

Beat: Politics

WE ARE ENEMIES OF THE STATE: Part II

Why are we the enemy?

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USPA NEWS - It has been said, "power reveals character." When people are allowed authority over another, the authority inevitably usurps the free will of the latter. After all, the power to command is the definition of authority.

As long as the one with the authority and the one being commanded submits to being commanded, there is no problem. Conflicts arise, of course, when the person being commanded chooses not to follow the order(s); or feels the order isn't justified. This conflict arouses the threat of hostile force against the person choosing not to comply with whatever order is being challenged. The reason for not complying is inconsequential in so far as the use of force is concerned. What is germane is the conflict; the degree of force used and the method employed to gain compliance.

When an authority figure has the ability to affect the life, liberty or property on another, through the powers granted that person, the methods and consequences should follow established laws, rules, regulations, policies, and directives. The consequences should be humane and in proportion to the offense. When they're not in proportion, and not performed in a humane manner, outrage inevitably ensues. It's ingrained in us to want the other fellow to follow the rules governing them. We can fudge a bit on the rules, naturally, but most reasonably intelligent people recognize when they've gone too far and can accept the consequences.

So it's not that submitting to authority is repugnant; we just want the game to be played fair and the scales of justice to be true. Authorities, however, seem to want the scale to weigh more heavily in their favor. Historically, the scale eventually becomes irrelevant; which is where we seem to find ourselves now. With no scale at all, who weighs what is right or wrong? Well, of course, the one who used to have the scale in the first place. But without a fair measurement, wickedness inevitably results. Unfortunately, there's just an innate debauchery in most of us, and that causes our authoritarian "Hitler" self to crawl out of our humanity.

AUTHORITY PRODUCES AGGRESSION

This fact couldn't have been illustrated more succinctly than the Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted at Stanford University in 1971. Two groups of participants were chosen at random to be either guards or prisoners. The simulated prison was located in the basement of the psychology building. The only instruction to the guards was to "maintain order." It was supposed to be a two-week experiment. Due to the extreme aggression of the guards, however, the experiment was called off after the fifth day. Even though the "prisoners" did attempt to rebel and stick up for themselves during the experiment, order was quickly restored after the "guards" became physically and mentally abusive.

We need only look at the events occurring at Abu Ghraib prison to see the manifestation of inhumanity by "professionals," not "test subjects." Members of the U.S. Military and civilian contractors from various law enforcement and clandestine agencies conducted torture, physical and psychological abuse, and heinous forms of humiliation. The Iraqi prisoners were the enemy; as such, it seemed rational to the high-ranking United States officials and lowly soldiers, that inhumanity towards another was permissible. It can be said that authority figures feel justified denying the "enemy" their life, liberty, or property according to the particular circumstances; and at times, those actions are necessary and prudent.

But when the authority is allowed to disregard morality and a person's humanity entirely, the rules become completely inconsequential. It should be noted, as well, that only lower ranking individuals were held responsible for their actions at Abu Ghraib. The highest-ranking officials, both military and civilian, who were ultimately the overseers and policy makers of the prison, were given a pass. There were no prosecutions of the political authorities that allowed and justified the torture in the first place.

BREAKING THE RULES MAKES YOU THE ENEMY

So herein lay the answer to the question, "Why are we the enemy?" The authoritarians make the rules and the rules prescribe the required behavior. The minions of the authorities who take on the cloak of authority enforce the behavior required by the rules, by whatever means they feel is necessary. When an individual's behavior is not aligned with the rules, then he or she breaking the rules is

perceived as the opponent, or the enemy. The culture of the authoritarian institution instills in its members that the rule-breaker is usurping the authority given to the guardian of the rules, therefore, the guardian must engage in some form of battle with the rule-breaker. A battle infers war, and in war there are enemies.

All the while, the rule-makers sit atop their perch and watch their orders carried out-- and the punishment that ensues from violating their orders. If the rules are unjust or inhumane, the lowly "enforcer" will eventually be held accountable, not the ones making the rules in the first place. In the story "The Wizard of Oz," the great and mighty wizard hid behind the curtain; and so it is for the rulers. They hide behind the curtain of invincibility, and even though we know they're behind the curtain, we play along to keep up the charade. We vote them back in, or we forgive them for their valuable service to our country; rarely do we ever rip them from their throne behind the curtain, or reveal them as the villains they are.

On the contrary, it is the laws, rules, regulations, ad infinitum, that makes us the villains. Some laws, of course, are necessary for a civilized society, and for justice to take place. It's the laws that violate our life, our liberty, our privacy, our property, and most of all our humanity that we rebel against. Even though we feel justified in our rebellion, the authorities see it as threatening their throne. Authoritarians, in whatever capacity they hold, are kingdoms unto themselves. The serfs must not violate the official decrees, lest the rabble pull back the curtain and throw the wizard out. So the guards follow orders, beat back the throngs of serfs approaching the curtain, and accept their reward for a job well done.

We, on the other hand, lie bruised and bloodied in the street. We wonder why that guard who is our neighbor, who seemed to be so much like us, can't see why we don't like the rules. Don't they see how the rules deny us our freedom to live out our lives as we deem fit? And why such harsh treatment? Surely their mothers, daughters, sons, wives, husbands, fathers, will have to endure the same treatment at the hands of some other guards. Why do they think we aren't deserving of humane treatment? Why are we the enemy? Why? Because they know we can pull back the curtain and that's against the rules.

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