

# FEAR AND DEMOCRACY

John Keane

*It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it.*

Aung San Suu Kyi (1991)

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## *Despotism*

Many things shall be said for a long time about the death squad attacks on two key American symbols of globalisation, but among the most certain of their effects is the fear that they reportedly struck into the hearts of many citizens around the world, above all in the United States itself.<sup>1</sup> A month after the attacks, fighter jets in that country scrambled daily over key cities on ‘homeland defence’ missions. Security was tight at sporting events, and in and around all government buildings. The airport at the country’s capital city had scarcely reopened. Reports whizzed through the media of two men infected with Anthrax, a deadly agent widely said to be the most likely weapon in a biological attack. Stories circulated as well of the shut-down for eight hours of the national Greyhound bus network - following a crash caused by a razor-wielding man who attacked the driver - and an incident in the capital city, one of whose underground stations was closed and passengers quarantined after a fare-dodger turned on transit police with a spray bottle filled with carpet cleaner. CNN researchers confirmed these jitters in a feature called ‘The New Normal’ : in response to questions about the meaning of normality, a sample of middle Americans responded mainly with stories about their fears about the loss of normality. Sales of ammunition, guns, bullet-proof jackets, and gas masks meanwhile remained brisk. So too were sales of antibiotics, bottled water, and canned goods. Talk of the ‘fear economy’ began to spread, helped along by new statistics on the cancellation of vacations, the widespread refusal to fly, the big reductions in consumer spending on luxuries and the scaling back of business investment plans. Despite the largest investigation and intelligence-gathering operation in the republic’s

history, most citizens acknowledged being caught in the vice-grip of fear. They spoke of their profound uncertainty about when, how, or even if, other attacks might occur. Many of those old enough to remember said that their sense of dread was comparable to that caused by the nuclear scares of the early years of the Cold War.

The spread of fear outwards from the United States, helped by the rapid circulation across borders of images, sounds and reported speech, arguably represents a new phase of the globalisation of fear that began after World War One and was reinforced by the events of the following world war and the invention and deployment of nuclear weapons. For the fourth time within a century, fear has cast a long shadow over the whole world. The odd thing is that political thinking has been caught naked by this new phase of the globalisation of fear, essentially because in recent decades questions about fear have rarely featured in discussions within the fields of political philosophy and political science. Franz Neumann's masterful Berlin lecture on the subject nearly a half-century ago was among the last sustained treatments of a theme that has since fallen into abeyance<sup>2</sup>. Whenever it has arisen, it usually appears as a matter of antiquarian interest, most often in connection with the classic work of Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* (1748)<sup>3</sup>. In that work, Montesquieu captured the imaginations of several generations of political thinkers and writers who found themselves caught up in one of the crucial political developments of the eighteenth century : the rising fear of state despotism and the hope, spawned by the military defeat of the British monarchy in

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Alden and Sheila McNulty, 'Fear and rumour leave America in grip of anxiety', *Financial Times Europe*, 11 October 2001, p. 18; Paul Krugman, 'Fear Itself', *The New York Times*, 30 September 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Neumann, 'Anxiety and Politics', in *The Democratic and Authoritarian State. Essays in Political and Legal Theory* (London 1964), pp. 270-300.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* [1748], edited Victor Goldschmidt (Paris 1979).

the American colonies, and by the first moments of the French Revolution, of escaping its clutches.<sup>2</sup>

Montesquieu was freely read and liberally quoted during this period, especially because his work contained an entirely new understanding of the concept of despotism. Montesquieu transformed the classical Greek understanding of despotism (*despótēs*) as a form of kingship exercised legitimately by a master over slaves. Rejecting as well Bodin's and Hobbes's subsequent positive rendering of despotism as a form of political rule justified by victory in war or civil war, Montesquieu entered the eighteenth-century controversies prompted by the Physiocratic defence of 'despotisme légal'. In a highly original move against all previous reflections on the subject, he viewed despotism, with trepidation, as a type of political regime that was founded originally among Orientals, but that now threatened Europe from within. Despotism, he thought, is a type of arbitrary rule structured by fear. It ruthlessly crushes intermediate groups and classes within the state and forces its subjects to lead lives that are divided, ignorant and timorous. Within despotic regimes, Montesquieu remarked, fear and mutual suspicion are rampant. The lives, liberties and properties of individual subjects are scattered to the winds of arbitrary power. Everyone is forced to live at the mercy of the frightening maxim 'that a single person should rule according to his own will and caprice'.<sup>1</sup>

Montesquieu's analysis of despotism no doubt contained strongly imaginative or 'fictional' elements, especially in its reliance upon a

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<sup>2</sup> See my 'Despotism and Democracy. The Origins and Development of the Distinction Between Civil Society and the State, 1750-1850', in John Keane (ed.), *Civil Society and the State : New European Perspectives* (London and New York, 1988 [1998]), pp. 35-71.

<sup>1</sup> *De l'esprit des lois, op. cit.*, Book 3, Chapter 2, pp. 143-144.

prejudiced or Orientalist view of Muslim societies.<sup>1</sup> Yet by linking together the subjects of fear and despotism Montesquieu powerfully gave wings to the intellectual flight from the status quo of absolute monarchy within the Atlantic region. He helped to convince many of his readers that despotism was a new and dangerous form of unlimited – concentrated and unaccountable - secular power. Guided by no ideals other than the blind pursuit of power for power's sake, and feeding upon the blind obedience of its subjects, Montesquieu implied that despotism is a half-crazed, violent and self-contradictory form of governance. It crashes blindly through the world, leaving behind a trail of confusion, waste and lawlessness, to the point where it tends to destroy its own omnipotence. It consequently undoes the fear upon which it otherwise thrives. Despotism becomes the scourge of decency. It shocks and repels those who are afraid; and it encourages those who yearn to live without fear. It inspires its opponents to seek alternatives, for instance republican government, representative parliamentary power-sharing arrangements, the cultivation of free public opinion within the rule of law, and the education of citizens into the ways of civic virtue.

### *Democracy*

Through this line of reasoning, the critics of despotism after Montesquieu helped prepare the way for the more recent view that republican or parliamentary democracies, in which the exercise of power is shared and subject to permanent public scrutiny, reduce fear to the point where it becomes of minor importance in politics. The presumption that democracies are fear-less or fear-resolving systems is sometimes stated

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<sup>1</sup> See Alain Grosrichard, *Structure du sérail : la fiction du despotisme asiatique dans l'Occident classique* (Paris 1979); and Chris Sparks, *Montesquieu's Vision of Uncertainty and Modernity in*

explicitly, as in one of the very few recent serious studies of contemporary politics and fear, by Juan Corradi and his colleagues.<sup>1</sup> There it is argued that while democracies do not altogether do away with fear – a political order without fear is an unattainable utopia – they are historically unique in their capacity to sublimate, reduce and control human fears creatively. Established democracies tend to ‘privatise’ fear, which becomes at most a personal matter to be handled by individuals in their daily lives – as an intimate problem to be analysed and treated in the company of either the spouse or the friend or the psychoanalyst or the priest. Little wonder that political philosophy and political science lose interest in the subject, which is handed over to the sub-field of political psychology, leaving a few isolated thinkers to ask : how do democracies actually manage to marginalise fear, to push it into the domains of intimate and transcendent experience? Corradi and his colleagues are understandably concerned with contemporary forms of state despotism in Latin America, so the thesis that democracies solve the age-old problem of fear functions mainly as a counterfactual presumption. They simply present a list of the various means used by American-style democracies to discharge fear, including the decentralisation of power, the exercise of self-governance through local associations, the encouragement of state-protected religious freedoms, the possibility of rapid geographic and social mobility and, above all, representative government.<sup>2</sup>

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*Political Philosophy* (London 1999).

<sup>1</sup> Juan E. Corradi, Patricia Weiss Fagen and Manuel Antonio Garretón (eds.), *Fear at the Edge : State Terror and Resistance in Latin America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford 1992).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-10, 267-292. The thesis is well-summarised by Norberto Lechner, ‘Some People Die of Fear. Fear as a Political Problem’, in *ibid.*, pp. 33-34 : ‘Democracy involves more than just tolerance; it involves recognizing the other as a coparticipant in the creation of a common future. A democratic process, in contrast to an authoritarian regime, allows us to learn that the future is an intersubjective undertaking. The otherness of the other is then that of the alter ego. Seen thus, the freedom of the other, its unpredictability, ceases to be a threat to self-identity; it is the condition for self-development.’

The thesis that democracies privatise fear is stimulating. But it is unconvincing, in no small measure because it only hints at the dynamic processes through which actually existing democracies do indeed tend – but not altogether successfully - to reduce the role played by fear in the overall structures of power. What then are these processes, peculiar to democracy, that perform the positive role of reducing and ‘privatising’ fear? And could it be that there are counter-processes that ensure that fear is a problem that democracies do not entirely resolve? The possible answers to these questions are not immediately obvious, but common sense reflection – let us call it the conventional view of democracy and fear – typically identifies three overlapping processes that seem to guarantee that democracies trivialise fear. In preparation for a more nuanced – less naïve - account of democracy and fear, these processes are sketched below :

1. *Non-violent power-sharing* According to the conventional view, democracies tend to reduce the fears of governors and governed alike because they institute the practice of non-violent power-sharing at the level of governmental institutions. Just how unique that innovation is can be seen by considering that all previous modern territorial states and military empires typically sought to exercise monopoly control of the means of violence, and to rule by making others afraid of the threatened use of that violence. The armed power of these states and empires, often wielded in the name of reducing their subjects’ fears, had the effect of *inspiring* fear among their subjects and rivals at home and their enemies abroad. As Guglielmo Ferrero emphasised, state and imperial rulers, equipped with the awesome capacity to take life away - the sword of the ruler should always be reddened with blood, noted Luther - developed a taste and a reputation for harsh action. All rulers armed with the sword

were capable of inspiring fear, even of the extreme kind that Montesquieu called despotic. The violent persecution and attempted destruction of religious minorities, such as the Huguenots, was only an extreme instance of this rule : the use of spies and informants, the militarisation of the civilian population, brutal punishments, forced conversions, and the torture and massacre of men, women, and children helped produce fear on a scale far exceeding anything described or recommended in the early modern textbooks on government written by figures like Bodin and Hobbes. Rulers' capacity for making others afraid of course applied as well to their (potential) rivals. Those who plotted the seizure or paralysis of armed power, for instance through a coup d'état or regicide, usually risked their lives, and lived in fear of doing so. That was a good and necessary thing, recommended Machiavelli. Musing on the reputation for cruelty of Cesare Borgia, he openly criticised Cicero's advice that love compared with fear is a much more effective resource in government : 'it is much safer to be feared than loved.'<sup>1</sup>

Democracies minimise such fear, initially by effecting a pact of non-violence among rulers and their potential rivals and opponents. What might be called the Law of Damocles helps to explain the basis of this pact. In the court of Dionysius, the much-feared tyrant of Syracuse, there was a sycophantic courtier named Damocles. He yearned to wield power like his master, so Dionysius decided to teach him a lesson by inviting Damocles to preside over a splendid royal banquet. Wrapped in frippery, Damocles was flattered and acted the part remarkably well – until he discovered, dangling above his lavish golden throne, a huge sword on the end of a single strand of hair. The foolish courtier-turned-ruler cried out

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<sup>1</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chapter xvii, in Max Lerner (ed.), *The Prince and The Discourses* (New York 1950), p. 61.

in horror. He had begun to learn the lesson that those who rule by fear can potentially die by fear, and that they are therefore best advised to seek means other than fear through which to govern. Democracies constitutionalise this rule : they respect the Law of Damocles by developing a consensus, among governors and governed alike, that threats of violence and government by fear are not easily containable, that nobody is safe, and that therefore such threats should not be used as techniques of government, or of opposition.

2. *Civil Society* The conventional view of democracy and fear supposes that democracies also diminish the use of fear as a weapon wielded by those who govern by institutionalising arms-length limits upon the scope of political power, in the form of civil society. The historical invention in early modern Europe of spaces of non-violence called civil societies has proved to be a self-contradictory and therefore highly unstable – but nonetheless precious – process.<sup>1</sup> The birth of these societies was made possible by the extrusion or ‘clearing’ of the principal means of violence from daily life and their concentration in depersonalised form in the hands of the repressive apparatuses of imperial or territorial-based governing institutions. As ownership of the means of violence shifted from the non-state to the state realm – it was always, and still remains, a heavily contested process<sup>2</sup> - these civil societies became permanently vulnerable to standing armies and police forces, which could harass them from within, or periodically call on the citizens of these societies to kill external enemies in wars between heavily armed states.

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<sup>1</sup> The classic work in this field is that of Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* (Basel 1939), 2 volumes.

<sup>2</sup> Janice E. Thomson, *Mercenaries, Pirates, and Sovereigns. State-Building and Extraterritorial Violence in Early Modern Europe* (Princeton 1994).

The civil societies that survived, and today flourish, nevertheless served to protect an important liberty : the freedom of individuals to live without the everyday fear of violent death at the hands of others. Modern civil societies tend to transform potential enemies into ‘strangers’ whose strangeness, Simmel pointed out, derives from their simultaneous remoteness and closeness to others around them.<sup>1</sup> Especially in contemporary civil societies, strangers abound and savage pleasure and unfettered hatred in destroying anything considered hostile becomes rare. The members of civil society become capable of suppressing or sublimating their aggressive impulses, whether they are directed at governments or at fellow-civilians themselves. They display remarkable self-restraint, even in the face of hostility. It is as if they are guided by an inner voice warning them not to inflict violence upon others who annoy or threaten them. The social spaces connecting individuals tend to become non-violent and ‘civility’ itself becomes a cherished norm. There are plenty of counter-trends, of course, but the capacity of civil societies to live non-violently means that ‘otherness’, the figure of the stranger or foreigner, for instance, can in principle be accepted, even welcomed, without fear. Otherness, or alterity, is not regarded as a temporary interruption or inconvenience to be eliminated, either by forcible exclusion or by its reduction to sameness. Otherness is instead the object of respectful, sometimes indifferent and sometimes rewarding encounters among subjects for whom that otherness sometimes may well lie beyond comprehension, as if it had an irreducible strangeness. To speak for a moment in the language of Emmanuel Levinas : within a civil society, the subject who acts as an individual or within a group is neither ‘at home with itself’ [*chez soi*] nor ‘in itself’ [*en soi*]. It is most certainly not (as Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued in *L’Être et le néant*) a ‘for itself’ [*pour*

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘Der Fremde’, in *Soziologie* (Munich and Leipzig, 1908), pp. 685-691.

*soi*]. It rather understands that it exists in proximity to others, that it is constituted *by* and *as* its exposure to them, and that therefore it can communicate non-violently with them through the ‘risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity, in the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, in exposure to traumas, in vulnerability’.<sup>1</sup> *Homo civilis* understands herself as the hostage of others. Exposure to their powers is the bedrock of her existence. She understands that she is another for others – and that responsibility for them is therefore neither an accident that befalls (or does not befall) her nor a sign of her ‘natural’ love or ‘natural’ benevolence towards them. *Homo civilis* instead understands something that is both more basic and more contingent : that civility is an expression of temporal and spatial interdependence, and that it is only thanks to ‘the condition of being hostage that there can be in this world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity – even the little there is, even the simple “After you, sir”.’<sup>2</sup>

3. *Publicity* Actually existing democracies today operate within a global framework of communications media. These media, the conventional theory supposes, have the effect of transforming the nature of the fear experienced by the members of civil societies by publicising it - thereby reducing the quantity of genuine fears they experience. Beginning with the early modern printing press, so the argument runs, these communications media helped to publicise the despotic potential of governmental institutions, so encouraging the publics that sprang up with media help to believe that fear should not rule, indeed that government by fear was illegitimate. The cultivation of public opinion within non-violent public spheres came to be seen as a weapon against the paralysing effects

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (The Hague, 1974), pp. 82-83.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 186.

of fear.<sup>1</sup> Much the same process encouraged the formation of civil societies by establishing spaces within which things could be said and done without fear of the consequences, and by helping to publicise their members' diffuse anxieties and their explicit fears – and so to suggest that there might be remedies for fear other than private suffering. The drying up of rumours, which once operated as the great waterway of fear<sup>2</sup>, was one of the long-term consequences of modern communications media. Rumours circulate fear by depending upon formulations like 'people are saying', or 'I heard', or 'there's a rumour going around'. Such hearsay has no individual subject and it is therefore hard to refute; it is a hot potato that is quickly juggled and passed on to the next listener. A rumour is a quotation with a loophole; it is never clear who is being quoted or who originally set it in motion<sup>3</sup>. By contrast, the non-violent conjecture and refutation, controversy and disputation that routinely takes place within a public sphere has the effect of checking the veracity and tracing the source - 'de-naturalising' or 'de-sacralising' - everyday fears.

### *The Triangle of Fear*

The familiar proposition that democracies tend to reduce and trivialise the fears of their citizens seems so far to be plausible, but another moment's reflection easily uncovers a basic problem in the analysis of democracy and fear : the problem of how to define fear itself. Few keywords in the field of politics have been so neglected as fear. By comparison with the

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<sup>1</sup> See John Keane, 'Liberty of the Press', in *The Media and Democracy* (Oxford and Cambridge, Ma., 1991), pp. 2-50.

<sup>2</sup> In his study of fear during the early modern era, *La peur en Occident, XIVe-XVIIIe siècles* (Paris 1978), Jean Delumeau writes that the rumour is 'equally acknowledgement and elucidation of a general fear and, further, the first stage in the process of abreaction, which will temporarily free the mob of its fear. It is the identification of a threat and the clarification of a situation that has become unbearable' (p. 247).

<sup>3</sup> See Hans-Joachim Neubauer, *Fama : Eine Geschichte des Gerüchts* (Berlin 1998).

huge controversies generated by other keywords like the state, democracy, power, fear as a concept tends to be used as a ‘face-value’ term – as a concept that does not merit even a definition because it is presumed that everyone who has experienced fear in their lives, or has learned about it from others, knows what it is.<sup>1</sup>

That presumption, that fear is fear, is manifestly misleading, as controversies within other scholarly fields, like psychology, physiological psychology, and philosophy, reveal.<sup>2</sup> Much could be said about these controversies, and their importance for democratic theory, but for the moment it is only necessary to draw upon them selectively for the purpose of sketching a new account of fear, understood here as an ‘ideal-typical’ concept that can bring greater clarity to our understanding of a political subject that has suffered much neglect and is now in urgent need of attention.

Fear is the name that should be given to a particular type of psychic and bodily abreaction of an individual or group within a triangle of inter-related experiences. This triangle of experiences within which fear arises in certain times and places among human beings – and among vertebrate animals as well<sup>3</sup> - is historically variable. Through time, humans and animals evidently develop, phylogenetically, different fear thresholds; so too, through the process of ontogenesis, beginning in the earliest moments of infancy, individuals can and do develop their capacities for

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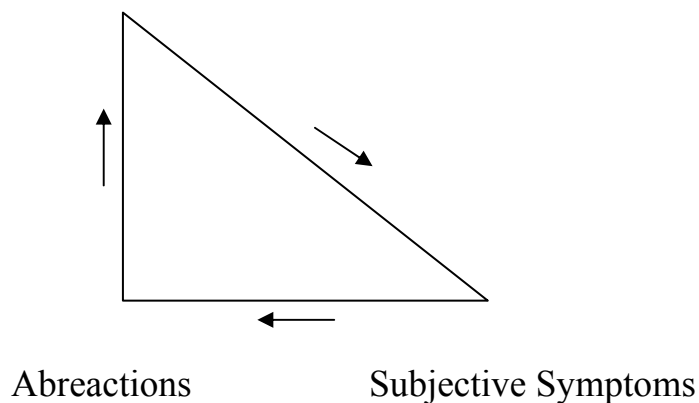
<sup>1</sup> An example of this face-value usage of the concept of fear is Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear : An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era* (Boulder 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London 1963), chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Eric A. Salzen, ‘The Ontogeny of Fear in Animals’, in Wladyslaw Sluckin (ed.), *Fear in Animals and Man* (New York 1979), pp. 125-163. Compare p. 9 : ‘provided we have evidence of some capacity for receiving and decoding information from the environment concerning dangers or threats, and some capacity for learning what are dangerous circumstances (or being provided with innate capacities for registering these), the concept of fear may be applied to animals other than human beings.’

conquering fears of various kinds; and, as Montesquieu well understood, different political systems have displayed radically different forms and concentrations of fear. In every case, however, the phenomenon of fear develops within a triangle of socially and politically mediated experience. The corners of this triangle are marked by (a) objective circumstances that are perceived by a subject or group of subjects to be threatening; (b) bodily and mental symptoms that are induced by that object and experienced as such by the individual subject or group; and (c) the individual's or group's abreactions against the object that has induced those symptoms in the first place (see Figure 1).

Threatening Objective Circumstances



***Figure 1 : The Triangle of Fear***

When seen in this way, it becomes clear that fear is not a naturally occurring substance, that it is rather the product of a dynamic relationship between individuals, their fellows and their socio-political circumstances. When fear is analysed as a particular experience that arises within the 'boundaries' of these triangular co-ordinates its relationship to similar but

different experiences becomes clear. Outside and beyond the ‘boundaries’ of the triangle the concept of fear simply doesn’t apply. Consider the case of a subject who neither experiences symptoms nor reacts against dangerous circumstances – the soldier who goes numbly into battle under the influence of drugs or duty – or the case of an individual who reacts against dangerous circumstances but experiences no symptoms of fear, as when a person chooses, on the spur of the moment and almost without thinking, to avoid moving towards an army checkpoint which is felt or known to be hostile. In both cases, the concept of fear is inapplicable. This understanding of the concept of fear as a particular set of experiences co-defined by the interaction of subject and object certainly helps us to see the difference between fear and anxiety. Anxiety is not a species of fear : it is rather a type of agitated reaction to events that have occurred in the past – sexual abuse by a parent, a close brush with death - or to possible future events, such as a forthcoming examination that could result in failure, a nuclear explosion caused by a ‘normal accident’, or concern about growing old. In each case, the events that trigger anxiety are somewhere in the distance, or they might in future not happen at all. Anxiety can of course be transformed into fear, but the difference remains. Compared with anxiety, fear is immediate. It is a subjective reaction to actually existing objective circumstances<sup>1</sup>.

Guided by this sharpened concept of fear, let us then probe in more detail what actually goes on within the triangle of experience called fear :

*Subjective Symptoms* Fear normally is experienced as subjectively felt symptoms, in the form of physiological, mental and emotional changes.

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<sup>1</sup> A version of this distinction between fear (the abreaction against a concrete, external danger) and anxiety is present in Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* (Princeton 1944), p. 38.

Groups in the abstract cannot experience these changes; of course, groups become afraid, but they only do so insofar as fear grips each one (or most) of their individual members. Fear is always an intensely personal experience.<sup>1</sup> Its physiological, mental and emotional components come in more or less concentrated form, both in terms of the ‘depth’ with which they are experienced by the individual, and the speed with which they come and go. Fear can be experienced on the surface – as when it is experienced ‘second hand’, at a distance, in empathy with others - or it can penetrate deep down, even hiding itself in the nightly dreams of the afraid, whose sleep it disturbs. The experience of fear can be more or less sudden. It can creep up on the individual, take its time, and trap its victim by stealth. Or it can suddenly pounce upon the individual, like a prowler lurking in the dark, in which case its effects are felt immediately and frontally.

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<sup>1</sup> To illustrate the point : among my earliest childhood memories is the moment of fear that came upon me each day when travelling to school, past a huge white sign painted on a grey concrete bridge. It read simply, ‘BAN THE BOMB’. As a five-year-old, I didn’t understand what those hurriedly painted, dripping words meant. Nor did my older sister, who helped me carry my school bag. We simply regarded them with trepidation. Time did not dissolve that feeling. It actually intensified the memory, especially when my otherwise physically fit father suffered a series of cancers that resulted in his premature death, aged 63. Cancers grow according to a complex logic, of course. The bodily causes of cancer are the same as the causes of evolution itself : mutations. Cancer is above all a matter of statistical bad luck. (Among the best recent summaries of the current research are Mel Greaves, *Cancer : The Evolutionary Legacy* [Oxford and New York 2000] and Robert Weinberg, *One Renegade Cell...*) So it could be an unfortunate coincidence, a stroke of malevolent luck, but towards the end of the 1950s, immediately after the conclusion of open-air British nuclear testing at Woomera and Maralinga, in the state of South Australia, my father was sent on a stock-check assignment by the federal government department for which he worked as a storeman. The son of a poor unemployed Irish carpenter, he was quietly proud to be offered the assignment. It was his most secure job ever and he lived on-site for six months, in the desert town of Woomera, 450 kilometres from our home. He never mentioned protective clothing, and a picture from this period shows him dressed merely in shorts and boots. I suppose that that was typical, especially given the daytime heat and the authorities’ wilful ignorance of the possible effects of touching, tasting, and breathing radiant dust. His first cancer developed not long after returning from Woomera. After his death, there was no official enquiry. No journalist or politician visited our home, and he was buried anonymously, without so much as the comfort of knowing that he might become a statistic – or that one day he might even be linked with the campaigners who painted those frightful words on the bridge that I crossed each day on my way to school.

Fear is a dictator of time, for in all cases, shallow or deep, slow or fast, time seems to slow down or even stop when the individual is afraid. This is because the body is plunged into a different world. It suddenly shrinks, grows weaker, and feels vulnerable, heavier some say, as if it is filled with cold, viscous liquid. Fear is forcible submersion in a fathomless ocean. The body stiffens, then shivers. Outside voices and sounds become muffled, directionless, then jangle in the head. Tics start up in the neck, the temples, the eyelids, jumping, thumping, like an insect under the skin. Shoulders knot. The mouth grows dry. Fear rises in the throat, like bile, then turns into a tumorous lump that sticks in the throat, like a stone. Speech stammers. The heart races. Fingers become shaky, inept. Hands tremble. Concentration on anything other than fear, and being afraid, becomes impossible. Fear closes the mind and fills it with thoughts that whirr like radarless bats. The pulse by this time seems to be everywhere – in the legs, arms, face, chest. Breathing naturally is difficult. It comes in short, ragged gasps. Or it seems to stop completely, so that there is no more in and out, in and out, only a gaping hole in the chest.

*Objective Circumstances* These subjective symptoms of fear are always experienced within certain surroundings. Fear is a reaction by a subject to an object or objects that are perceived to be hostile or outright dangerous. It is true that fear-like symptoms can occur despite the fact that there are no signs of circumstances that are fear-producing. When a person acknowledges that there are no (immediate) signs of danger, but says, ‘I’m not afraid of anything in particular. I just feel like this most of the time’, all the while feeling incapable of doing anything about that feeling, they may be said either to not know the meaning of the word fear or to be suffering from a trauma that was experienced as such at some point in the past.

In all other cases, the fear experienced by individuals or groups is typically induced by threatening circumstances within their immediate or more distant milieu. Fear can be triggered by a very large variety of objective circumstances – a critically ill child, a sudden explosion, getting the sack, cornered by a thief, the cracking roar of jets overhead, television images of civilian aircraft transformed into deadly missiles. In every case, these circumstances are sensed by the individual or the group to be ill-boding, sinister, menacing, perhaps even life-threatening.

*Intended reactions* Experienced as felt symptoms induced by objective circumstances, fear usually results in some kind of intentional reaction or abreaction against the perceived object of fear. In extreme cases, fear can have destructive effects on the individual or group. It hounds the afraid into self-persecution. They become incapable of warding off their fears and instead regress into morbid symptoms, like panic and muddle. Fear can also be projected outwards, against others, as a form of persecutory behaviour, in which the experience of fear prompts the subject to look with hateful eyes for an enemy; the afraid, sometimes with the help of demagogic leaders, then off-load their fears nastily onto others – as in xenophobia – or violently eliminate or paralyse – kill or injure – what makes them afraid. These and other reactions are typically unpredictable, for fear is a form of radical uncertainty. With the body in such an unfamiliar and agitated state, it is never clear what will happen next. For the individual who is afraid, fear resembles peering coldly down from some shadowy height, without being able to see the ground below and without knowing how to act. The stomach churns. The afraid may suddenly feel wet and warm between their legs. Scared shitless can pass from phrase to fact. The self that is afraid is under siege. It is a desperate

self. Transfixed on its object, it may freeze, or shake uncontrollably. Or the self may scream while taking a step back from the shadowy height on which it is perched, or stand firm, or run away, or jump blindly towards the ground below.

Miraculously, the afraid may also grow wings – *Timor addidit alas*, runs the original Latin expression - and fly defiantly over the heads of its object, determined to make it flee. Scores of self-help manuals advise readers how to turn their fears and indecision into confident actions.<sup>1</sup> There it is called ‘fearbusting’, but those influenced by classical Greek and Roman writings harbour the same point : fear can breed courage, ‘grace under pressure’ (Aung San Suu Kyi<sup>2</sup>), and courage, in the circumstances, can nourish creative or daring acts that are quite literally out-of-the-ordinary. Exactly how this happens is strongly context-dependent, although when large numbers of people lose their fear the triangle of fear is typically broken by catalysis. Individuals or groups boldly wade out of the mire of fear, thereby inspiring others to follow. This escape from fear is always an *individual* act, although the act itself can be more or less group-based and more or less dramatic. Commenting on Edgar Allan Poe’s story of three fisherman caught in a maelstrom, Norbert Elias points out that two of them died after being paralysed by fear, whereas the survivor managed to conquer his fear after recognising that round objects are sucked less quickly into a watery abyss, and so jumping into a barrel to save himself. The lucky survivor, Elias comments, ‘began to think more coolly; and by standing back, by controlling his own fear, by seeing himself as it were from a distance, like

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway* (London 1991) and Gavin de Becker, *The Gift of Fear* (London 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Aung San Suu Kyi, ‘Freedom from Fear [1991]’, in *Freedom from Fear and Other Writings* (London and New York 1995), p. 184.

a chessman forming a pattern with others on a board, he managed to turn his thoughts away from himself to the situation in which he found himself...Symbolically representing in his mind the structure and direction of the flow of events, he discovered a way of escape.’<sup>1</sup>

Then there are moments when the escape from fear at the individual level is a group-based process, an event that is as dramatic as it is co-dependent upon the ‘saintly’ abreactions of others. The October 2000 revolution in Serbia is a case in point.<sup>2</sup> The unexpected overthrow of the *ancien régime* arguably would have been impossible without fearless catalysts like the youth group *Odpor* (Resistance), which in the face of harsh repression struggled to resist the ‘sociocide’ or implosion of civil society and to stand up to the Milosević regime through non-violent acts of open defiance, including door-stepping citizens in towns large and small, hosting music concerts and publicly circulating banners and leaflets that contained what seemed at the time to be make-believe slogans, like ‘He is finished!’ Their actions were saintly in the best and most exact sense.<sup>3</sup> They felt called upon to bear a responsibility that they alone had to bear. Their standards could not be statistically unremarkable, or commonplace. They felt themselves required to exceed ordinary standards, to do things that others – being afraid, or too selfish – were unwilling to do, or could not reasonably be expected to do. Like all previous saints, they were *unique* people in the face of fear. They strived to accomplish the impossible, and that is why they did not expect others to seek the unattainable in the way that they did. That is what made them saints :

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<sup>1</sup> Norbert Elias, ‘The Fisherman in the Maelstrom’, in *Involvement and Detachment* (Oxford 1987), p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Dragica Vujadinović-Milinković, ‘Degradation of Everyday Life, Destruction of Society and Civil Society Suppression’, paper presented at the University of Bradford, March 25-26 2000; and my conversations with Zaga Golubović, Perast, Montenegro, July 2 2000.

<sup>3</sup> See the remarks of Emmanuel Levinas, in ‘Mourir pour...’, in *Entre nous : Essais sur le penser-à-l’autre* (Paris 1991), pp. 228-229

their ability to assume personal responsibility for doing things that were way and above the call of duty.

Fear that gives wings to courage and freedom is only one type of abreaction to fear. The capacity to shake it off by confronting the perceived sources of fear can indeed be enlivening. The personal effort to draw on inner and outer resources to nurture the habit of refusing to let fear dictate one's actions can fortify the individual. And the ability to join with others in dignity and solidarity to resist the enervating miasma is a form of empowerment. The surmounting of fear can certainly add to people's self-confidence, as it does normally in the process of ontogenesis, and at a certain magical moment during the outbreak of every revolution (as Ryszard Kapuściński's fine study of the overthrow of the Pahlavi establishment emphasises<sup>1</sup>). Yet fear should not be glorified universally, as if it was something like the necessary condition of courageous action, itself the precondition of democratic freedom. This is so for two main reasons.

In the first place, the abreactions produced by fear can be destructive of the freedom and dignity – sometimes the lives - of others. Fear can produce anti-democratic sentiments and outcomes. The covenants extorted by fear outlined and justified in Thomas Hobbes's *De Corpore Politico* and other works can be understood as a simile of a type of fearful reaction by individuals and groups that results in their own subjugation.<sup>2</sup> The huddling together of the afraid and their combined efforts to project their fears nastily onto others, for instance in the form of hatred of

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<sup>1</sup> Ryszard Kapuściński, *Shah of Shahs* (London 1986), pp. 109-111.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore Politico : or the Elements of Law, Moral and Politic*, in William Molesworth (ed.), *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury*, volume 4 (London 1840), part 1, chapter 2, section 13, pp. 92-93.

foreigners or nationalist pride, is another instance of the possible anti-democratic effects of fear.

There is a second reason why fear should not be glorified as the mother of courageous freedom. During the experience of fear, there are always moments that feel interminably long, when the person who is afraid fails to react, or takes no appropriate action to protect themselves, as when a person turns pale, breaks into a sweat, screams...and later says that they were ‘scared stiff’ or ‘glued to the ground’. The details of such non-action could of course be counted – plausibly - as a type of reaction, even though it is minimal and involuntary, which serves to highlight the key point that fear is no friend of freedom. All fear is bondage, goes an old Italian and English proverb.<sup>1</sup> Fear is indeed a thief. It robs subjects of their capacity to act with or against others. It leaves them shaken, sometimes permanently traumatised. And when large numbers fall under the dark clouds of fear, no sun shines on civil society. Fear saps its energies and tears and twists at the institutions of political representation. Fear eats the soul of democracy.

### *Fear as a Public Problem*

And so the question returns : is it the case that democracies, considered as dynamic systems of publicly accountable power, contain within them mechanisms for ‘privatising’ and therefore trivialising, or even eradicating outright the fears that otherwise threaten the social and political freedoms that are the lifeblood of democracy? Fresh thinking is certainly required when responding to this question, if only because the

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<sup>1</sup> James Sanford, *The Garden of Pleasure : Contayinge most pleasante Tales..Done out of Italian into English* (London [?] 1573), p. 52.

conventional argument that democracies ‘privatise’ fear is vulnerable. Deeper reflection on the subject of fear and democracy suggests that it is far too simple and even a bit smug. Much more needs to be said in particular about the several counter-trends within the realms of state institutions, civil societies and communications media introduced above. These counter-trends arguably ensure not only that fears are not washed away by democracy. These counter-trends also guarantee that fear is a permanent *public* problem within both potential and actually existing democracies.

*War* Consider the problem of war : within the field of governmental institutions, citizens’ fears generated by war and rumours of war by no means disappear. Democracies have an excellent record in not going to war against one another<sup>1</sup>, but this does not mean that war is somehow forgotten or that it disappears over the horizon of experience. In our times there is undoubtedly public support for minimising the loss of life – the number of body bags – and the casualties that result from war. The reliance upon computerised, ‘risk-free’ aerial bombardment as the preferred means of military intervention and the growth of a ‘post-heroic’ view of war, even an unwillingness among men and women to wave the flag, slip into military uniform and go off to fight wars, are the main consequences. Some scholars have drawn from this the conclusion that the world has sub-divided into two parts : a zone of violent anarchy that is troubled by war, warlords, lawlessness, repression and famine; and a ‘security community’ of peaceful and prosperous democracies in which fear generated by war disappears.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R.J. Rummel, *Understanding Conflict and War* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1975-81), volumes 1-5.

The conclusion may be comforting, but it is misleading, as recent events show strikingly. The so-called democratic zone of peace cannot shake off the problem of fear generated by war, and not only because the violence-ridden drugs trade and globalised arms production binds it to the fate of war-torn zones. Public calls for military intervention wherever human rights are violated – into areas suffering plagues of private violence and uncivil war stoked by gunrunners, warlords, gangsters, armed sects, rebel armies – keep fear of war in the headlines. So too does the growth of a global system of communications media, whose editors often feature war and cruelty in accordance with the rule, ‘If it bleeds, let it lead’.<sup>2</sup> Then there is the unresolved problem of the role to be played by nuclear-tipped states in the post-Cold War world system. This system is dominated by the United States, the world’s single superpower, which can and does act as a ‘swing power’ backed by nuclear force. As a swing power, it is engaged in several regions although not tied permanently to any of them, but its manoeuvres are complicated by the fact that it is presently forced to co-exist and interact peacefully with four great powers, three of whom are nuclear powers : Europe, China, Russia, and Japan. The geometry of this arrangement clearly differs from the extended freeze imposed by the Cold War, when (according to Raymond Aron’s formula) the democracies lived in accordance with the rule, ‘peace impossible, war unlikely’. With the collapse of bipolar confrontation, this rule has changed. There is no evidence of the dawn of a post-nuclear age, and the freedom from the fear of nuclear accident or attack that that would bring. Nowadays, as Pierre Hassner has put it so well, peace has become a little less impossible and war is a little less unlikely, principally because a form

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<sup>1</sup> Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky, *The Real World Order : Zones of Peace/Zones of Turmoil* (Chatham, N.J., 1993).

<sup>2</sup> These points are analysed in more detail in my ‘The Long Century of Violence’, in *Reflections on Violence* (London and New York 1996)

of unpredictable anarchy has settled on the whole world.<sup>1</sup> The probability of a nuclear apocalypse, in which the earth and its peoples are blown sky-high, may have been reduced, but major wars remain a possibility, including even the use of nuclear-tipped weapons in conflicts that originate in local wars. Depleted uranium shells are now routinely dropped on the victims of war. Nuclear weapons abound – the arsenals of the United States and the Russian Federation each contain somewhere around 7,000 nuclear warheads<sup>2</sup>. And despite the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, nuclear capacity, as can be seen in the nuclear arms races between Pakistan and India, and between Israel and the Arab states, is spreading, despite any prior agreements about the rules of nuclear confrontation and despite the fact (revealed in the so-called National Missile Defence system planned by the Bush administration) that the issue of nuclear weapons is now deeply implicated in the proliferation of so-called conventional weaponry.

*Civil Society Failures* Toughly realist accounts of the fear-reducing qualities of contemporary civil societies need to be sensitive to their self-paralysing tendencies, as well as to the measures required to ameliorate or overcome them. Civil societies undoubtedly contain fear-producing dynamics. Their restlessness (an apt word used by Hegel to describe a feature of modern civil societies) frustrates any natural tendency towards social equilibrium; and the social bonds nurtured by the conflicts they produce do not guarantee citizens' freedom from fear. Civil societies are structured by a dynamic complex of organising principles and

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<sup>1</sup> See the concluding interview in Pierre Hassner, *La violence et la paix : De la bombe atomique au nettoyage ethnique* (Paris 1995), especially p. : 'In the past, the doctrine of deterrence matched the civil character of our societies : an invisible hand, or abstract mechanism, took charge of our security, and we did not have to bother our heads with it. But today the nuclear issue can no longer be considered in isolation, it is inextricably mixed up with everything else.'

<sup>2</sup> *The Times* (London), February 10, 2001, p. 16.

institutional forms that disorientate actors, generate risks, and enforce hard choices. The anxieties that result - Franz Neumann pointed out<sup>1</sup> – function as the soil in which fears of various kinds spring up. The disorganising effects of the processes of commodity production and exchange associated with market economies are one example. The freedom of capital to invest and dis-invest produces well-known symptoms : for instance, periods of creative destruction associated with technical innovations; surges of capital investment and hyper-speculation followed by downturns; and the periodic dis-employment and wholesale redundancy of labour power. The resulting stresses and strains can and do generate genuine fears – of losing one’s material livelihood (as a worker) or one’s shirt (as an owner or manager of capital). To the extent that market economies intertwine and form themselves into a global economy, these fears come to be felt globally. They are compounded by the perpetual ecological disturbances caused by market-driven fossil fuel-based economies. Led by the United States, whose inhabitants currently consume between 50 and 100 times more energy than those of Bangladesh, these economies have consumed ten times more energy during the past century than did their predecessors during the thousand years before 1900.<sup>2</sup>

Fears also result from the tendency of civil society to generate moral turbulence and collisions among its constituent individuals and groups. So-called communitarian critics of civil society feed upon this point. Mourning the loss of imagined stable communities of the past - and

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<sup>1</sup> Franz Neumann, ‘Anxiety and Politics’, in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State : Essays in Political and Legal Theory* (New York 1957), p. 271 : ‘Modern society produces a fragmentation not only of social functions but of man himself who, as it were, keeps his different faculties in different pigeonholes – love, labor, leisure, culture – that are somehow held together by an externally operating mechanism that is neither comprehended nor comprehensible.’

<sup>2</sup> J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun. An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (London and New York 2000), pp. 14-17.

suffering from a condition that might be called *Gesellschaftsangst* - they dream fancifully of stitching together the torn shreds of morality with the blue thread of Political Community. That could not be done without destroying civil society itself, but their emphasis on its disorganising effects, and the trepidations they generate, although exaggerated, puts a finger on the point that civil societies produce fear in considerable quantities. True, they cultivate resources - the arts of kindness and civility, the ability to duck conflicts, to make jokes, to bargain and to effect give-and-take compromises – that help them weather storms of controversy and the fears they induce. A good case can be made as well for the view that conflict is an essential factor of socialisation, and that civil societies benefit from the cumulative experience of tending and muddling through their own social conflicts, particularly the kind that are non-threatening or ‘divisible’.<sup>1</sup> In practice, of course, the distinction between threatening and non-threatening conflicts is itself controversial to their protagonists, and that is the rub : civil societies conjure up fears of what others have done, or are doing, or might be planning to do, sometimes to the point where the participants themselves become mildly or acutely afraid. A disturbing example is the unease today within the European Union about national identity and the xenophobic outbursts driven by wild fantasies of ‘take-overs’ by ‘foreigners’, or what the Germans call *Überfremdungsangst*. It comes in harsher or milder forms, the most common of which are conversations like : ‘Has the Italian restaurant across the road from you closed down?’ ‘Yes, there’s a Chinese starting up there now.’ ‘Oh no, not again.’<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Albert Hirschman, ‘Social Conflicts as Pillars of Democratic Market Society’, *Political Theory*, 22, 2 (1994), p. 56. The socialising effects of conflict are analysed in Georg Simmel’s pathbreaking essay, ‘Der Streit’, in *Soziologie, op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Frank Pergande, ‘Der Sozialismus hat Erfolg gehabt’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 262/45 (November 10 2001), p....

## *Communications Media and the Fascination with Fear*

No account of the subject of fear and democracy would be plausible without considering the ways in which modern communications media fascinate their audiences with stories that not only report and circulate fears but also *induce* fears. Why is it, beginning with the Graveyard poets and the first gruesome tabloid newspaper stories, through Dracula, the films of Alfred Hitchcock and Stephen King, millions of people have spent so much time wilfully scaring themselves, to the point where they experience mysterious pleasures associated with sudden intakes of breath and momentary prickles of the skin? Why do the communications media of contemporary democracies enjoy the power to fascinate people with matters that they should run screaming from?

Providing plausible answers to these questions is not easy, although one way of doing so is to examine the ways in which fear is rooted in the experience of death. The whole Western history of reflections on the subject of fear and politics, beginning with Thucydides, may be thought of in 'existential' terms, as a sub-set of the more general, deeply visceral reactions to the irremediable fact that each and all of us is fated to die. Death always preoccupies and intrigues individuals, whether they know or accept it, or not. The preoccupation begins at an early age, when death is the object of intrigue and curiosity, but death is most often subject to taboos imposed by adults. In functional terms, adult individuals, and small and large groups, cope with death through a great variety of strategies with often unpredictable reactions. They may lapse into melancholy; with a sigh of resignation and a touch of despair, they turn in seriousness towards the great questions of life, thereby earning themselves the reputation of being a wet blanket in the company of

others. Others who are preoccupied with the idea and certainty of death seek out a religion, which has the consoling effect of putting death in its place, sometimes even (in the case of Christian Science, for instance) by denying it outright. There are of course more common methods of forgetting death. Exalting the dead through fond memories and making ‘a supreme effort to deny death’<sup>1</sup> by declaring it a taboo subject are just two examples of the many ways in which the living cope temporarily with the necessity of their death. They live content, convinced of their own immortality.

It is well known that putting death on the shelf has its costs. Individuals normally pay for their denials. Sometimes the cost is high, in the form of severe symptoms like bouts of depression and psychosomatic illness. More common are those moments when individuals experience, sometimes intensely, what Freud called the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), that diffuse feeling of fascination with the eery, the shadowy, the strange. During these moments when they are drawn into the lairs of the uncanny, seemingly against their will, they resemble children who are both afraid of the dark and yet riveted by it. Comfortable in the conscious, if strained recognition that there is no immediate or actual danger to their lives, they indulge their deeper concerns about death.

Whether or not ‘the aim of all life is death’, and whether individuals chronically suffer the secret wish to die,<sup>2</sup> need not detain us here. The key point is this : since the conscious fear of death would make individuals unable to function normally in everyday life, they repress that fear. In

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<sup>1</sup> Hattie Rosenthal, ‘The Fear of Death as an Indispensable Factor in Psychotherapy’, in Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek (ed.), *Death : Interpretations* (New York 1969), pp. 169-170.

<sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited J. Strachey (London 1955), volume 18.

turn, that repression generates tension which, from time to time, is released through a safety valve, in order to avoid accumulating too much of it.<sup>1</sup> The old joke about the individual who was so afraid of death that they killed themselves captures something of this equation. Under democratic conditions, there are times, in other words, when individuals are drawn fearfully towards death in order better to escape its clutches. Under democratic conditions, such fears are no longer projected onto the imagined ‘spirits’ of nature; and religious institutions lose their monopoly powers of handling the uncanny through sacred imagery that rivets believers to images of the living God, who is represented as a terrible power capable of divine wrath. The modern experience of the uncanny consequently tends to become ‘homeless’. Enter modern communications media : their success in creating and retaining audiences partly stems from their power of creating sites that enable individuals to fixate on symbolic representations of dying and death. Communications media enable individuals to indulge their fears of death, as if they were obsessed with a disturbing painting, like that of Dürer depicting Death as an intruder hell-bent on strangling his victim.

### *The Democratisation of Fear*

Within contemporary democracies, the fear industry – the widespread promulgation of images and stories of fear through communications media – is widely criticised for its exaggeration of the scope and intensity of violent crime and other personal and group disasters.<sup>2</sup> It is accused of *inciting* fears in others, sometimes to the point of so blurring their

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<sup>1</sup> G. Zilboorg, ‘Fear of Death’, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 12 (1943), p. 465; see also Hattie Rosenthal, ‘The Fear of Death as an Indispensable Factor in Psychotherapy’, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear. Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York 1999).

judgements about ‘reality’ that they begin unnecessarily to be panicked into believing that they are living in some late modern version of the lawless state of nature described by Thomas Hobbes. Driven by ratings, the media turns fear into a commodity. It bombards its audiences with stories of homicidal au pairs, preteen mass murderers, paedophile preschool teachers, road ragers, and merciless killer viruses. The corresponding – anti-democratic – belief in Hobbesian solutions logically follows, or so it is claimed. The afraid take refuge in talk of worsening crime and getting tough on the causes of crime; they huddle under the protection of insurance policies, burglar alarms tougher policing, and gated communities dotted with ‘armed response’ signs.

Repressive forms of law and order may well be the offspring of citizens who are afraid, although the politics of fear is a wild horse capable of surprising twists and turns. A good counter-case can be made for paying greater attention to the dialectics of the commercialisation of fear through media such as film, television and music. These media arguably have the long-term effect of relocating fears that are experienced privately into the public domain. They publicly identify those who are afraid, give them a voice, partly by giving their fears a name. The fears once experienced privately by individual victims at the hands of bullies, stalkers, child molesters, or rapists are comparatively recent examples of this trend. By identifying these fears and enabling the afraid to speak out publicly, communications media enable all citizens to understand these fears as a *public* problem for which *public* remedies can and should in principle be found.

This long-term transformation of fear into a public problem is of course subject to many and various exceptions, but its vital significance can be

gauged by placing it within a wider historical context. Until the eighteenth century – until Montesquieu’s pathbreaking reflections - fear had been regarded by those who studied it as a sad necessity in human affairs. Although there had been a string of laments for the undue power and folly induced by fear, discourses on its nature usually treated it as human fate. Fear was considered to be a sticky web spun by the gods, as natural as thunder and lightning, an inevitable part of the human condition – as Thucydides himself thought when analysing fear as rooted in the human drive for security, glory and material wealth.<sup>1</sup> QUOTE MILAN HERE...

During the eighteenth century, this presumption of the inevitability of fear began to crumble. A long revolution in the understanding of fear broke out. So fear came to be given various names and then studied by writers who distinguished between its causes and pretexts. Its roots in the densely textured fabric of psychic, social and political life were investigated, and the possibility emerged, or so these writers thought, that fear and its paralysing effects could be overcome, not just comforted and consoled, for instance through religious faith. Fear came to be regarded as a thoroughly human problem for which there are thoroughly human remedies. Some writers even thought politically about the subject, sometimes in radical ways, for instance by suggesting that a certain type of political system – a democratic republic – would prove to be something of a ‘school of courage’ (Ferrero) and, hence, the best antidote to fears that destroy citizens’ capacities for self-chosen action.

To the extent that fears once suffered in private have come to be perceived and dealt with as public problems, the ground is prepared for

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<sup>1</sup> See the forthcoming contributions of Milan Podunavac, *Politics and Fear*

the understanding of fear as contingent, as a *political* problem. This long-term transformation may be described as the ‘democratisation’ of fear, not in the ridiculous sense that everyone comes to exercise their right to be afraid, or is duty-bound to be so, but rather that fear, especially its debilitating and anti-democratic forms, ceases to be seen as ‘natural’ and comes instead to be understood as a *contingent* human experience, as a *publicly treatable* phenomenon, as a political problem for which tried and tested political remedies may be found. A fundamental first step in this modern democratisation of fear was its categorisation. Partly in emulation of the methods pioneered by Linnaeus, imaginative word-building by analysts of fear became vogueish. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the suffix *phobia* – from the Greek *phobeio*, meaning ‘I fear’ and ‘I am put to flight’ – began to be used widely by medical and psychological writers, so widely in fact that figures like Benjamin Rush satirically suggested new terms like ‘rum phobia’ (‘a very rare distemper’) and ‘church phobia’ and ‘doctor phobia’.<sup>1</sup> Carl Westphal’s less light-hearted invention of the term *agoraphobia* pinpointed cases of morbid fear of open places.<sup>2</sup> Others spoke for the first time of such fears as *photophobia* (fear and avoidance of light), *hydrophobia* (fear of water, earlier called *phobodipsia*, fear of drinking), and *xenophobia*, fear and avoidance of strangers and foreigners. On the eve of the First World War, one authority noted the contemporary usage of 136 different neologisms with the suffix *-phobia*<sup>3</sup>. The new and expanding vocabulary for

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Rush ... (1825), cited in Karl Menninger et. al., *The Vital Balance : The Life Processes in Mental Health and Illness* (New York 1963), especially p. 444. See also the pertinent remarks of Leopold Loewenfeld, *Die psychischen Zwangsercheinungen* (Wiesbaden 1904), pp. 330-355.

<sup>2</sup> Carl F. O. Westphal, ‘Die Agoraphobie : Eine neuropatische Erscheinung’, *Archiv für Psychiatrie* 3 (1871), pp. 138-161. Westphal describes a disturbed patient who felt that Tiergarten, where there were no signs of houses, and a certain square in Berlin were both many miles wide. The patient did not mind traffic or the company of other people, but whenever alone in such places he suffered severe symptoms, like head sensations, palpitations, and trembling.

<sup>3</sup> G. Stanley Hall, ‘A Synthetic Genetic Study of Fear’, *American Journal of Psychology* 25 (1914), pp. 149-200, 321-392.

describing and analysing fear no doubt served to endow its investigators with ‘expertise’ and clinical ‘authority’. But it also paved the way for the view that fears can be named and classified and their aetiology publicly explained. Freud’s early thoughts on the zoophobias of children – the horse phobia of ‘little Hans’ and the wolf phobia of the young Russian known as ‘the wolf-man’<sup>1</sup> – helped reinforce this trend. Fear was seen neither as a natural product of birth (as Rank had claimed) nor (as Ernest Jones had surmised) an expression of an inborn faculty<sup>2</sup>, nor as an illness. The fears of disturbed individuals were rather interpreted as clues to the existence of repressed anxieties and wishes that have been displaced by the ego, only to resurface in consciousness in disguised form. Those disguises were said to function as mechanisms of avoidance, whose self-disturbing or self-crippling effects could in principle be cured by cultivating the victims’ capacity for self-reflection by talking about them.

The contemporary concern with traumas – experiences of fear that are so intense that an individual’s ordinary coping mechanisms break down - feeds into this older process of democratising fear. Many studies in the burgeoning fields of psychiatry and psychoanalysis point out that intense experiences of fear are not confined to those who survived the Shoah, or nuclear attack, or refugee and prison camps, or who as soldiers survived combat at the battlefield. Traumas are found closer to home, sometimes too close to home for comfort. The common symptoms of what was once called ‘shell shock’ and ‘battle fatigue’ and is now called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – symptoms such as emotional numbing, feelings

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<sup>1</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-year-old Boy[1909]’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London and New York 1955), volume 10, pp. 3-149, and ‘From the History of an Infantile Neurosis[1918]’, in *ibid.*, volume 17, pp. 3-122.

<sup>2</sup> See Freud’s critique of Rank in *The Problem of Anxiety* (New York 1936), chapter 10; cf. Ernest Jones, ‘The Pathology of Morbid Anxiety’, (1911) in *Papers on Psychoanalysis* (London...4<sup>th</sup> edition).

of helplessness, anger, anxiety, disturbed sleep, flashbacks, panic attacks, hyperalertness, suicidal thoughts, survivor guilt, self-punishment, anxiety about losing others, general confusion - show up in large percentages of other groups that have been scared half to death, for instance those who have experienced rape or incest or violent crime.<sup>1</sup> The individuals and groups who survive concentrated fear do not easily extricate themselves from its clutches. Fear lives on in its victims. It stalks their every step. Despite the fact that they may have no direct memory of what was done to them, the victims of fear remain disturbed. It is as if everything that subsequently happened to them brings them back to their original fears. Their 'normal' lives within civil society cannot be routinised, or purified. They are haunted by a normalcy shot through with the bizarre fears from which they thought they had escaped. Hence their felt need to bear witness, to tell stories to others about the horrors that they tasted – and so painfully to reconstitute their damaged lives, not through tranquillizers, but through the catharsis of teaching themselves and others how the truths and dangers of what they have been through might be comprehended.

The political effort to identify fears, to name them, to witness and care for their victims, and to hunt down their perpetrators so that they might be brought before courts of law, is something positive, yet incomplete. It is hard to know where today's democracies are positioned on the scale of either understanding the fears that they (or other regimes) generate, or their counter-capacity to cultivate fearlessness, for instance through publicly witnessing the dastardly effects of fear. One thing is however

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<sup>1</sup> Good summaries of these trends can be grasped by comparing *Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry Into 'Shell-Shock'* (London 1922); the Veteran Administration publication, *Selected Bibliography 2 : Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder with Special Attention to Vietnam Veterans*, Revision 25 (Phoenix, VA Medical Center), January 16 1986; Charles R. Figley (ed.), *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans : Theory, Research and Treatment* (New York 1978); Alice Miller, *Am Anfang war Erziehung* (Frankfurt am Main 1980); and Kalí Tal, *Worlds of Hurt. Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge and New York 1996).

certain : despite the flight of contemporary political science and political philosophy away from the land of fear, its inhabitants do not remain silent. Fear is a topic that cannot be ignored, or made to wither away, simply because democracies themselves stimulate the public awareness that those who ignore fear do so at their own peril.