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LECTURE

at the Occasion of the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation VIZE 97 Prize

Prague Crossroads
October 5, 2005

LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY IN A TIME OF TERROR

My first visit to this wonderful city of Prague was at a time of a great cataclysm. The date: July 20, 1969. The cosmic weather report: The brilliant sunshine created by the Prague Spring had been eclipsed by the summer solstice of re-emerged clouds of Soviet Darkness and the somber skies of the Warsaw Pact. Having survived the barbarity of the Nazi invasion and the cruel injustices of decades of totalitarian Communism, this great nation attempted a remarkable social experiment. Just a year earlier, during the Prague Spring, 1968, your nation sought to put a 'human face' on its political agency. People and their leaders believed the time had come to enhance the Human Condition through institutions that promoted freedom of expression and human dignity. Sadly, for you, and for many of us living on the other side of that dark curtain, this hope of liberation was cruelly crushed

In summer of 1969, as I experienced it, there was a strange sense of communal paranoia in the air around Prague. Everyone whispered whenever mentioning to me anything political or about their invaders, and continually checked to see if we were being watched. By that time after the previous year's invasion, there was not a military tank in view in your city and no obvious army of occupation in sight. Nevertheless, their shadowy presence was palpable and intimidating. Yet under those dark clouds there were rays of warm friendship and solidarity among all those I met. I was part of a small group of foreign scholars who participated in a psychology conference organized by the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

Our Czech colleagues took very good care of us all. I had the special pleasure of being the house guest of Vera Bokorova, who had been a graduate student working with me at the first European Summer School in Experimental Social Psychology, held in Leuven, Belgium in 1967. The Bokorova family made me feel at home and despite the shortage of food at that time, they and their neighbors shared the harvest of their community garden that they had cared for so lovingly.

The spirit of Czech/ American friendship is deep and vibrant. This special relationship between our countries was laid down long ago by many Czech immigrants to America, and by the collaboration of our President Woodrow Wilson with your first President T. G. Masaryk and his American wife. This special relationship not only survived the Soviet occupation, it flourished during that time.

How I Won the Race to the Moon. To quote a famous Czech playwright; "These are the paradoxes." Right then, as the Soviets tried to secure their closest political neighborhood and defeat the soul of this Czech nation, they lost the Moon. The "race to the Moon" pitted the United States against the Soviet Union, with the Russians in the lead initially, holding the Sputnik advantage. However, on July 20, 1969, American astronaut, Neil Armstrong, took "a giant leap for mankind" in space exploration by his small steps on the Moon surface. Along with many others in Prague, the Bokorova family and I stayed up late into the night to watch this remarkable scientific achievement unfold on television.

The next day as my hosts brought me around to their friends in their homes and at the cafes, understandably I had to take full credit for this victory over the hated Russians. After all, there were many psychological dimensions to this technical accomplishment in terms of the mental preparation of the astronauts, the interior design of the space capsule, and the special competitive motivation that President John Kennedy had championed in his vision of space exploration. So psychology had played an important role -- that made me proud to be a member of this "winning team."

So here I am today, more than a third of century later, in a very different country. No more Czechoslovakia, no more Iron Curtain blocking the sun, but by a totally transformed climate. Smiles replace frowns, openness replaces defensiveness, transparency replaces paranoid suspicions, and a sense of liberation pervades everything. Perhaps you have already gotten used to it, the younger generation taking it for granted, but for me as an old-time visitor to this great nation, it is fresh and exciting.

And what a wonderful occasion it is for me on this special day. I come to share my unbridled delight in receiving the honor of the Dagmar and Václav Havel Foundation Vision 97 Award for 2005. It is a remarkable company of scholars, humanists, scientists and public servants that I proudly join today. Neuroscientist, Karl Pribram, the first recipient of this award, who is my good friend, asked me to give his fond greetings to the Havel family. It is important to add that I am excited to meet the man who was able to say "No" to a tyrant and who has not only been able to write about truth but to model a life lived in Truth.

My Research Career

Perhaps you are curious about what I have done since that visit to Prague many years ago. I have created programs of research that demonstrate the vulnerability of most people when caught up in the vortex of powerful social situations. As an experimental social psychologist, I try to create in laboratory settings the controlled conditions that allow me to test causal hypotheses about the nature of human nature. Because I am passionate about understanding the dynamics of human nature in its many facets, my research domains have been quite varied. I have studied: social affiliation, cognitive dissonance, persuasion and influence, time perspective, shyness, madness, prisons, vandalism, torture, and other evils. In general, I have shown that social conditions can exert powerful influences over the way we feel, think and act, even though we are typically not aware of their subtle and pervasive impact on us. My research has shown how rational people can behave irrationally, sane people can act crazy, and good people can do bad things-- under specified social conditions.

My research on the psychology of evil has centered on the processes of deindividuation-- feeling anonymous--and dehumanization--treating others as less than human enemies, along with the power of imprisonment. My most well known research is the **Stanford Prison Experiment** that demonstrated how easy it is for ordinary people to behave in evil ways toward others when deindividuation and dehumanization were combined in a realistic prison setting. Normal, healthy college students were randomly assigned to play the roles of prisoner or guard in a mock prison scheduled to last 2 weeks. However, I was forced to end the study a week early because it had gotten out of control. Nearly half the volunteer prisoners began having "emotional breakdowns" after being brutalized repeatedly by other students acting as guards. They behaved sadistically, taking delight in creating ways to humiliate and degrade "their prisoners."

Having total power over others without moral constraints or supervision can transform good people into perpetrators of evil, as we have seen in the abuses by American soldiers in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison-- which reveals remarkable parallels with my Stanford Prison.

I have also been responsible for one line of research that did just the opposite of the Stanford Prison Experiment -it helped to liberate people from psychological prisons. That **Self-Imposed Silent Prison is Shyness**. Mine was the first systematic investigation of shyness in adults. In addition to discovering new information about the causes, correlates, and consequences of shyness, my associates and I have created a Shyness Clinic in our community that has been treating shy adolescents and adults for the past 30 years.

Illuminating the Darker Sides of Human Nature

I have been privileged to be able to explore the darker sides of human nature in order to find ways of shedding new light on them and to develop remedial applications to alter those undesirable states. It has become part of my agenda to act as an agent for social change to promote the psychology of liberation. In recent years I have been devoting more of my intellectual energy and academic credibility to discovering new ways in which I can help to liberate people from various prisons of the mind and spirit, which diminish human dignity, reduce personal autonomy, and curtail freedom of expression and association.

What are some of those prisons of the mind?

The first one is Shame. As a child growing up in poverty in the ghetto known as the South Bronx in New York City, I was often shamed by social workers, clinic doctors and others who made evident that me and my kind of poor people were a burden on their society-- and I still remember the sadness and anger I felt. Shame is one consequence of prejudice and discrimination. To combat that evil, we must find new ways to encourage tolerance for diversity.

Another prison is Shyness. We each contribute to the growing epidemic of shyness by failing to do one simple thing -- helping make others feel "special." We can do that by exchanging our compliments and praise for criticism, and being more accepting of others. We can also help our children train daily for "social fitness" just as they might do in athletic training.

Time Traps create other prisons. Those people who focus excessively on memories of negative past experiences are more likely to get depressed, and become more angry and violence-prone. When a nation or groups within a culture collectively share such a past-negative time perspectives, the threat of centuries' old revenge and blood feud is ever present, as we have seen in genocidal wars. It is time now to create a New Time that involves the youth of all nations in developing captivating future-oriented strategies to combat those old-fashioned myths and outmoded scenarios.

However, there is another aspect of time perspective that creates a unique prison for many young people everywhere, that is being totally present-oriented -- with a focus on either hedonism or present fatalism. To be trapped in the **present-hedonistic** prison creates an illusion of freedom to do whatever gives one pleasure without concern for future costs and consequences. They become at risk for all addictive behaviors. Others who are **present-fatalists** take no actions that will give them pleasure or improve their usually lowly social-economic status; since they have internalized the belief that fate controls their destiny. This view confines them and their families to prisons of poverty and suppresses motivation to make changes in their lives of

quiet desperation.

The ideal time perspective that I advocate is learning to develop a balanced blend of a moderate level of Future and Positive Past orientation with a dash of hedonism on the side. Seeking that ideal should be the quest of individuals and the nations that enable such a healthy combination to flourish.

Never Trading Freedom for Security-- Even in the War on Terrorism

In many of these psychological prisons, we exchange our personal freedoms for promises of security and simplicity that are always illusions. Right now in many nations, especially in the United States, national leaders are proposing that same trade-off in response to the threat of global terrorism. They promise to make the homeland safe and guarantee security in return for citizens sacrificing some of their hard-won basic freedoms. The more freedom we surrender to buy the illusion of security, the more we are doing the terrorists' job for them since their threat alone is sufficient to induce democracies to act like fear-driven fascist states. Terrorist threats come from extreme fundamentalism within and outside our nations and must be opposed not by nation wars but by reaching into the hearts and minds of potential terrorists. We must give them hope for a better future through education and adequate resources to live fuller more meaningful lives without violence.

A TIME FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AND COMMUNAL ACTION

President Havel addressed the United States Congress 15 years ago, saying that the Czechs can learn much from America, and that in return the Czechs could offer their unique experiences and special knowledge to that well- educated, wealthy, powerful nation. I am delighted to have this occasion to continue that dialogue about the quest for freedom and truth, for democratic governments to enrich the lives of its citizens and to reach beyond the boundaries of state to embrace global vitalization. In his first Presidential address, Havel made evident how individuals become responsible for the kind of government they are subject to, both by the way they think about it and by their failure to challenge unacceptable forms of government oppression and tyranny.

Talking about the "contaminated moral atmosphere" that permeated the old way of thinking in Czechoslovakia, Havel noted that the totalitarian system persisted longer than it should have because Czechs resigned themselves to it and did not envision its change. Thus political revolutions begin in the minds of men and women who can liberate their critical thinking skills from the confines of tradition and their spirits from the forces of external domination.

Liberty and Truth

In thinking about our national histories it seems to me that Americans may have been more

successful in the pursuit of liberty and freedom, while you Czechs may be better in pursuing truth. It is impressive to me that your presidential flag bears the motto, **"Truth Prevails"**! (I am sorry to say that such a banner is unlikely to fly high over the offices of the current administration in the United States.)

I invite you to reflect with me on this theme of the Psychology of Liberation. I encourage us all to consider the ways in which we limit our own personal freedoms, in particular, the freedom of our minds to soar to new realms. We need to reflect further on how we may imprison others through prejudices, unreasonable expectations, and contingent rather than unconditional giving of our love. And further, how we limit ourselves if we persist in seeing the world in simplistic black and white dichotomies that encourage us to believe that what our side is doing is legitimate and right, and our opinions are the only correct and acceptable views.

Together we must work to open all the prisons of the mind to liberate the creative energies that are stifled by such cerebral bars. We must also refashion our laws and correctional facilities to design community alternatives to physical incarceration, and more humanized treatment of all prisoners so that they will be effectively functioning citizens when they return to our society. Nelson Mandela has given us one effective model for doing so, and of course, Václav Havel has provided another creative model of national liberation from oppression. Again, recall the motto of the Velvet Revolution that overthrew years of tyranny: **"Truth and Love Must Prevail Over Lies and Hatred."** This romantic motto may be ridiculed as the stuff of dreamers, but is even more valid today as lies and hatred breed genocide, civil wars and suicidal terrorism around the globe. Truth and love bind to form understanding and compassion as the first principles in opposing new forms of tyranny arising in our world.

My Psychology of Liberation is a call to arms, compassionate arms, in opposing all those forces both within us and around us that diminish the potential for human perfection. It is an invitation to join in a global community that supports those forces that will strengthen the bonds of the Human Condition-- starting with justice, peace and love. In the end, I believe that each of us has the ability "to make a difference" in improving the Human Condition -- through acts of kindness, generosity of spirit, and a vision that always seeks to make others feel special, worthwhile, understood and embraced as our kin, especially when they are not of our kind.

Doing so joins us with the wonderfully vibrant hero of Nikos Kazantzakis' novel, **Zorba, The Greek**, in the great dance of life -- as we all devote our creative energies to making love, not war.