

## **HUBRIS SYNDROME AND A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL PSYCHIATRY: need to protect prosocial behavior, public benefit and safety of our civilisation**

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The amazing world of psychiatry today is more than medical specialty. It is a „broad church“ of disparate discourses and different practices (Lolas 2010). Psychiatry has several partial or fragmentary identities related to its biologic, psychodynamic, and social subspecialties with many psychiatric schools. Many of the psychiatric schools, not only do not accept, but criticize the most basic tenets and treatment principles of the others (Jakovljević 2008). Political psychiatry is a black sheep among different branches of contemporary psychiatry because neither its theoretical concept is well formulated nor its practice is established as a coherent field.

Psychiatry can play an essential role in society in general through its understanding of human nature and behavior in complex interactions. In psychiatry there has been a prevailing tendency to reduce the role of scope of the profession in dealing with political issues which is considered to be outside the proper sphere of competence and propriety. With his paper on the hubris syndrome, David Owen has made important contributions to the new perspective on scope and role of political psychiatry which should be warmly welcomed. From Greek origin, the word hubris specifically refers to „the excessive pride and ambition that usually leads to the downfall of a hero in classical tragedy“ (Encarta Concise English Dictionary, 2001) or „a tale of how an honourable man pursuing honourable goals was afflicted with arrogant pride and led his nation towards catastrophe“ (Collins Cobuild Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 2006). The word hubris also includes the meaning of „inviting disaster“ (Russel 2011).

Owen's contribution to the political psychiatry should not be eclipsed by the psychiatry of politicians, because his work has relevance for all MDs and psychiatrists who care for patients who are VIPs (very important persons) holding other powerful professional positions, for example in corporate business like multinational companies, banks, etc. He also described physical and mental illnesses which may impair the quality of decisions made by political leaders affecting the interest of people they represent. In addition, his case histories revealed the common tendency for politicians to keep their illnesses secret thereby avoiding the best medical advice and treatment. What is even

more important, he proposed remedial measures to minimise the impact of ill health on the politicians' ability to deal with affairs of state (Russel 2011).

### **Political psychology and political psychopathology**

Political psychology is an interdisciplinary academic field dedicated to the relationships between psychology and political science, with a focus on the role of human thought, emotion, and behavior in politics (Sapiro 2001). It emerged in the 1940s with an increasing cross-fertilization between political sciences and psychology. Psychopolitics refers to „research and action on the psychological aspects of political behavior, such as the effects on society of different types of leadership (democratic, fascist, socialist)“ as well as to „the use of psychological tactics or strategies by politicians (Corsini 2002). Psychopolitics also includes „application of psychiatric knowledge or theory to the process of government „ and to „the shaping of public policy“ (Campbell 2004). Political genetics refers to „applications of genetic concepts to social processes through political action“ as well as to „the incorporation of genetic theory into political dogma or national policy“ (Campbell 2004). As normal and abnormal psychology have been widely recognised it is also appropriate to speak about political psychology and political psychopathology as scientific fields. In this context, political psychopathology should be an important field of political psychiatry.

### **A redefinition of political psychiatry: A new look on an old odious term**

The term political psychiatry has different meaning for different people, but in general the negative and odious connotations of the psychiatric abuse prevail. In Wikipedia „political abuse of psychiatry is the purported misuse of psychiatric diagnosis, detention and treatment for the purposes of obstructing the fundamental human rights of certain groups and individuals in a society“. Instead of abuse of psychiatry with political aims, political psychiatry should be defined as a discipline which deals with research and knowledge about how mental disorders and political events and processes influence each other as well as

how politicians use psychiatry and psychology to influence people's behaviors and to achieve their political goals. According Corsini (2002) political psychiatry refers to „the application of psychiatric principles and knowledge to the formation of public policy, especially as it relates to mental health services, treatment of the mentally ill, questions of medical ethics, prosecution and rehabilitation of criminals, and attempts at thought and behavior control“.

Two distinct streams can be recognized in the political history of psychiatry: first, as social control of deviance, and second, psychiatry as advocacy of „the right to be different“ (Jablensky 1992). The scientific model of political psychiatry as an interdisciplinary field between psychopathology, mental health sciences and political sciences is closely associated with the basic belief that psychiatry's concern with the individual as part of the social matrix can be extended to society itself and political processes in psychological and psychiatric terms and concepts. Recent dramatic transformations in social and political structures as well as in life philosophy and values have significant impact on mental health and psychopathology searching for a new role of psychiatry in contemporary society.

### **Hubris syndrome: Need to protect our society and civilisation**

Introducing his term the hubris syndrome, Owen wanted to establish 'causal link between holding power and aberrant behavior that has the whiff of mental instability about it' (see Russel 2011). He developed his concept of the hubris syndrome on the observations on George W. Bush and Tony Blair (see Russel 2011). According Owen and Davidson (2009) at least 3 of the 14 defining behaviours should be present, of which at least 1 should be among the 5 unique components (5, 6, 10, 12 and 13) to satisfy the diagnostic criteria of the hubris syndrome. The hubris syndrome includes the behaviour seen in a person who: 1. sees the world as a place for self-glorification through the use of power, 2. has a tendency to take action primarily to enhance personal image, 3. shows disproportionate concern for image and presentation, 4. exhibits messianic zeal and exaltation in speech, 5. conflates self with nation or organisation, 6. uses the royal 'we' in conversations, 7. shows excessive self-confidence, 8. manifestly has contempt for others, 9. shows accountability only to a higher court (history or God), 10. displays the unshakable belief that he will be vindicated in that court, 11. loses contact with reality, 12. resorts to restlessness and impulsive actions, 13. allows moral rectitude to obviate consideration of practicality, cost or outcome, and 14. displays incompetence with disregard for the nuts and bolts of policy-making. This syndrome is associated with the possession of power, especially with power which has been linked with exorbitant success. Rules, laws, morals and conventions are considered to be inapplicable to those who believe they are above all that

issues. Hubris syndrome is close to the concept of political type of personality that is characterised by concern with power over other people and being in charge of events (see Corsini 2002), but it represents the dangerous power intoxication with tragic consequences for individual and for wider society. The hubris syndrome is in some aspects close to narcissistic personality disorder (7 of the 14 defining behaviors of the hubris syndrome are among the criteria for narcissistic personality disorder), antisocial personality disorder and histrionic personality disorder. Key to diagnosis of the hubris syndrome is a position of substantial power for a certain period of time as a precursor of the syndrome developing. The hubris syndrome is likely to abate once power is lost.

In Greek myths, the hubris often afflicted rulers and conquerors who abused their power and authority to gratify their own vanity, ambition and selfish interests. According to the logic of the ancient myths, we should have in mind the dynamics linking hubris and Nemesis. Jungians takes the cyclic hubris-nemesis dynamic quite seriously. Namely, hubris above all is what attracted Nemesis, the goddess of fate and divine revenge who then retaliated to humiliate and destroy the pretender, often through terror and devastation (Ronfeldt 1994). The sentence „same people that warships you when you are going up, will kick you on the way down“ illustrates hubris-nemesis complex in celebrity world. According to Ronfeldt (1994) the list of international figures whose mindsets combine hubris and nemesis includes Adolph Hitler, Fidel Castro, Ayatollah Homeini, Saddam Hussein, Mohamar Khadafi, and probably Slobodan Milosevic and Kim Il Sung. Exemplars of hubris without much nemesis might include Charles de Gaulle, Shah Mohamed Reza Pahlavi, Eva and Huan Peron, and perhaps Manuel Noriega and Aron Sharon, while the impulses of nemesis without much hubris appear in figures like Mahatma Ghandi, Ernesto „Che“ Ghevara, Ho Chi Minh, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Saladin (Ronfeldt 1994). Some cultures and subcultures, for example toxic subculture of celebrity, and some social conditions, are supposed to be more susceptible than others to hubris-nemesis dynamics. The wars in former Yugoslavia 1990-1995 were closely associated with different issues of political psychopathology.

Pathological strivings for status, rank, and power can take many forms including hubris syndrome and narcissistic personality disorder, and may be associated with a huge addictive potential. The human ego is more vulnerable to the development of acquired narcissism than is generally believed. Hubris syndrome is a serious social problem which in different ways can affect the continuance of our civilisation. We are all dependent upon the good judgement and decisions of our political leaders, especially at times of crisis and war. That's why political leaders need self-control as well as external restraints.

## Conclusion

Due to progress in many mental health disciplines, psychiatry has the historical opportunity to shape the future of mental health care, medicine, politics and society. The hubris syndrome has opened a useful discussion on the relationships of psychiatry and politics, scope and role of political psychiatry, including responsibility for prosocial political behavior, the public benefit and the security of our civilisation.

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