

## Power: Models, Social Psychology, Neurobiology and Pathology

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*MUDr. František Koukolík in his short study talks about power, debilitation and a dark trio.*

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### ON THE NATURE OF POWER

A classic description of power can be found in Hobbes's Leviathan (1651). Weber's simple definition says that to have power means to have the possibility to force someone to do something against his will, which is done by means of aggressiveness and/or by manipulation. There also exist a close relationship between power and property. Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius and Pratto) states three types of social hierarchy, based on age and gender structure of population, and also on an "arbitrary set" (social class, race, ethnic origin, and religion). It considers all types of group conflicts to be a demonstration of creation and existence of hierarchies as the basic human characteristic, conditioned by evolution. It explains the oppression with an individual or group discrimination and the "inequality of behaviour", which among others consists of a permanent inferiority of other groups, the handicapped, or ideological asymmetry. Those oppressed also support the legitimizing myths.

Authoritarianism is a combination of authoritarian submissiveness, aggression and clinging to the conventions. One of the demonstrations of authoritarianism can be dehumanization: animalistic and mechanical. Power has phylogenetic and ontogenetic roots. We can understand humans, similarly to their evolution ancestors, as social primates that form hierarchized groups. Ontogenetic roots of power/authoritarianism are described in Duckitt's theory. On the other hand, it is true that evolution is much more complex, dynamic and flexible than what neo-darwinian synthesis described. We also have to take into consideration the theory of co-evolution of genes and culture, the theory of niche, and also the inclusive

heritability, including the discoveries of epigenetics; which is probably best described by the current type of bio-psycho-social model. As an example, we can take the effects of stress, child abuse, and the effects of a socio-economic pressure.

People are characterized by high degree of altruism and cooperation, they are conditioned by strong reciprocity which is defined with altruistic punishment and rewarding. If people can, they punish unfair behaviour. Unstable social hierarchy is for human brains more difficult than stable hierarchy. The core of political conservatism is the aversion to change and justification of inequality. Political conservatism corresponds to the degree of fear of death, instability of a system in which people live, dogmatism, the inability to tolerate ambiguity, the need for an order and mind withdrawal, the need to avoid uncertainty, and the fear of threat and loss.

System justification theory explains the paradoxically affecting behaviour of inferior social groups, and dominant behaviour of superior groups. Owen and Davidson described the hubris syndrome (the syndrome of power and pride) as a combination of the features of a narcissistic, antisocial and histrionic personality, with some unique features. They used this description in a set of 18 US presidents, and 26 UK prime ministers between 1908 and 2008.

Koukolík (2010) formulated the hypothesis of a power obsession as a combination of hubris syndrome and/or the connection to stupidity.

## **DEBILIZATION**

Debilization is an intentional and unintentional, targeted and untargeted oppression or damaging of positively created rational, emotional and social needs with which people are born, including the oppression or damaging of the possibility of their development. Debilization is a set of power tools. In the scope of debilization, there is (alphabetically): absurdity, anti-science, anti-culture, bureaucracy, irrationality, power aspects of religion, propaganda, and stupidity. Due to the limited space of the lecture, I omit the description of poverty and hunger, impact of drugs and alcohol, environment damaging, armament, and wars.

To the scope of absurdity, there belong Barnum's effect, irrational skepticism, Koestler's delusion, the activity of the temporal lobe of brain, expectations, imagination, hidden causes, syndrome of false memory and the will to believe.

Anti-culture has been described, for example, by Julien Benda (1927), Alain Finkielkraut (1988), or Chris Hedges (2009). We see the examples of it in everyday life. We can consider

as a part of anti-culture the scientific misconduct: the falsification and fabrication of data, and plagiarism. The percentage of verifiably plagiarised academic theses rose tenfold in 1975-2010.

Bureaucracy is described by Parkinson's laws, and Peter's and Dilbert's principle. There is a new Charlton's analysis (2010) that used some of the principles of the evolution theory.

The definition of irrationality (Sutherland) says that any intellectual process is irrational that leads to the conclusion or decision that, considering the evidence and the time available for the decision making, was not the best that could have been reached. There exist more than twenty mechanisms of irrationality. The most widespread are the mistake of first impression, obedience, conformity, thoroughness which is misplaced, and all forms of bias. Cognitive dissonance is also widely used. Classic experiment of Lord's group (1979) and Westen's group (2004).

Religiosity is a manifold phenomenon: aspects of power are known, for example, from the crusades, behaviour of the inquisition, religious wars in Europe, Calvinist police control, militant Islamism is characterized by sharia, and a large number of current militant fights are of a religious nature. As an example of a barbarian demonstration is the female genital mutilation originating from pre-Islamic time. There are mentioned about 2 million interventions a year, and about 130 million of women from a large number of countries above the equator, including Egypt, are affected by this.

Propaganda is an attempt of some authority to persuade about something the largest number of people possible. The purpose of propaganda is gaining and/or keeping political power. The pillars of propaganda are simplicity, touching emotions, addressing imagination and (Pavlov's) repetition. Literature shows about 30 propagandistic tricks, starting with marks and halos. They should be part of common knowledge.

Propagandistic influencing is highly effective, where the neuronal is commonly known. Stupidity is neither an insult nor a ridicule, it is not a display of mental retardation, a fallacy, or ignorance. The simplest definition says that stupidity is a collapse of reaction between behaviour and the environment conditioned by the function of the Schema. That is a learning programme, or a larger number of them determined both genetically and by learning. Schemas

determine the way of cognition. As a part of stupidity there is a syndrome of group thinking (Janis).

## DARK TRIO

Dark trio is an often occurring combination of machiavelism, narcissism and psychopathy. Machiavelism is understood as a combination of opportunism and egoism. There exists an investigation test/scale. Machiavelism has a neuronal correlate corresponding to its degree.

Approximately 4% of adult population (with men in the majority) suffer from antisocial personality disorder, and about one quarter of them are psychopaths (Cleckley, Hare). Psychopaths are diagnosed by a qualified psychiatrist or a psychologist, on the basis of an objective anamnesis, examination, and Hare's test. Fully developed psychopaths are characterized by affective dimensions, interpersonal dimensions, life-style, and anti-social dimensions. Heartlessness and callousness of psychopaths is probably determined genetically; it can also be caused by perinatal brain damage, or by deprivation of attachment and socio-economic relations. A simple classification distinguishes unsuccessful (criminal) and successful (non-criminal) psychopaths, whose disorder is not complete. We can consider as a type of psychopathy a person characterized by a fierce need for power. Company psychopaths occur in the leadership of corporations more often than in general population. Fully developed psychopathy has a structural and functional brain correlate. There has been found differences between violent and non-violent psychopaths in their function and structure of brain.

## Sources

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