

**AUTHORITARIANISM AS A TRANSITION: OLIVEIRA VIANNA IN DIALOGUE
WITH EUROPEAN FASCISM AND CONTEMPORARY AUTHORITARIANISMS**

***O AUTORITARISMO COMO TRANSIÇÃO: OLIVEIRA VIANNA EM DIÁLOGO COM O
FASCISMO EUROPEU E OS AUTORITARISMOS CONTEMPORÂNEOS***

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EL FASCISMO EUROPEO Y LOS AUTORITARISMOS CONTEMPORÂNEOS***



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ABSTRACT: This article examines the concept of instrumental authoritarianism in Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna, analyzing his proposal of a pedagogical State that would justify authoritarian tutelage as a means of democratic formation. The research adopts a historical-hermeneutical method, articulating Vianna's thought with European authoritarian traditions and contemporary technocratic authoritarianisms. The theoretical dialogue with Weber, Arendt, Schmitt, Habermas, Foucault, and Agamben allows questioning the ethical and political legitimacy of an authoritarianism that presents itself as transitory. It is concluded that, in the absence of clear normative foundations, every form of tutelage tends to permanence, transforming the promise of emancipation into technical rationality and governmentality. The study thus shows that Vianna's thought expresses a recurrent contradiction of modernity: the effort to build freedom under the form of authority.

KEYWORDS: Oliveira Vianna. Instrumental authoritarianism. Democracy. Technical rationality. Political legitimacy.

RESUMO: *O artigo examina o conceito de autoritarismo instrumental em Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna, analisando sua proposta de um Estado pedagógico que justificaria a tutela autoritária como meio de formação democrática. A pesquisa adota um método histórico-hermenêutico, articulando o pensamento de Vianna às tradições autoritárias europeias e aos autoritarismos tecnocráticos contemporâneos. O diálogo teórico com Weber, Arendt, Schmitt, Habermas, Foucault e Agamben permite problematizar a legitimidade ética e política de um autoritarismo que se apresenta como transitório. Conclui-se que, na ausência de fundamentos normativos claros, toda forma de tutela tende à permanência, convertendo a promessa de emancipação em racionalidade técnica e governamentalidade. O estudo evidencia, assim, que o pensamento de Vianna expressa uma contradição recorrente da modernidade: o esforço de construir a liberdade sob a forma da autoridade.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Oliveira Vianna. Autoritarismo instrumental. Democracia. Racionalidade técnica. Legitimidade política.

RESUMEN: *El artículo examina el concepto de autoritarismo instrumental en Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna, analizando su propuesta de un Estado pedagógico que justificaría la tutela autoritaria como medio de formación democrática. La investigación adopta un método histórico-hermenéutico, articulando el pensamiento de Vianna con las tradiciones autoritarias europeas y los autoritarismos tecnocráticos contemporáneos. El diálogo teórico con Weber, Arendt, Schmitt, Habermas, Foucault y Agamben permite problematizar la legitimidad ética y política de un autoritarismo que se presenta como transitorio. Se concluye que, en ausencia de fundamentos normativos claros, toda forma de tutela tiende a la permanencia, convirtiendo la promesa de emancipación en racionalidad técnica y gubernamentalidad. El estudio evidencia que el pensamiento de Vianna expresa una contradicción recurrente de la modernidad: el esfuerzo por construir la libertad bajo la forma de la autoridad.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Oliveira Vianna. Autoritarismo instrumental. Democracia. Racionalidad técnica. Legitimidad política.

Introduction

The question of the legitimacy of power and the ethical limits of authority constitutes one of the enduring dilemmas of political philosophy. Since Max Weber (1994), it has been understood that every regime seeks to justify itself not only through effectiveness, but through belief in its legitimacy—whether rational, traditional, or charismatic. Tension arises when power claims a morally superior end in order to justify authoritarian means. At this point, a question emerges that runs through modern political thought and guides this study: can authoritarianism be a legitimate means to democratic ends?

Hannah Arendt (2011) reminds us that authority, unlike mere force, presupposes recognition and consent, but she warns that its degeneration into technical or bureaucratic domination leads to the denial of politics as a space of freedom. Norberto Bobbio (1997), in turn, observes that the drama of modern democracies lies in reconciling the need for governmental effectiveness with the principle of limiting power. This contradiction, which marked the twentieth century, finds a singular formulation in the thought of Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna (1883–1951): a project of instrumental authoritarianism that presents itself as transitional, pedagogical, and grounded in the technical rationality of the state.

Vianna's work challenges the classical categories of political theory. While denouncing the inauthenticity of liberal institutions in Brazil—copied from European models and detached from the country's social reality—he proposes authoritarian centralization as a necessary stage in the construction of an authentic democracy, albeit one of a corporatist and elitist nature. This conception, deeply marked by belief in a corrective state rationality, is situated between two opposing traditions: on the one hand, Carl Schmitt's political decisionism (2000), which exalts sovereign authority as the foundation of order; on the other, the participatory ideal that views democracy not merely as a form of government, but as a value intrinsic to political freedom (Arendt, 2011; Bobbio, 1997).

This study adopts a historical-hermeneutic method, combining conceptual analysis with historical contextualization. The hermeneutic perspective allows Vianna's categories (state, democracy, people, elite) to be interpreted within the intellectual horizon of his time, thus avoiding anachronisms. At the same time, a dialectical reading seeks to reveal the internal tensions of his thought—between modernization and exclusion, technique and legitimacy, transition and permanence. The objective is to understand how Vianna's authoritarianism articulates a political rationality that aims to correct the imperfections of liberal democracy through the temporary suspension of its own principles.

Understanding this formulation requires acknowledging its constitutive ambiguity. In Vianna, authoritarianism is presented as a transitional means, yet it lacks normative criteria capable of ensuring its self-limitation. Thus, the problem is not only political, but also epistemological and ethical: if authoritarianism is an instrument for democracy, what guarantees that the transition does not become an end in itself? To what extent can the technical rationality of the state replace the principle of popular sovereignty without destroying the very basis of democratic legitimacy?

In light of these questions, this article proposes an analysis of Oliveira Vianna's instrumental authoritarianism in dialogue with European fascism and contemporary authoritarianisms, seeking to elucidate the continuities and ruptures among these forms of power. In doing so, it aims not only to reassess Vianna's position in the history of Brazilian political thought, but also to shed light on a persistent dilemma: thinking democracy from within—and, paradoxically, from authoritarianism itself.

The Concept of Instrumental Authoritarianism in Oliveira Vianna

The concept of instrumental authoritarianism formulated by Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna constitutes one of the most complex and ambiguous points in Brazilian political thought. In it, authoritarianism appears not as an end, but as a pedagogical and transitional means, deemed necessary for the constitution of an authentic democracy adapted to national reality. This conception breaks with classical categories of power analysis by proposing a paradoxical political teleology: the temporary suspension of freedoms as a condition for their future realization.

From a conceptual standpoint, the term *instrumental* carries a dual meaning. On the one hand, it suggests a mediating function—a technical means aimed at the organizational effectiveness of the state; on the other, it implies a moral justification, a teleological legitimation according to which coercion becomes necessary for the political maturation of society. It is precisely this second aspect that demands closer philosophical scrutiny, for, as Immanuel Kant (2002) observes, no political action can be morally valid if it treats human beings merely as means rather than as ends in themselves. In this sense, Vianna's instrumental logic reveals a profound ethical tension: by reducing citizenship to raw material to be shaped by technical elites, his proposal risks transforming the people into objects rather than subjects of politics.

The genealogy of this idea can be traced to Vianna's critique of inauthentic Brazilian liberalism. In *O Idealismo da Constituição* (1939), Vianna denounces the mechanical importation of foreign institutional models—particularly North American and French constitutionalism—which, he argues, were implemented in Brazil without correspondence to its social reality. This operation, according to him, produced institutions “out of place,” an expression later taken up by Roberto Schwarz (1973) to describe the incongruity between legal forms and social structures. Brazilian liberalism would thus be an abstraction, incapable of organizing political participation or constructing effective citizenship.

Vianna's response to this impasse is what Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (1978) termed instrumental authoritarianism—a transitional regime in which a centralized state acts as tutor to society, guiding it toward democratic maturity. Authoritarian centralization is therefore justified not by ideology or totalitarian vocation, but as a functional strategy to dismantle the conditions that hinder the emergence of a genuine liberal order. As Santos (1978, p. 93) states, it involved “implementing an authoritarian political system whose economic and political program would be capable of demolishing the conditions that prevent the social system from becoming liberal.”

However, this formulation contains an ethical and philosophical aporia. If authoritarianism is presented as a means, its legitimacy depends on the ends it seeks to achieve. This relationship between means and ends was extensively discussed by Max Weber (1994), who distinguished between an ethics of conviction and an ethics of responsibility. The responsible politician must evaluate the consequences of actions, not merely their intentions.

In Vianna, instrumental authoritarianism can be seen as an expression of this ethics of responsibility, insofar as it aims to correct structural deficiencies in order to allow for the future emergence of a stable democracy. Yet the Weberian problem reappears in tragic form: the absence of clear normative criteria to delimit the transitional character of authoritarianism turns the instrument into an end in itself. Without an ethical horizon capable of limiting power, Vianna's pedagogical state comes dangerously close to what Weber would describe as hypertrophied rational-bureaucratic domination—technique transformed into ideology.

Hannah Arendt (2011) offers another lens through which to assess Vianna's tension. In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt distinguishes authority from domination: the former is grounded in recognition and shared tradition, the latter in coercion and obedience. The authoritarian pedagogy proposed by Vianna—a state that educates the masses until they are deemed fit for democracy—dissolves this distinction, as it turns government into a tutor and

the citizen into a perpetual apprentice. By seeking to ground freedom in temporary submission, Vianna reproduces the paradox of technocratic authority, in which technical knowledge replaces political judgment. Arendt (2011, p. 167, our translation) warns that “the replacement of authority by competence is one of the most subtle forms of the destruction of politics.”

This technocratic bias is central to Vianna’s thought. In *Instituições Políticas Brasileiras* (1949), he defends the primacy of the Executive and of technical elites over party elites, placing his faith in bureaucracy as an instrument of modernization. This perspective resonates with Carl Schmitt’s decisionism (2000), for whom the essence of politics lies in the sovereign decision that founds order. However, unlike Schmitt—who conceives the decision as an existential and absolute act—Vianna understands it as a technical and corrective function. The result is an administrative decisionism, in which authority is legitimized not by exception, but by competence—an inversion that anticipates, in part, the instrumental rationality criticized by Jürgen Habermas (1987), according to which technical reason tends to colonize the lifeworld and reduce politics to management.

From an epistemological standpoint, the notion of an *instrument* proves to be ambiguous. It is simultaneously a descriptive concept and a justificatory metaphor. As a concept, it designates a phase of institutional transition: a regime of force intended to consolidate the nation and its political structures. As a metaphor, however, it performs an ideological function by concealing the permanence of hierarchies under the guise of state pedagogy. A transition devoid of mechanisms of self-limitation runs the risk of becoming permanent. Kant (2002) had already warned that no form of government can claim moral legitimacy if it cannot be universalized according to the principle of mutual respect. Vianna’s authoritarianism, by treating the people as incapable of self-government, denies the moral universality of autonomy and establishes a tutelary politics grounded in collective heteronomy.

The racial and cultural dimension of Vianna’s thought exacerbates this contradiction. In *Populações Meridionais do Brasil* (1938), he attributes psychological and moral characteristics to different regions and population groups, reproducing categories of inferiorization typical of racial determinism. Although he did not formulate a racial policy along the lines of Nazism, his hierarchical view of society underpins the very necessity of a strong state. Instrumental authoritarianism thus emerges as a corrective function applied to a society deemed immature and mixed, in which technical elites assume the task of civilizing the masses. From this perspective, the transition is not temporal but ontological: the Brazilian people are seen as incomplete, eternally in formation.

The philosophical analysis of this discourse reveals a tension between historicism and morality. If authoritarianism is justified as a historical requirement—a necessary stage of development—it relinquishes any claim to universal ethical grounding. The risk is falling into political relativism, in which historical necessity legitimizes any means. Habermas (1987) criticizes this instrumental rationality for its inability to ground norms that are valid intersubjectively. Applied to Vianna, this means that the instrument lacks communicative justification: it is not the result of rational consensus, but of technocratic imposition. Authoritarian pedagogy thus replaces dialogue with administration, and deliberation with tutelage.

In theoretical terms, instrumental authoritarianism may be described as an attempt to reconcile two irreconcilable paradigms: Schmittian decisionism and the Weberian teleology of rationality. Vianna recognizes the need for sovereign decision, but subordinates it to a technical and moral purpose—national modernization. However, by converting the political into a function of the technical, he strips authoritarianism of its tragic dimension and transforms it into social engineering. What is lost in this process is the properly political dimension of conflict and plurality.

In sum, the concept of instrumental authoritarianism in Oliveira Vianna can be interpreted as a project of redemption through authority, in which coercion appears as a political remedy for the disease of liberal inauthenticity. Its ethical core lies in the belief that freedom can be learned under tutelage. Yet, in light of modern political philosophy, this belief reveals an insoluble contradiction: the authoritarianism that promises democracy tends to perpetuate itself, because it lacks internal criteria for its own overcoming. What in Vianna is announced as transition may therefore be read—as Arendt (2011) would warn—as the moment in which power ceases to be a means of politics and becomes its own end.

Convergences and Differences between Oliveira Vianna and European Authoritarianism

The comparison between Oliveira Vianna's instrumental authoritarianism and twentieth-century European authoritarian regimes—particularly Italian Fascism, German Nazism, and Iberian conservatism—is an indispensable exercise, but one that requires methodological caution and philosophical sensitivity. Historical analysis, while fundamental, is not sufficient; it is necessary to grasp the structures of legitimacy, the forms of authority, and the political temporalities involved in each model.

The most evident affinity between Vianna and European authoritarianisms lies in their shared critique of parliamentary liberalism. Both the Brazilian jurist and thinkers such as Carl Schmitt and Giovanni Gentile start from the diagnosis that liberalism dissolves political unity, turning the state into an arena of fragmented interests. In *O Idealismo da Constituição* (1939), Vianna denounces the importation of inauthentic liberal institutions incapable of taking root in Brazilian social reality, echoing—albeit in a different register—Schmitt’s critique of government by discussion (Schmitt, 2000). Both identify liberal fragmentation as the cause of disorganization and state impotence. However, whereas Schmitt sees the sovereign decision as the founding act of order, Vianna conceives authoritarianism as a pedagogical instrument guided by technical, rather than existential, rationality. The difference is decisive: in Schmitt, authority arises from the act of exception; in Vianna, from administrative competence.

This distinction introduces a broader conceptual problem: what, after all, is authority?

Arendt (2011) distinguishes authority from domination and violence. Authority, she argues, “requires neither coercion nor persuasion; it is recognized as legitimate by those who submit to it” (Arendt, 2011, p. 127, our translation). Power, by contrast, arises from collective action and deliberation among equals, whereas domination is founded on obedience imposed by force. Within this typology, Vianna’s authoritarianism occupies an ambiguous threshold: it aspires to the legitimacy of authority, yet relies on the instruments of technical domination. His centralized state imposes itself neither through tradition nor through charisma, but through belief in the rational competence of elites—what Paul Ricoeur (1991) would call functional legitimacy, a form of authority without transcendence, deriving its justification from effectiveness rather than conviction.

It is in this respect that instrumental authoritarianism differs from fascist and conservative models. European fascism, particularly in Italy, conceived authority as the mythical expression of national unity—*everything within the state, nothing against the state*—mobilizing symbols and mass rituals (Gentile, 2001). Nazism, more radical still, grounded authority in an absolute racial principle, legitimized by biology and violence. Iberian conservatism, in turn, rested on religious tradition and hierarchical order. In contrast, Vianna’s authoritarianism seeks legitimacy through a modern state rationality of a technical and pedagogical nature. It is not based on symbolic mobilization or tradition, but on rational management and social tutelage. This difference makes Vianna less an ideologue of totality than a political engineer of transition, concerned with constructing the material and institutional conditions for a future democracy.

Nevertheless, the foundation of this political pedagogy raises doubts as to its nature: is it a historical necessity or a justificatory ideology?

Vianna presents authoritarianism as a requirement of national development—a means imposed by the political immaturity of the people. Yet, by defining the people as incapable of self-government, he transforms sociological analysis into political ontology. The state ceases to be a mediator and becomes a tutor. As Pierre Rosanvallon (2015) observes, every political pedagogy runs the risk of turning into paternalism, replacing the learning of citizenship with the administration of obedience. What in Vianna appears as a transitional necessity may therefore be read as a sophisticated form of legitimizing technical power, grounded in the belief that society must be guided from without until it reaches maturity.

This ambiguity is closely tied to the political temporality of his thought. European fascism, according to Emilio Gentile (2001), conceived itself as a permanent revolution, in which state and people merged in a continuous movement of national regeneration. Conservatism, by contrast, valued stability and the continuity of tradition. Vianna, influenced by an evolutionist view of history, understood authoritarianism as a transitional phase—a necessary pedagogical stage to overcome the backwardness of the masses and to build authentic institutions. His temporality is teleological, oriented toward a moral and political end: organic democracy.

Yet this teleology is problematic. First, because it lacks objective criteria indicating when and how the transition comes to an end. Second, because by legitimizing itself through the promise of a democratic future, Vianna's authoritarianism subordinates the present to the utopia of maturity. Ricoeur (1991) warns that any politics that projects its legitimacy exclusively into the future tends to fall into secular eschatologies, in which progress justifies present violence. Thus, the time of transition in Vianna is, in fact, a suspended time—a becoming that is never fully realized, since the people are always deemed unfinished.

Another fundamental point of distinction concerns the relationship with the masses. Fascism mobilizes the people; conservatism excludes them; Vianna re-educates them. While the former seeks emotional adherence and the latter preserves social distance, instrumental authoritarianism aims to transform the population into a technical body capable of acting according to the rationality of the state. This pedagogy, however, entails a form of symbolic violence in the Bourdieusian sense, as it imposes an elitist vision of political rationality upon subordinate classes. The state assumes the role of the nation's moral instructor—a figure that Arendt (2011) would regard as anti-political, insofar as it replaces deliberation with instruction.

At the same time, there is an element of originality that prevents reducing Vianna to an epigone of European regimes. His authoritarianism is disenchanted, devoid of mythology and charisma. He does not ground power in messianic figures, but in bureaucratic structures. Whereas Mussolini or Hitler personified the nation, Vianna placed his trust in administrative impersonality. In this respect, his conception anticipates the form of political rationalization that Weber (1994) describes as legal-rational domination. Yet the same process that confers technical legitimacy upon the state also distances it from politics as a space of meaning—the state becomes an instrument without a subject, a mechanism that decides in the name of efficiency.

The result is a peculiar form of bureaucratic authority, founded not on faith or tradition, but on belief in competence. Ricoeur (1991, p. 204, our translation) termed this phenomenon “legitimation through technical mediation,” in which authority ceases to be an ethical bond and becomes an administrative function. This is perhaps the most profound marker of the difference between Vianna and fascism: if fascism is a mystique of power, instrumental authoritarianism is its technification. If the former seeks the fusion of state and nation, the latter aims at their rational engineering.

However, the absence of a transcendent normative principle—whether myth, tradition, or participation—turns Vianna’s authoritarianism into a regime of circular justification: it legitimizes itself through the very act of governing. Thus, the teleological temporality he proclaims risks transforming itself into practical immobility. The transitional becomes permanent. State pedagogy, far from preparing self-government, may eternalize tutelage. It is at this point that the central ethical dilemma is revealed: Vianna’s educating state is simultaneously emancipatory and oppressive, rational and self-referential.

In sum, the convergences between Oliveira Vianna and European authoritarianisms lie in their shared critique of liberalism and in the exaltation of the state as a principle of unity. The differences, however, are decisive: (1) whereas fascism legitimizes itself through the mystique of the nation and conservatism through tradition, Vianna relies on technical reason and the teleology of progress; (2) whereas European regimes conceive authoritarianism as an end, Vianna formulates it as a means—albeit without guarantees of self-limitation; (3) whereas fascism mobilizes the masses and conservatism excludes them, Vianna seeks to educate them, subordinating them to the rationality of the state.

These distinctions show that instrumental authoritarianism is not a mere tropical copy of European models, but an original product of Brazilian reflection on the crisis of peripheral

modernity. Its specificity lies precisely in the attempt to reconcile the democratic promise with faith in technical authority. However, as Arendt (2011) warns, any authority grounded solely in instrumental rationality is destined to erode the very ground of politics, for it replaces plural judgment with rationalized obedience. In this sense, Vianna's proposal remains a mirror of the deepest tensions of Brazilian modernization: the desire for freedom mediated by faith in tutelage.

Implications for the History of Brazilian Political Thought

The presence of Oliveira Vianna in the history of Brazilian political thought is at once unavoidable and unsettling. Unavoidable because his work occupies a central place in efforts to understand forms of power and social organization in Brazil; unsettling because his response to that diagnosis was an explicit authoritarianism, albeit disguised as political pedagogy. Reading Vianna therefore demands more than a historical-descriptive approach; it requires a metacritical reflection capable of uncovering the philosophical logics that sustain his political theory and its implications for the Brazilian democratic project.

Santos (1978) was the first to articulate the idea of instrumental authoritarianism as an interpretive key to Vianna's thought. For him, Vianna's project consisted in creating a strong and centralized state capable of dismantling archaic structures that hindered the emergence of an authentic liberal order. This reading recovered the pragmatic dimension of Vianna's authoritarianism, freeing it from the simplistic accusation of fascism. However, José Murilo de Carvalho (2011) deepened the complexity of this analysis by identifying in Vianna a constitutive duality: two heads, one critical and modernizing, the other hierarchical and exclusionary. Eduardo Bastos (1993), in turn, further developed the sociological meaning of the proposal, interpreting it as an attempt at institutional adaptation rather than as a totalitarian ideology.

These interpretations converge on one point: Vianna must be understood as a thinker of transition, for whom authoritarianism is a means rather than an end. Yet this convergence does not resolve the fundamental tension of his work—that of an author who seeks to found democracy through the temporary negation of its own principles. The philosophical challenge lies in understanding the logic of thought that sustains this contradiction.

From a hermeneutic standpoint, one can identify in Vianna a theoretical hybrid that combines traits of Schmittian decisionism, sociological functionalism, and historicist teleology.

His decisionism is evident in his belief in the centrality of the state and in the necessity of sovereign decision to break liberal paralysis. Functionalism appears in the idea that political form must adapt to social structure—the state as an organ of institutional adjustment. Finally, historical teleology emerges in his conviction that authoritarianism is a necessary stage on the path toward democratic maturity. This tripartite logic generates an insoluble tension: the state decides on behalf of society, yet justifies this decision as a functional imposition of history. The result is a self-referential political rationality that legitimizes authority through the very effectiveness of governing.

From a philosophical standpoint, Vianna's thought reveals an adherence to what Jürgen Habermas (1987) terms *instrumental rationality*, that is, a form of reason oriented toward control and efficiency, to the detriment of deliberation and mutual understanding. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1987), the author argues that modernity suffers from the colonization of the lifeworld by systemic rationality—the predominance of technique and administration over dialogue and public ethics. Vianna's instrumental authoritarianism is precisely the political translation of this colonization: the belief that state technique can replace democratic consensus as the foundation of legitimacy. The state ceases to be a mediator of wills and becomes an engineer of order.

This Habermasian reading makes it possible to reassess Vianna's contribution—or limitation—to the philosophical project of democracy in Brazil. His thought not only reflects the authoritarian context of conservative modernization, but also anticipates a recurrent logic within Brazilian institutions: the belief that democracy can be produced from above through technical reforms and social disciplining. This tradition, extending from the *Estado Novo* to contemporary technocratism, is a direct heir to Vianna's rationality. By subordinating politics to technique and deliberation to pedagogy, Vianna not only diagnoses the inauthenticity of Brazilian democracy, but also contributes to its reproduction.

Nevertheless, reducing Vianna to an ideologue of domination would oversimplify the density of his reflection. His diagnosis of the gap between formal institutions and social reality remains relevant. His denunciation of liberal fiction and of merely nominal democracy anticipates, in a pioneering way, contemporary analyses of low-intensity democracies, a concept formulated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002) to describe regimes that preserve electoral rituals while hollowing out popular participation and maintaining exclusionary social structures. Vianna, albeit through authoritarian means, identified this abyss between form and

substance, between norm and practice. His error, therefore, lies not in the diagnosis, but in the therapy: instead of expanding the public sphere, he proposes reducing it under state tutelage.

This inversion reveals the deepest tension in his thought: the attempt to replace communicative rationality (the basis of democratic deliberation) with technical rationality (the basis of administrative efficiency). Habermas (1987) would show that no political order can be sustained solely on instrumental rationality without compromising legitimacy. Democracy is not merely a means of functional organization, but a form of life grounded in reciprocity and language. By treating politics as technique and the people as objects of education, Vianna reverses the relationship between means and ends: democracy ceases to be an end and becomes a deferred promise.

Vianna's perspective also engages, albeit by contrast, with the thought of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2002), who proposes a high-intensity democracy centered on the expansion of participatory spaces and the valorization of plural forms of knowledge. While Boaventura conceives democracy as a communicative process of emancipation, Vianna reduces it to an institutional product of an enlightened state. This methodological divergence expresses two antagonistic philosophical paradigms: the emancipatory paradigm, grounded in deliberation and diversity, and the pedagogical paradigm, founded on authority and hierarchy.

At a metacritical level, one may argue that Oliveira Vianna's thought operates according to a functionalist-decisionist logic, in which political legitimacy is measured by the capacity to produce social cohesion rather than by the realization of freedom. This logic, although coherent within its historical context, compromises the philosophical horizon of democracy by replacing the principle of collective autonomy with the rational tutelage of the state. Vianna thus offers an ambivalent lesson: on the one hand, a warning about the need for institutions rooted in national reality; on the other, a reminder that no democratic project can arise from the suspension of the democratic principle itself.

Accordingly, the implications of Oliveira Vianna for Brazilian intellectual history go beyond political sociology. He embodies the structural tension between modernization and citizenship, between technical reason and public reason, that runs through the entire formation of the Brazilian state. His legacy invites critical reflection on what it means, in peripheral contexts, to prepare the people for democracy. Ultimately, his work demonstrates that every promise of tutelary emancipation carries the risk of perpetuating tutelage—and that democracy, to be authentic, must be learned not under authority, but in freedom.

Oliveira Vianna and Contemporary Authoritarian Governments

Oliveira Vianna's thought, formulated in the context of the first half of the twentieth century, reveals striking relevance in light of the political transformations of the twenty-first century. The emergence of hybrid regimes, illiberal democracies, and forms of authoritarian technocracy seems to echo, under new historical conditions, Vianna's ideal of a strong and rationally centralized state that tutors a society deemed incapable of self-government. Instrumental authoritarianism thus reappears under the guise of efficiency, governance, and technical rationality.

In *The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*, Fareed Zakaria (1997) argues that the greatest threat to contemporary democracy no longer stems from military coups, but from elected governments that erode liberal institutions in the name of popular sovereignty. Such regimes preserve electoral rituals while hollowing out the substance of political freedom—a form of authoritarianism legitimized through the ballot box. Guillermo O'Donnell (1994) describes a similar phenomenon in Latin America with the concept of delegative democracy, in which elected leaders concentrate power and justify their authority through claims of administrative effectiveness. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) reinforce this interpretation by demonstrating that contemporary democracies tend to die slowly, from within, not through abrupt rupture but through gradual institutional erosion.

These empirical diagnoses find an early theoretical matrix in Oliveira Vianna: the belief that democracy can only flourish after a period of tutelary centralization led by technical elites. What he conceived as pedagogical authoritarianism—a means of social maturation—reappears today under the logic of global technocracy, which governs not through charisma or ideology, but through expertise. Rather than military dictatorships, regimes proliferate that legitimize themselves through technical rationality and the promise of efficiency. In this sense, the contemporary world has radicalized Vianna's project, replacing the educating state with the managerial state, whose authority is grounded in the language of data, metrics, and administration.

Michel Foucault (2008) anticipated this transformation by describing the shift from sovereign power—centered on decision and law—to biopower, a form of governance that manages life and conduct through dispositifs of knowledge. Modern power no longer enforces obedience through coercion, but induces it through rationality. In Vianna, authoritarianism assumes precisely this form: it does not present itself as tyranny, but as rational tutelage. The

state is conceived as the educator of society, the producer of order and conduct—a pedagogy that, in the twenty-first century, materializes as technocratic governmentality.

Giorgio Agamben (2004) deepens this diagnosis by analyzing the expansion of the state of exception as a paradigm of government. In contemporary regimes, the exception ceases to be an event and becomes a permanent structure. Analogously, Vianna's instrumental authoritarianism, conceived as a transitional stage, tends to become perpetual, as it lacks internal limits that would define the end of the transition. The pedagogical exception becomes an administrative norm. The temporary is converted into a technique of governance, and the suspension of democracy is justified as a policy of efficiency.

From an ethical standpoint, this naturalization of the exception produces a paradox already present in Vianna and intensified in the present: how can pedagogical authoritarianism be distinguished from permanent authoritarianism? Arendt (2011) warned that any politics that instrumentalizes freedom in the name of an alleged collective good destroys the very meaning of politics as a space of action and plurality. The Viannian project, and its technocratic heirs, is grounded in the idea that freedom is a consequence rather than a principle—that it must be learned under tutelage. Yet, as Arendt emphasizes, freedom is not the effect of authority; it is its condition of possibility. Where permanent tutelage prevails, there is no democratic maturation, only political infantilization.

This logic of tutelage resurfaces in the contemporary discourse of neoliberal technocracy. Byung-Chul Han (2017) identifies in current rationality a mutation of power: control is no longer exercised through prohibition, but through seduction and self-exploitation. The postmodern subject is governed by the promise of performance and efficiency. From this perspective, contemporary authoritarianism is softer than Vianna's, yet equally effective: the citizen submits not to a strong state, but to the logic of performance and management. This is what Han calls the burnout society, in which the imperative of productivity replaces that of obedience. Vianna's state pedagogy, aimed at educating the people for work and order, is reborn in neoliberal pedagogy, which teaches individuals to self-manage and compete.

These convergences suggest that contemporary authoritarianism is, in many respects, a technified version of Vianna's instrumental authoritarianism. Both are legitimized by promises of efficiency and rationality; both distrust popular deliberation; both replace politics with administration. There is, however, a significant difference: whereas Vianna still relied on a moral vision of the state—the educator guiding the nation—contemporary authoritarianism is devoid of ethical purpose. Its teleology is not the formation of the citizen, but the maintenance

of systemic functionality. Technical authority has lost its pedagogical horizon and become self-referential, what Habermas (1987) would describe as the colonization of the lifeworld.

The crisis of legitimacy facing liberal democracies can therefore be read as the global expansion of what Vianna anticipated as a national solution: the transfer of popular sovereignty to technical competence. Government ceases to be a space of debate and becomes an instance of management. Pierre Rosanvallon (2015) terms this phenomenon democracy of impartiality, in which legitimacy shifts from voting to expertise, and power is justified by an appearance of neutrality. However, as Sousa Santos (2002) reminds us, every technocracy carries a form of epistemic exclusion: it silences dissent and reduces the citizen to the condition of a spectator.

In this context, revisiting Oliveira Vianna is philosophically relevant because his thought offers a critical mirror of the present. It helps us understand how technical rationality can be converted into ideology and how the discourse of transition—formerly pedagogical, now managerial—tends to perpetuate the suspension of politics. Modernity, as Foucault (2008) warned, is the moment in which domination becomes rationalized; in this sense, Vianna was an exemplary modern thinker. What he formulated as a stage of maturation, the twenty-first century has transformed into a permanent structure: a rationalized authoritarianism sustained by the promise of security, competence, and predictability.

In summary, the resonances between Oliveira Vianna and contemporary authoritarian regimes are not limited to historical affinities but express a philosophical continuity: the belief that freedom can be governed. This belief, shared by technocrats and populists alike, constitutes the core of the new global authoritarianism—an authoritarianism without dictators, grounded in the management of conduct and the administration of uncertainty. By illuminating this logic, Vianna remains, paradoxically, a contemporary thinker: not because he offers a model to be followed, but because he reveals the enduring risks of any politics that seeks to educate, tutor, or govern freedom.

Final Considerations

The thought of Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna expresses the central paradox of Brazilian political modernity: the desire to construct democracy through tutelage. His instrumental authoritarianism proposes freedom as an objective, yet suspends it as a method—transforming the means into an end and the transition into permanence.

In examining whether authoritarianism can be morally legitimate as a pedagogical stage, it becomes evident that, in the absence of clear ethical and institutional limits, all forms of tutelage tend toward perpetuation. Vianna's educating state, inspired by technical rationality and sovereign decision-making, anticipates contemporary forms of technocracy and governmentality described by Foucault, Habermas, and Agamben: regimes that administer freedom in the name of efficiency.

The resulting thesis is unequivocal: any authoritarianism that presents itself as transitional runs the risk of becoming absolute, since power that claims to be a means of emancipation, without moral self-limitation, ultimately suppresses the very freedom it seeks to establish.

Thus, Vianna's legacy is not a model to emulate, but a critical mirror: it reveals a recurring pathology of political modernization—the temptation to replace deliberation with technique and autonomy with tutelage. Ultimately, his work reminds us that democracy is not taught through authority, but learned through freedom.

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