristic of the Russian culture-pattern, the insecurity created in the backward areas of poverty, have all resulted in an increased tendency towards rationalization. A super-organized economic system, from which 'the crises are forever eliminated', a rigidly organized state, a fixed pattern of historical development, are all meant to cure the basic insecurity from which many social groups belonging to the contemporary world suffer. The same crisis in the rational pattern of democracy has led in some cases to an escape into irrationality and the unconscious, while in others, to an increased effort towards rationalization. How to adjust himself to an increasingly fluid pattern of life while retaining his basic frame of mind, is a problem which the man belonging to a democratic world has sometimes failed to solve.

Though the expression has not been used, this study is permeated with the idea that Fascism and Communism are group adaptation syndromes. The evolution of modern civilization has reached a point at which the equilibrium, or the adequate adjustment of some individuals and groups cannot be attained except in the following two ways: (a) by a resurrection of the primitive instinctive and emotional forces of the mind, and (b) by a desperate effort to increase the control of consciousness and reason over all aspects of human behaviour. The former can be considered a syndrome of regressive group

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adjustment, the latter a syndrome of 'progressive adjustment'. But regressive (or to the right) and progressive (or to the left) have the same meaning when the movement starts from a state of flexible equilibrium. The main result is in both cases the same, a rigid organization of the pattern of human life. In the first case this was done in the name of the blind forces of instinct and feeling, in the second, in the name of the omniscient human reason.

Though this may over-simplify the whole problem, it would be useful to consider democracy as a group adjustment under conditions of ease, and totalitarianism as a group adjustment under conditions of stress. Hence the feelings of freedom involved in the democratic way of life and the feeling of effort and rigidity involved in the totalitarian way of life. This may serve as an answer to the questions whether, in Communist societies, individual freedom and the flexibility of the pattern of life are merely matters of time, and whether the individual born and brought up in these societies feels as free as the individual born in democracy. The truth is that the totalitarian way of life is the fruit of stress and anxiety. As such it contains in itself the seeds of rigidity; it can only develop within its own character, or collapse.

PSYCHOLOGY AND HISTORY

History was my main source of information. The Athenian community and civilization, the beginning of American society, the French Revolution and certain aspects of modern British civilization furnished the material for the democratic way of life. The German community under the Nazi regime and contemporary Soviet society formed the empirical basis for the study of the Fascist and Communist way of life. Certain aspects in the evolution of the modern Western world, the evolution of the working class in particular, also added material for the study of Communism.

This approach to a psychological subject seems anachronistic in our experimentalist era. An experiment with small social groups in the manner of Lewin or Moreno would have perhaps carried greater conviction for many psychologists. I toyed with the idea for quite a while and finally I had to give it up. The reasons are many. First, I could not help recognizing that with regard to the democratic way of life and even to the mental structure of the democratic personality I have learned much more from Tocqueville, Edmund Burke, Max Weber, Sombart and F. H. Knight than from Lewin and Moreno. As for the Communist and the Fascist ways of life and personality types, I had in front of me the published works of the leading representatives of these movements as well as the living examples of Soviet and Nazi societies. More useful were my own experiences, for I have

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lived successively under three political régimes: democracy up to 1938, Fascism from 1938 to 1944, and Communism from 1944 to 1948. As I was keenly interested in, and often deeply involved in, the political life of my country of birth (Rumania), my own experiences have offered significant material for the study of the democratic and totalitarian ways of life. The experiences gathered from my diplomatic missions in various Western countries have also furnished material for the present study.

The experiments set up to demonstrate the specific type of organization and authority in a democratic or authoritarian group revealed less, and that in a much more confusing manner, than what I previously knew from the observation of everyday life and from the study of various democratic and totalitarian civilizations. It seems that the psychologists and the sociologists concerned with this approach are much more interested in trying out a method—the experimental method—than in the furthering of human knowledge in this field. The instrument has become more important than what it is supposed to serve. Thus I soon discovered that it was a feeling of reality that led my way towards history in order to study some important aspects of group behaviour. This gave me the opportunity of studying the patterns of life of various groups on a natural scale, and in their most accomplished forms. I could select my examples of democratic and totalitarian societies in a manner which enabled me to arrive at an idea about the main sociological and psychological factors characteristic of the two ways of life. After I had thus framed my concepts of the democratic and totalitarian ways of life I subsequently made use of the main results furnished by recent psychological researches on this matter, based on experiments, tests, questionnaires, interviews and clinical observation. The main results obtained by the analysis of various democratic and totalitarian societies were on the whole supported and completed by those obtained by the methods mentioned above. I found this proceeding useful, and if the present study has a message it is to persuade the social psychologist to appeal as often as possible to history; in the historical forms of various civilizations he will find a fertile ground for the study of human social life.

METHODS

I started the study of the democratic and totalitarian ways of life by the analysis of a series of concrete cases of democratic and totalitarian civilization. My main aim was, however, to use these specific social forms as empirical ground for investigating into the nature of democracy and totalitarianism. I have, therefore, consciously attempted to build up 'ideal types' of democracy and

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totalitarianism. One can say that, at this stage of my study, I applied the method of 'phenomenological reduction', that is, from the mass of empirical data, sociological and psychological, I gradually proceeded towards the determination of a few central features characteristic of the democratic or totalitarian ways of life. I may have been arbitrary, I may have made mistakes, but the conviction—that this was the best way of organizing a rich and often incoherent material offered by the study of history did not for a moment leave me throughout my work on the present study. Thus, I have found that the processes of social and cultural flexibility, or rationalization and of minimization of power are characteristic of all democratic societies. The processes of social and cultural rigidity, of the 'emotionalization' or super-rationalization of life and that of the concentration of power are, on the other hand, characteristic of all modern totalitarian societies.

I did not stop here in my search for the ideal type. Aiming at finding terms by which to cover sociological, psychological and spiritual phenomena, I defined democracy as an ethical way of life. Human personality and personal relations form the basis of the scale of value in such a society. The essence of democracy is human dialogue. Thus, I tried to point out the futility of defining democracy in terms of liberal economy. A way of life based on economic values is basically individualistic and as such it cannot form the essence of democracy. It was only during the liberal period of Europe that *homo economicus* put on an ethical mask. Thus, he worked himself into believing that by pursuing his own interests he aimed at the happiness of the many. Democracy is not a purely religious way of life either, for, this is based on 'logos', the absorption of the human essence into a transcendental order.* A balance between the divine and secular order was necessary in order to make a democratic way of life possible. And finally, democracy is not a political way of life, the essence of which lies in the external character of social authority. Strong quasi-religious and political elements are found in a totalitarian way of life. But what really constitutes the essence of totalitarianism is its complete impermeability to an ethical way of life as described above.

In order to complete the picture of the ideal types, I described democracy as a way of life dominated by the feelings of ease and

*Rousseau, who in many ways represents the type of personality characteristic of the modern period of democratization, wants to be 'in dialogue' with God. 'Je voulais que Dieu m'eût dit ce qu'il n'avait pas dit à d'autres' says his *Vicaire Savoyard*. Relationships of interdependence, if not of equality, between man and God form an important feature in the pattern of the Reformation. Angelus Silesius expresses this boldly 'I know that without me God cannot exist for a single second.'

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DEMOCRACY

naturalness which arose from a certain harmony in the pattern of life. The Greek term *eukosmia* and what the French mean by *douceur des mœurs* are adequate expressions of this state of affairs. The totalitarian way of life is, on the other hand pervaded by extreme emotions, by the feeling of effort and rigidity, and by the tension aroused by an ambivalent attitude—the feeling of unlimited power alternates with the feeling of impotence, the feeling of insecurity is carefully covered by an inflated sense of adventure, the fear of chaos is strongly repressed by rigid organization.

Empirically minded sociologists and psychologists may find fault with a certain detachment from facts and a certain tendency towards abstract thinking displayed throughout this study. I can only say that this was necessarily implied in my approach. Here I touch upon another point regarding the method used in this study. My approach was integralist. I wished in the first place to see the democratic, the Fascist and the Communist ways of life as parts of a whole, or as stages in the unfolding of the historical process of contemporary civilization.

I have avoided any 'reductionist' view of democracy and totalitarianism and of contemporary European civilization in general. The temptation was great to consider the economic process, as Marx did, or the religious factors, as Max Weber did, as the basis of modern civilization and to infer from this the psychological changes in modern man. But this would have implied that I, as a social psychologist, know much more than I do in fact know. That is to say, I know that one specific factor of modern civilization can be considered as the originator or the cause of others. This assumption forms the basis of a reductionist point of view. I refrained as much as possible from any reductionist attitude, be it called economism, idealism, sociologism—in the manner of Karl Mannheim for instance—or even psychologism. I do not know, for instance, whether a series of sociological phenomena characteristic of the process of democratization preceded in time or whether they caused the psychological phenomena characteristic of the same process. I have considered the historical process as a whole and pointed to its various aspects, economic, sociological, spiritual and psychological, without assuming that they determined each other in a specific manner and order. My assumptions were that they belong to a structure and that they are conditioned by the whole to which they belong.

A reductionist attitude requires metaphysical ferment and a considerable power of belief which I do not possess. Throughout this study I was unable to decide which is more important in the historical process, the sociological or the psychological factors, society or the individual. If I have to say something about this problem, my con-

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viction is that behind all this—the individual, society, psychological and sociological factors—there lies the process of history itself which in its unfolding relies at one time on individual, at others on supra-individual factors. How to understand the structure of history, in which human personality is a basic factor, was one of my chief concerns throughout this study. It can, therefore be said that the study of democracy and totalitarianism has been carried out in the function of two variables only, culture-pattern and type of personality.

What I have just said is connected with a certain point in my approach, namely, with my political prejudices. It is only fair to say that I started the present study with strong prejudices for democracy. And although these prejudices have not diminished in vigour, yet with the advance of the present study they became mingled with the conviction that the totalitarian forms of our times sprang up from the historical process by a certain necessity. I am referring to the psychological and moral concept of necessity. Consequently as true child of my age I became partly resigned before, and partly terrified by the 'monster' of history. I seem to read in a new context the meaning of the ancient myth. Chronos creating, and then eating his own offspring. Sometimes this inner tension burst out in emotional attitudes and value judgements.

Before closing this introduction I feel I have to mention the extent to which I am aware of the main shortcomings of the present study. The canvas on which I chose to paint was too large; my ability to deal with historical facts was often too limited, and the extent to which I could rely on psychological research in this field was insignificant. I can sum up all these difficulties by saying that the nearer I came to the end of this study the more I realized that I was at the beginning. It is with this feeling that I closed the last chapter.