PART THREE

Psychoanalysis and Psy-Knowledge in Soft and Hard Dictatorships
Psychoanalysis in Troubled Times: Conformism or Resistance?

Stephen Frosh

Preface

If psychoanalysis is at least in part a “Jewish science,” as I think it is (Frosh 2005), then there are plenty of reasons to be a little anxious about it in Hungary, whatever celebrations we might have of Ferenczi, Bálint, or Róheim. The magnitude of the devastation of Hungary’s Jewish population in 1944 (400,000 of them were killed in Nazi death camps, rounded up under Eichmann’s guidance with the aid of the Hungarian authorities) has rarely been fully acknowledged in Hungary itself, and the continuation, perhaps even the rise, of anti-Semitism in contemporary Hungary is well documented (e.g., Kovács 2012). Whether this should be understood as an element in a generally authoritarian political context marked by the dominance of the nationalistic ultra-right—the hardline response to the 2015 refugee crisis being just one instance of this—or whether it is more specific, directed precisely at Jews and the idea of the Jew, is something that requires more detailed and careful analysis than I am capable of giving. But it hangs as a black cloud over my thinking and maybe over that of others. Psychoanalysis in Europe had Jewish origins and was dominated by Jews until the coming of the Nazis. Then it was destroyed, with various degrees of heroic resistance and culpable complicity, and neither the international psychoanalytic movement nor many of the countries involved have fully dealt with the legacy of this destruction (Frosh 2012). This is a legacy of a parricide, perhaps, or an atavism, or a straightforward act of hatred followed by denial. It keeps cropping up too, for example in enactments in psychoanalytic congresses, where anti-Semitism seems
somehow to appear in the complex mix of attitudes and affiliations that psychoanalytic history inspires (Ehrich et al. 2009).

I will leave this distasteful topic shortly but also abstract it into some thinking about psychoanalysis’ institutional responses to some of the pressures it has faced in other authoritarian societies. Without documenting in detail the response of Hungarian psychoanalysts to political authoritarianism, it is clear that the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society, after the bright start led by Ferenczi, went through some very bad times under the fascist and communist regimes. It is also notable that psychoanalysis was subjected to anti-Semitism from early on. Here is Ferenczi, writing to Freud in 1919 after the collapse of the brief Soviet Republic:

After the unbearable “Red terror,” which lay heavy on one’s spirit like a nightmare, we now have the White one . . . the ruthless clerical/anti-Semitic spirit seems to have eked out a victory . . . we Hungarian Jews are now facing a period of brutal persecution of Jews . . . It is naturally the best thing for psychoanalysis to continue working in complete withdrawal and without noise. (Mészáros 2012, 85)

This particular withdrawal was forced upon the analysts by anti-Semitism; as will be seen, other occasions of political withdrawal have had other determinants. There were various immediate effects of the end of the Soviet experiment, including Ferenczi’s dismissal from his university appointment (he had been the first Professor of Psychoanalysis in a university department), a wave of emigration of Jews and intellectuals, including several psychoanalysts (for instance, Melanie Klein and Sándor Radó), and the lost opportunity for Budapest to become the center of European psychoanalysis. After 1938 and the adoption of more stringent anti-Jewish laws by the right-wing Hungarian government, many more Jewish analysts left; those that remained struggled terribly during the war years, and several were killed. Judit Mészáros, seeing the losses to psychoanalysis as an indirect result of anti-Semitism rather than an attack on psychoanalysis itself (which was more the case under communism), and praising the action of the non-Jewish leaders of the residual psychoanalytic movement, comments:

The antipsychoanalysis ideology of Nazism—which declared psychoanalysis to be a Jewish intellectual product and launched a propaganda campaign against it that distorted its principles and created an atmo-
sphere of utter contempt—had essentially not managed to seep into Hungary during the 1930s and 1940s. Nevertheless, indirectly, both the White Terror under the Horthy regime and the anti-Jewish laws as of 1938 as well as the destruction wrought by Hungarian and German Nazis—through the persecuted Jewry—led to massive losses in Hungarian psychoanalysis. (Mészáros 2012, 102)

Although she is careful to document the efforts to help Hungarian Jewish analysts, Mészáros also notes the damage that was done to the Hungarian society and the ambiguities of its continuing official survival during the war. She notes:

In 1939 before World War II broke out, the Hungarian Society included 28 members and three associated members. Five of them emigrated in the years to follow: Róbert Bak, Sándor Feldmann, Fanny Hann Kende, Klára Lázár-Gerő, and Géza Róheim. During the war, no further data were available. In 1944, as with most of the European associations—the Danish, Dutch, French, and Swiss—the Hungarian Society showed little sign of life. . . Tragically, several Hungarian psychoanalysts were killed in the concentration camps and by war in 1944 and 1945. (Mészáros 2012, 92–93)

There is a lot more to say to bring the story up to date in the light of the enforced closure of the Hungarian Psychoanalytical Society in 1949 and its resonance with further, now Stalinist, anti-Semitism, but this is perhaps sufficient context. In Hungary, where the conference from which this publication arises took place, there is a complex psychoanalytic history that—as is the case in many other places—is deeply infused with the crises of twentieth century authoritarian politics.

Politics

The links between psychoanalysis and politics are deep-rooted and provocative. There are, for instance, many examples of the ways in which psychoanalysis has been used as an instrument to advance progressive politics by supplying a theory of the social subject that is compatible with radical critique and a practice that is emancipatory. These examples stem from pre–World-
War-II Europe and arguably can be seen to have their source in Freud’s own late “social” texts (e.g., Freud 1930). After the war, they went relatively quiet until taken up by Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and the expansion of a radical community, mostly outside the psychoanalytic movement, and a strong infusion of feminist critique that did in some cases include feminist psychoanalysts (or feminists who became psychoanalysts, e.g., Mitchell 1974; see also Frosh 1999 and Zaretsky 2015). Here, however, I want to take up another aspect: the fact that however much psychoanalysis lends itself to progressive thinking, it also shows a repeated tendency to drift *institutionally* towards conformity. This is, of course, never the whole story: wherever psychoanalysis conforms, we find analysts who oppose this process, and there have also been strong institutional examples of progressive politics, for example in the “free psychoanalytic clinics” movement of the 1920s and 1930s in Berlin, Vienna, London, and importantly in Budapest (Danto 2005), or even the British Psychoanalytic Society’s opposition to nuclear arms in the 1990s (Segal 1995). But conformism has been visible and at times has manifested itself in situations where one might hope that psychoanalysis would come into its own as an ethical practice of political resistance. I do not, of course, believe that this is a phenomenon unique to psychoanalysis: plenty of professional organizations have shown themselves only too ready to leap to attention when required to do so by the “authorities.” But it is especially instructive to see psychoanalysis, the “science” of the unconscious, struggling with its own unconscious, to some extent at least, unawares.

**Conformity and Criticality**

**NEUTRALITY**

Let me work with an example here, relating to the question of psychoanalytic “neutrality” and its effect on psychoanalytic institutions. Neutrality properly refers to the stance of the psychoanalyst as “at a point equidistant from the id, the ego, and the superego” (A. Freud 1937, 28), reflecting the idea that the analyst should maintain a neutral thinking function resistant to hasty judgment. More fully, Laplanche and Pontalis (1973, 271) direct as follows:

The analyst must be *neutral* in respect of religious, ethical, and social values—that is to say, he must not direct the treatment according to
some ideal, and should abstain from counselling the patient; he must be *neutral* too as regards manifestations of transference (this rule usually being expressed by the maxim, “Do not play the patient’s game”); finally, he must be *neutral* towards the discourse of the patient: in other words, he must not, *a priori*, lend a special ear to particular parts of this discourse, or read particular meanings into it, according to his theoretical preconceptions.

This is the kind of neutrality that allows something to happen, playing a waiting game to see what will emerge, refusing to censor, and in consequence supporting not only the disturbing and potentially disgusting, but also, relatedly, the radical and new. Censorship always reflects the status quo; it derives from an assumption about what is proper and tolerable, what is safe and respectable. Neutrality in the way it is described here undermines censorship precisely by not taking sides.

This particular version of neutrality has been significantly challenged by relational analysts and others who not only register the impossibility of not making one’s values felt but who also see the attempt to do so as a way in which the analyst avoids taking responsibility for the effects of her or his presence and activity in the psychoanalytic encounter (e.g., Benjamin 2004). The appeal to “neutrality” can also produce modes of political conformism that both undermine psychoanalysis’ claims to be a progressive discipline and reveal aspects of its “unconscious” formation. The issue here is that the “neutrality” with which the analyst faces the patient becomes interpreted as “neutrality” in relation to the external world and specifically to political processes, even when these impinge very strongly on the mental well-being of patients and of populations, and indeed on the possibility of a “neutral” psychoanalytic encounter, free from undue external “impingements.”

I want to present two specific instances here, extremely briefly. I have written about them both elsewhere in more detail, and reproduce some of this material in what follows;¹ but in the discussion, I want to come back to the question of what it might mean to consider psychoanalysis “in troubled times.”

¹ The next two sections are extracted and abbreviated from Frosh 2005 and from Rubin et al. 2016.
GERMANY

The first comes from the now well-mined history of psychoanalysis in Germany during the Nazi period. There is a lot that one could say about this, and here I am going to very selectively present a tiny amount of material to raise the issue of the corrosiveness of what purports to be psychoanalytic “neutrality” but can so easily become complicity. By the early 1930s, German psychoanalysis was a model for how psychoanalysis might be practiced and developed in an advanced society. Yet, within a remarkably short time after the accession of the Nazis to power in 1933, all this had gone. Max Eitingon, who had headed the German Psychoanalytic Society (DPG), left for Palestine, and the DPG was taken over by two non-Jewish analysts who effectively became collaborators with the Nazis: Felix Boehm and Carl Müller-Braunschweig. With the active connivance of Ernest Jones, the DPG was “Aryanized” by the end of 1935, nearly three years before other Jewish professionals, such as lawyers and doctors, were excluded from their equivalent organizations. By 1936, Otto Fenichel could comment that the “Aryan” members of the DPG “are avoiding any contact—both the slightest professional contact as well as personal contact—with their non-Aryan colleagues” (Eickhoff 1995, 950). The exclusion of the Jews was embraced with some enthusiasm by their non-Jewish erstwhile colleagues, whether because of fear of being associated with the specifically derogated marginality of the Jews, or because of active anti-Semitism.

The pressure to resign under which the Jewish analysts were put can be seen as a version of the famously brusque treatment meted out by the psychoanalytic movement to Wilhelm Reich. Reich had been regarded as an analyst of considerable promise in Vienna in the 1920s, where he had conducted a highly regarded seminar on therapy, a seminar that bore fruit in his 1933 classic, Character Analysis. Moving to Berlin, he joined the communist party in 1930 and caused dissent within it because of his views on the gravity of the working classes’ defeat with the advent of Hitler, as well as because of his promotion of sexual liberation (Sharaf 1983). From that time on, he became increasingly involved both in a theoretical project to link Freudianism with Marxism and in practical politics surrounding sexual reform; along with Fenichel, he was the acknowledged leader of the “political Freuds” (Jacoby 1983). Increasingly, however, Reich’s ideas diverged from Freudian psychoanalysis, becoming more biological in focus and less interested in the fantasy dimensions of psychic life. More relevantly, his political radicalism was concerning within the psychoanalytic movement, with Freud himself demon-
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strably critical. With the Nazis in power, the threat posed by “political” activity to the safety of psychoanalysis within Germany was seen by Freud as well as by Jones as potentially extremely damaging, and Reich was its most flagrant exponent. Anna Freud’s letter to Jones from April 27, 1933, shows the reasoning as well as the emotion:

My father’s opinion on this matter is: If psychoanalysis is to be prohibited, it should be prohibited for what it is, and not for the mixture [or “hodgepodge”] of politics and psychoanalysis which Reich represents. My father can’t wait to get rid of him inasmuch as he attaches himself to psychoanalysis; what my father finds offensive in Reich is the fact that he has forced psychoanalysis to become political; psychoanalysis has no part in politics. (Steiner 2000, 128)

Promotion of the idea that “psychoanalysis has no part in politics” was a key element in the defense of psychoanalysis against the Nazi critique of its inherently destabilizing nature, and this was precisely the line taken by Boehm and Müller-Braunschweig in their negotiations with the Nazis. Boehm did this explicitly by arguing to the Nazis that there were two kinds of psychoanalysis: the genuine version, which could be of service to the state, and the other, distorted, politicized version brandished by Reich. That this paved the way for a distinction between “pure” and “Jewish” psychoanalysis was not a point made explicitly, but it was clearly a move made available by this rhetoric about “two types of analysis.” Freud himself had taken the view that Reich and Fenichel had been using the International Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse, of which Fenichel was editor, for “Bolshevik propaganda,” a result of which was that Fenichel lost his position (Nitzschke 1999, 353). As implied in Anna Freud’s letter, Freud was actually quite brutal in his view of what should happen to Reich. Writing to Eitingon in 1933, he commented, “Since Reich is now causing trouble in Vienna, he should be removed from the DPG. I want this done for scientific reasons but have no objection to it being done for political reasons as well and wish him success if he wants to play the martyr” (Nitzschke 1999, 355). Preserving psychoanalysis by getting rid of troublemakers had always been one of Freud’s strategies and has never been alien to psychoanalytic institutions’ way of operating. Here this approach was additionally fuelled by the hope that depoliticizing psychoanalysis by excluding its wildest radical would convince the German authorities that it should be judged on its “scientific” merits alone.
As it turned out and as Reich and a few others were prescient enough to see, this “non-political” attitude effectively paved the way for a partial Nazification of psychoanalysis, while depriving psychoanalysis of its crucial critical role. It also resulted in the “secret” expulsion of Reich from the DPG and the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in the summer of 1933, a decision that Reich seems not to have known about until he arrived at the Lucerne Congress of August 1934, when Müller-Braunschweig informed him that he had been expelled from the DPG a year earlier. Over the course of that congress it became apparent to Reich that the leadership of the IPA endorsed this decision. Jones later claimed that Reich had resigned from the IPA at that congress, but this, it seems, was never Reich’s view (Sharaf 1983, 188).

Jacoby (1983) has discussed some of the complex politics surrounding Reich at this time, pointing out that he did not have the unequivocal support even of the “political” Freudians, notably Fenichel. However, the key point here is not so much how difficult Reich was even for those who might be seen as potentially aligned with him, but rather that from Freud down, the early period of Nazi rule in Germany was seen as requiring extreme caution concerning any potentially subversive political involvement, and that the consequence of this was that the politics of the psychoanalytic movement itself began to be played out under the shadow of Nazi demands. In particular, splitting the presentation of psychoanalysis so that it appeared that its political, or at least socially critical, dimension could and should be divorced from its “scientific” claims, was a strategy employed to make psychoanalysis seem safe and useful to the new German authorities. However, this strategy was not only parallel to, but formed a metaphoric unity with the splitting of the movement between its “Jewish” and “Aryan” components, the former being what marked it as potentially subversive and parasitic, whereas the latter made it serviceable. The seeds of psychoanalysis’ later absorption into the dejudaicized “New German Psychotherapy” were very strongly sown here: without its critical dimension and without its Jewish elements (both people and ideas), it would indeed survive, but only subserviently, as a technology devoted to making citizens productive.

BRAZIL

My second example comes from one of the most “psychoanalytic” countries in the world, Brazil, which has a long and complex history of engagement with psychoanalysis as a “modernizing” force in a context in which racial
and sexual “primitivity” were seen as requiring understanding and control (Plotkin 2011). After World War II, Brazilian psychoanalysis was organized according to an idealized version of the IPA’s protocols, in the sense that it sought orthodoxy as a way of becoming recognized—an instance of a kind of “colonial” dependency present in many Brazilian professional and academic environments. Part of this orthodoxy was adherence to political neutrality, an issue that came to a head during the period of the Brazilian dictatorship in the 1960s and 1970s, especially during the ultra-violent “years of lead” (1968–1974). In this period, which saw a perhaps surprising expansion of “official” psychoanalysis in the country (Russo 2012), an event occurred in which the societies recognized by the IPA in Rio de Janeiro, under the guise of neutrality and “safeguarding psychoanalysis,” covered up participation in torture and repression. This episode was documented by Helena Besserman Vianna in her 1994 book Don’t Tell a Soul. The book title was inspired by a 1993 request by an official of the IPA that the author, who was in some ways a “victim” of the affair, not talk about this subject any more.

The case began in 1973, when a clandestine revue published a note naming some “torturers” in Rio de Janeiro; included in the note was the name of Amilcar Lobo, a trainee analyst in one of the psychoanalytic institutes in Rio de Janeiro (“Rio 1”). Lobo had been in analysis for years with Leão Cabernite, who at the time was the President of Rio 1 and the Brazilian Psychoanalytic Association. The note was anonymously forwarded to a psychoanalytic journal in Argentina edited by Marie Langer. Information about it soon spread, first through letters sent by Langer to the presidents of the IPA and COPAL (the Psychoanalytic Confederation of Latin America). Subsequently, a letter sent to COPAL and signed by Cabernite and two other members of the Board of Directors of Rio 1 castigated the denunciation as “entirely false and empty of any foundation.” The IPA president Serge Lebovici accepted this and no further investigation was undertaken. After Vianna, a trainee with the other IPA institute in Rio (“Rio 2”), was revealed by a graphologist as responsible for the anonymous letter, Rio 1 wrote to Rio 2 requesting punishment for someone whose intention was to “destroy and demoralise Brazilian psychoanalysis” (Vianna 1994, 46). From this point on, Vianna’s career was systematically undermined.

By the early 1980s, and because of a gradually changing situation in Brazil, information on the accusations and cover-up were seeping out. During a public seminar about psychoanalysis and Nazism, a participant announced himself as a former political prisoner and claimed that he had seen Lobo
among the torturers. Following that, Rio 1 finally decided to expel Lobo; however, they also expelled Helio Mascarenhas and Eduardo Pellegrino, two politically active members of Rio 1, for having talked about “forbidden subjects”—i.e., the Lobo affair—outside the society. This triggered a larger institutional crisis between followers of Cabernite and an opposition that defended Pellegrino and Mascarenhas (Vianna 1994, 88). Adam Limentani, the IPA president, acknowledged the crisis between the two groups in Rio 1, and decided to freeze the society and send a Site Visit Committee chaired by Robert Wallerstein to examine the situation. After the visit, a series of institutional requirements was stipulated as a condition of the Rio 1 society recovering its independence. This included barring Cabernite from any administrative responsibility in Rio 1 (Wallerstein 1999, 970). The Committee did not, however, demand Cabernite’s expulsion for what Wallerstein later called his “grossly unethical behavior” and they did not put their requirements into writing because “it was a gentlemen’s agreement between persons of presumed good will” (Wallerstein 1999, 970). In 1989, Lobo published his autobiography in which “he defended his four years of participation in the torture squads and acknowledged that, as his training analyst, Cabernite was completely aware of his activities” (Hildebrand 1999, 31).

In 1993, the IPA Executive learned that Cabernite had not only remained a major influence in the society, but that he was also being honored for his distinguished leadership. Faced with this situation, and only after heated debate, the decision to expel Cabernite was made. Rio 1’s refusal to accept both the IPA’s recommendation and the conclusions of their own Ethical Committee led to a major split within the society; six members resigned and another thirty withdrew, creating a new opposition group. According to the Bulletin of this group, the mantra of IPA apoliticism was still operating as of 1998, when Otto Kernberg, while paying a visit to Brazil, refused to talk to the dissident groups in Rio, stating that “when psychoanalysis is made into a political movement, we are no longer on the grounds of psychoanalysis.” Further, he accused the group of conspiring to defame psychoanalysis and asserted that it was “destructive, perverted, and anti-ethical, they resented the fact they could not leave the past behind” (Hildebrand 1999, 32–33). Overall, the IPA and the local Brazilian societies came out of this affair badly. Instead of speaking up against torture and violence, they were, at best, too easily deceived, and at worst complicit in covering it up, even after the period of state terror had passed. Inaction was officially cloaked by the ideology of “psychanalytic neutrality” or justified through the logic of “safeguarding psychoanal-
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ysis.” The IPA never genuinely tackled the issue of how psychoanalysis had itself come to be connected with torture, totalitarianism, and repression; how it avoided taking a stance against it; and how it renounced its ethical responsibility by adopting a so-called neutral posture.

It is worth noting, somewhat speculatively, how the Cabernite-Lobo Affair echoes some transgenerational analytic continuities. The profile of European psychoanalysts who migrated to Brazil after World War II critically shaped the history of Brazilian psychoanalysis, especially its official societies. One important figure was Werner Kemper, who arrived in 1949 to help meet the demand for training analysts in Rio. Kemper had been the director of the polyclinic in the so-called Göring Institute in Germany during World War II, and was a collaborator with the Nazi regime (Goggin and Goggin 2001). Kemper was Cabernite’s analyst. It is of course simplistic to claim that there is a direct link between the failure of the IPA to deal with the Nazi heritage of some German analysts like Kemper and its failure to deal with the complicity of some Brazilian analysts involved with the violent dictatorship in that country. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Kemper’s Nazi connections seem to have evoked little interest when he moved to Brazil; it was more important that he was a “proper” psychoanalyst who could help establish an official society. One cannot know what transpired between him and Cabernite in Cabernite’s analysis, but the silence regarding Kemper’s past during that period parallels the silence that reigned over and was preserved for as long as possible in the Lobo case. What might be seen here is a tendency towards an institutional defense against uncomfortable truths, manifested not only in turning away, but also in very active and at times vicious practices of denial. Perhaps one can also add that the pretense that nothing has happened represents a forgetting of history that one might have expected psychoanalysis, of all disciplines, to be protected against. But, of course, it is not.

Conclusion

I have suggested that, in some of its institutional history, psychoanalysis reveals how it can develop normalizing and conforming tendencies that are at odds with its more progressive aspects. I take these “progressive” parts of psychoanalysis to be more true to the psychoanalytic mission as a whole, as they derive from its conditions of formation in the social revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and also reflect its potential—
mimicking that of the unconscious—for disturbing the comfort of the status quo. Nevertheless, the pull of an intergenerational collusion with repression that is based on silence and denial is very strong, especially when—as in the Brazilian case—it is tied to a social orthodoxy of normalization and a history of colonial deference. When tested to the extreme, it can produce behavior that might be termed “symptomatic” of the presence of something not fully worked through, in this case, corruption that has a lineage back to Nazism and the destruction of the psychoanalytic ethic.

The question to end with concerns the conditions under which psychoanalysis might sustain its progressive enterprise when faced with authoritarianism, and those under which it might not. As we have seen, the latter can come about for a number of interlinked reasons, including the understandable anxiety of individuals faced with real threats to their safety; and also the equally understandable uncertainty people might have when confronting a confusing situation that is outside their usual experience, which is fast-changing and potentially dangerous. Appeasement of the Nazis in the early years of their rule in the 1930s, for example, only looks completely and obviously wrong-headed with hindsight. At the time, it was not necessarily (though it was sometimes) a culpable stance, as people were desperate to avoid a repeat of the mindless bloodletting of the previous war, about which many of them felt guilty.

But conforming to authoritarianism can also occur through opportunism (some of the non-Jewish analysts in Germany seem not to have minded too much that the Jews with whom they had to compete for jobs were no longer on the scene) and also because there are some elements within psychoanalysis itself that could be activated under such conditions. For example, there is evidence that the growth of “official” psychoanalysis in Argentina during the years of the murderous junta was aided by psychoanalysis’ appropriation of a medicalized treatment discourse that could be seen both as privatizing and pathologizing social unease. Additionally, its adoption of familial ideology could be aligned with the views of the Catholic Church, with which the leadership was associated (Plotkin 2012). Some of the same issues might have been at play in Brazil, building on a tradition in which psychoanalysis was deployed as part of a normalizing “modernization” process aimed at taming the fantasized “wildness” of the Brazilian character (Plotkin 2011). In the German case, the broader ambivalence about psychoanalysis’ “Jewishness” was very notable, though this may not have been a significant element in the treatment of Wilhelm Reich. What was more important there was the immo-
bilitating anxiety produced by the times, and the inability of the leaders of the psychoanalytic movement (including Freud) to understand the extent of the political earthquake with which they were faced. Here too, however, there is a systematic point to make: psychoanalysis’ tendency to withdraw into the personal, to focus on the “inner” can be seen as an important strength; this is, after all, primarily what it does and how it works. But its weakness is also clear: abstracting itself from the social and political context in which its patients, its analysts, and its institutions function, it can become reductive and backward-looking, pathologizing and individualizing social suffering rather than understanding its sources and what might have to be done to contest it. The famous dictum, attributed to Lacan, that “cobbler stick to shoes” has something to it: psychoanalysts cannot claim expertise over the social and political sphere just because they are psychoanalysts. What they do, or should, know about is the unconscious and how it functions in the psychoanalytic setting. Nevertheless, if that is all they know and can permit into their consciousness as psychoanalysts as well as citizens, then they are unlikely to be able to stand up to an authoritarian regime that “impinges” (to use a psychoanalytic word) on the well being of their patients and their practices. As far as it is possible to tell, in both Germany and Brazil, those psychoanalysts who suffered were not persecuted because they were psychoanalysts; rather, it was either because they were Jews (in Germany) or radicals (in both countries). Both these things might have also attracted them to psychoanalysis, but it was not in the essential nature of official psychoanalysis that this should be so.

My terminology of “official” psychoanalysis is clearly both vague and disputable. There are many “official” psychoanalyses, and as characterizes a liberal profession, there are also many analysts who do not adhere particularly strongly to any viewpoint laid down by the societies to which they belong. However, there is something to note in the way the IPA-recognized societies in Germany and Brazil operated in the troubled times to which this chapter refers. What is “official” is institutionalized and bureaucratized and becomes dependent on, and fascinated by, wider social acceptance and approval by the centers of power in any society. This might even be more strongly true of a discipline like psychoanalysis, which is always in danger of being marginalized and seen as both sordid and subversive (for instance, because of its fascination with sexuality), than it is of other more “respectable” disciplines like medicine or law. Being “official” in this way leaves it drawn towards subservience, as if the more explosive the unconscious material with which it deals, the more conformist it might have to be to contain this and be a “normal”
element in society. If this is what dominates, if “official” acceptability and influence is the goal, then the supposed neutrality with which psychoanalysis is so enamored becomes identical with social and political conformism, which under the right conditions can lead to the reactionary responses sketched here. When psychoanalysis began in the 1890s with Freud, it was a marginal discipline and practice. This was never a comfortable situation to be in, but perhaps this kind of discomfort can inoculate it, to some degree, against the danger that when times are troubled, as they quite often are, it will lose its bearings and its ethical standing.

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