

The strange death of the authoritarian personality: 50 years of psychological and political debate

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ABSTRACT

In 1950 Adorno *et al.*'s *The Authoritarian Personality* study warned that American society contained a minority of individuals whose characters made them prone to become fascists in certain circumstances and that this was a danger common to contemporary industrial society. After early acclaim critics argued that the main threat came from left-wing authoritarian individuals. But research in several countries failed to establish their existence. We trace and evaluate this debate, largely defending the original research. Subsequent argument suggested that the concept of authoritarianism was becoming outdated in post-industrial society, a view that we strongly challenge. While defending the diagnosis and purpose of the original research, we conclude by endorsing the argument that authoritarianism is better described in terms of attitude rather than personality. This gives a clearer psychological description of political movements of the far right and offers more direct measures for their reduction.

Key words authoritarianism, ethno-centrism, fascism, prejudice

The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno *et al.*, 1950) was a landmark study in social psychology investigating matters of great political importance. Its authors were a distinguished team: Theodor Adorno was a leading member of the New Institute for Social Research and Else Frenkel-Brunswik a noted researcher in child psychology; both had come to America as refugees from European fascism. R. Nevitt Sanford was a professor of psychology at the University of California at Berkeley and Daniel Levinson a research student at Berkeley and subsequently professor of psychology at Yale. The authors acknowledged help from Max Horkheimer, who edited the series *Studies in Prejudice* and directed the Department of Scientific Research of the American Jewish Committee, and also from Samuel Flowerman who succeeded Horkheimer in this position. The team administered attitude and personality questionnaires to 2,000 respondents and concluded that there was 'no difficulty in finding subjects whose outlook was such as to indicate that they would readily accept fascism if it should become a strong or respectable social movement' (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: 1). They warned that such a movement could arise under particular socio-economic conditions and called for 'action research' to counter this danger (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: 972).

Their work was greeted enthusiastically as a major contribution to a socially concerned psychology that sought to understand contemporary problems and create a more tolerant post-war world. The study inspired much research and a review, five years later, cited 64 derivative studies (Titus and Hollander, 1955); and such works continued. However, in the conservative climate of the Cold War, the study met sharp criticism on the grounds that it had overlooked the existence of left-wing authoritarianism. There followed a determined search for such people and, though this was of doubtful success, the study's reputation suffered. Even Roger Brown (1986: xi), a staunch defender of the study, felt that the story was 'largely complete' by the mid-1960s. A later critic argued that authoritarianism, right or left, was dead (Ray, 1990a). Political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1992) reached a similar conclusion, though without reference to psychological research. He described a 'world-wide liberal revolution' that would supersede authoritarianism both at the political and the personal levels.

But this has not happened. On the 40th anniversary of the study's publication Meloen (1991) charted a continuous record of psychological research into authoritarianism. In the 1970s and 1980s Altemeyer (1988: 25) developed additional scales to measure authoritarian attitudes. He found increasing authoritarianism in Canadian students. In the 1990s research was extended into the former Eastern bloc (Csepeli *et al.*, 1996). In this article, some half a century after the original publication, we review the psychological and political controversies that have surrounded authoritarianism research and point to its continuing importance in psychology and its relevance to society.

BACKGROUND AND OUTLINE OF THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY STUDY

The Authoritarian Personality study had European roots drawing on the theories of Marx and Freud, and on empirical studies of workers in Germany and France (Roiser and Willig, 1995). A study by the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research, carried out in the late 1920s, examined a wide range of political, cultural and social attitudes among blue- and white-collar working-class men in Weimar Germany. They described a minority as having authoritarian attitudes (Fromm, 1984). A later study (Horkheimer, Fromm and Marcuse, 1936) associated authoritarianism with the family structure of contemporary society. Its authors suggested that psychological authoritarianism at an individual level could predict the emergence of fascism as a political force. This was not seen as a specifically German phenomenon, but as a more general feature of advanced industrial society. So, after the Nazis closed the Frankfurt Institute and many of its members fled to America, they had reason to continue their work. A study in the late 1930s showed anti-Semitism among one third of a group of American workers, but political caution caused its publication to be withheld. After the war the researchers were able to undertake a much larger study in collaboration with leading American psychologists, resulting in *The Authoritarian Personality*.

The researchers designed four scales: three of these were intended to measure Anti-Semitism (AS), Ethnocentrism (E), Political and Economic Conservatism (PEC); and the fourth was to measure Potentiality for Fascism. The latter scale was to be the key measure of authoritarianism and aimed at personality rather than attitude. Known as the F-scale or the California F-scale, it was also referred to as the Implicit Anti-Democratic Trends scale. The nine components of authoritarianism are listed in Table 1, with a brief definition of each.

The scales were of the Likert type. Respondents were asked to indicate levels of agreement or disagreement for each item on a scale from +3 to -3. Scores were then transformed onto a scale of 1 to 7 and an average calculated with 7 as the most authoritarian and 1 the least. Subjects with similar scores did not have to concur on each item. In this kind of scale the same score could be gained in many different ways. This was different from the Guttman scale which adopted a cumulative approach. A scale of this kind (Bogardus, 1925) asked Americans to indicate how close to them they would allow people of particular races and nationalities to come: to their country, state, county, neighbourhood, street and so on. The responses showed a pattern of structured overlap. But such a pattern was not looked for in the scales of *The Authoritarian Personality*, or indeed in most attitude and personality scales.

In the initial study a questionnaire containing all four scales was administered to 2,000 people in California. From these, about 80 individuals,

Table 1 The nine components of authoritarianism

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- 1 *Conventionalism*: a rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values
 - 2 *Authoritarian submission*: a submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the in-group
 - 3 *Authoritarian aggression*: a tendency to be on the lookout for people who violate conventional values and to condemn, reject and punish them
 - 4 *Anti-intraception*: an opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tender-minded
 - 5 *Superstition and stereotypy*: the belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate, the disposition to think in rigid categories
 - 6 *Power and toughness*: a preoccupation with the dominance–submission, strong–weak, leader–follower dimension, identification with power-figures; over-emphasis upon the conventionalized attributes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness
 - 7 *Destructiveness and cynicism*: a generalized hostility, vilification of the human
 - 8 *Projectivity*: the disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses
 - 9 *Sex*: an exaggerated concern with sexual 'goings-on'
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Source: Adorno *et al.* (1950: 228)

scoring high and low on the E-scale, were interviewed in detail on their upbringing, family relations and career aspirations. They were also given the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). Analysis of the findings indicated the presence of a number of types, groups of subjects who showed consistent patterns of scores on the various tests and indicative characteristics in the interviews. The study concentrated on the authoritarian personality type, which scored high on scales of anti-Semitic, ethnocentric and conservative attitudes, despite the variety of content, and also scored high on the F-scale itself. These subjects were likely to be prejudiced against Jews, hold patriotic opinions, be hostile to foreigners and minority groups such as 'Negroes', religious sects and 'Zootsuiters', and be conservative on questions of welfare and labour unions (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: Chs 3, 4 and 5). It was argued that these combined characteristics were indicative of an authoritarian personality type, a prejudiced individual who was anti-democratic and potentially fascist. On the basis of the overall findings it was said that the authoritarian type was psychologically unhealthy and originated in punitive child-rearing practices. It was further suggested that, under certain socio-economic conditions, such individuals could emerge as fascists, as had happened with such catastrophic results in pre-war Europe. They thus warned that the human raw material for a revival of fascism was present in contemporary America.

ACADEMIC ACCLAIM AND POLITICAL IMPACT

The atmosphere in late 1940s American social psychology was very receptive to the study. Prejudice and conformity were important research topics. Many social psychologists belonged to the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI) whose publication, the *Journal of Social Issues*, together with the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, had an almost campaigning approach. There were articles on action research which involved street theatre in Times Square and discussed how to confront the anti-Semitic bigot in public situations (Citron *et al.*, 1950). There was also work on anti-Italian and anti-Negro prejudice. Saenger's (1953) *The Social Psychology of Prejudice*, subtitled *Achieving Inter-cultural Understanding and Co-operation in a Democracy*, outlined ways of challenging authoritarian and discriminatory attitudes.

The Authoritarian Personality study measured both personality and attitude. But its recommendations leaned towards personality, dealing with matters of child-rearing and education, rather than the public challenging of prejudiced attitudes. Nonetheless it made a most substantial contribution to the liberal and campaigning social psychology of the time. Its publication was greeted with acclaim. M. Brewster Smith's (1950) review in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* was enthusiastic. He said it was a 'landmark in the development of social psychology and personality study . . . the most extensive and sophisticated research on the topic yet contributed by psychologists' (Smith, 1950: 775). He thought, however, that the authors concentrated too much on high scorers at the expense of low scorers and the middle ground.

Smith felt that the Likert scales 'show that there is something there' but that they were 'inefficient instruments for analysing its nature' (1950: 778). He suggested that 'Much of the psychological interpretation of the scale results, particularly by sub-scales, logically requires the sort of foundation that the newer scaling methods of Guttman and Lazarsfeld might provide' (1950: 778). He continued:

Nowhere do methodological considerations lead the authors to examine their concepts and categories for overlap. . . . The present reviewer would be happier if methods had been employed that made clearer the minimum array of concepts needed to describe the authoritarian personality and involved the testing of explicit hypotheses about their relations. (Smith, 1950: 778)

Also problematic were the linked concepts of 'latency' and 'emergence', associated with the idea that the F-scale was measuring something hidden that might emerge in the future. This problem was only suggested in Smith's review and will be discussed later in the light of subsequent research. Nor did

the reservations diminish his general enthusiasm. He found the exposition of the authoritarian character structure entirely convincing. It had, he said, a wealth of methodological and clinical detail and was a 'tour de force'.

His review also made a bold political point, arguing that irrational accusations against 'communists and homosexuals in the State Department' (Smith, 1950: 775), illustrated exactly the unhealthy and authoritarian attitudes featured in the study. This was a sharp and specific reference to Senator McCarthy's speech of 9 February 1950, in which he said that the Department of State was full of communists and that the Secretary of State knew their names. Smith himself was to become a victim of McCarthyism. Despite this he remained a firm defender of *The Authoritarian Personality* and its successors.

The publication was noticed in Britain at an early stage. The psychoanalyst Henry Dicks studied personality traits and national socialist ideology among German prisoners of war. At the end of his report Dicks asked: 'what studies are going on, based on the psycho-dynamic concepts, to enquire into the host of politically significant group phenomena now challenging the wisdom of our epoch?' (1950: 153). He then footnoted:

As if in answer to this concluding question, the writer has just received the large volume, *The Authoritarian Personality*, by Nevitt Sanford and associates, which on first reading seems to embody nearly all the concepts of this present article, and which describes just the kind of refinements of technique not available to the writer. (1950: 153)

Dicks subsequently went to America and carried out research on national character with Edward Shils at Chicago University.

Roger Brown (1965) summarized the early social and political importance of the study:

The Authoritarian Personality had the greatest possible relevance to the social issues of its day. The Soviet Union had been our ally in the war against fascism. American intellectuals generally accepted the Marxist interpretation of fascism as a movement of the extreme political right, as a conservatism driven to desperation by the economic problems of capitalism. The Egalitarian opposite to the Authoritarian held the leftish liberal views of a New Dealer in the 1930's. They were views common to humane liberals, to Henry Wallace's Progressive Party, to non-Stalinist communists, the authors of *The Authoritarian Personality*, and most American social psychologists. (Brown, 1965: 478)

He said further that 'the theory of prejudice it propounded has become part of popular culture and a force against racial discrimination' (Brown, 1965: 479). The term 'bigot' gained a considerable currency as a common-sense equivalent for the more technical term 'authoritarian'. The concepts

developed also found their way into contemporary political science. In his collection of essays on *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* Richard Hofstadter (1966), a leading political scientist, took the term 'pseudo-conservative' from *The Authoritarian Personality*, from which he quoted:

The pseudo-conservative is a man who, in the name of upholding traditional American values and institutions and defending them against more or less fictional dangers, consciously or unconsciously aims at their abolition. (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: 675)

He sought to distinguish the pseudo-conservative from the genuine conservative. Of pseudo-conservatives he said:

They have little in common with the temperate and compromising spirit of true conservatism in the classical sense of the word, and they are far from pleased with the dominant practical conservatism of the moment as it is practised by the Eisenhower administration. (Hofstadter, 1966: 44)

But there was no category of 'true conservative' in *The Authoritarian Personality*. Hofstadter wished to create this new type, thus encouraging a differentiation in American politics between conservatism and liberalism along European lines. It is interesting that he borrowed from psychological literature to develop this proposal.

McCARTHYISM AND THE COLD WAR

The liberal climate of American politics was changing. McCarthy's speech, to which Smith's review referred, was an indication of things to come. It marked the beginning of 'McCarthyism', an episode of acute political paranoia that dominated American politics until 1954, when McCarthy was censured by the American Senate, effectively ending his political career. In a retrospective study of McCarthyism, the political journalist Richard Rovere (1960: 12) said that 'whatever is illiberal, repressive, reactionary, anti-intellectual, totalitarian, or merely swinish, will for some time to come be "McCarthyism"'. He added that the McCarthyite regarded himself as simply a patriotic American. Rovere did not refer to *The Authoritarian Personality*, but the traits he listed bore a striking resemblance to those that emerged from the study. Writing some years later, Billig (1978: 40) argued that, despite its absence of consistent anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism, 'McCarthyism presented, at least temporarily, the seeds of a fascist reaction'.

The political climate of the Cold War began before McCarthyism and continued after it, dominating American government thinking for a generation. It also influenced authoritarianism research and the lives of some

researchers. The study appeared at a time when the wartime alliance with Russia was being forgotten and 'international communism' was replacing fascism as the perceived threat to world peace. The liberal milieu that Brown so sympathetically described was at risk. In March 1949 the Regents of the University of California demanded that its employees sign an anti-communist loyalty oath. Sanford (1953) commented:

Our book on *The Authoritarian Personality* was published in the midst of the loyalty oath controversy. A colleague from the Department of Speech, who knew this work, and who mistook an outward calm for scientific disinterest, said to me, 'This must be a perfect laboratory set up for you.' (1953: 28)

But Sanford interpreted his employers' behaviour cautiously. The Regents showed

. . . authoritarian submission toward an imagined public opinion, the outside enemy, and they adopted an attitude of authoritarian aggression toward those under their governance. Yet I believe we should be exceedingly cautious about the assignment of personality determinants in these actions. (1953: 29)

Staff at the university resisted implementation of the oath for a year, after which time 45 non-signers, led by the cognitive-behavioural psychologist Edward Tolman and including Sanford, were dismissed. They took their case to court and were reinstated in November 1952, on condition that they sign a new, milder oath, applicable to all state employees.

Not all involved with the project were affected. For instance, Adorno and Horkheimer had returned to Germany in 1950 to re-establish the Frankfurt Institute. But sympathizers also were caught in the web of suspicion. M. Brewster Smith, the study's enthusiastic reviewer, was subpoenaed in 1953 before a Senate Internal Security sub-committee and questioned on his pre-war membership of the Young Communist League. He was blacklisted for ten years from becoming a consultant for the National Institute for Mental Health (Smith, 1986). While the attack on individuals was rapid and direct, the critique of ideas was extended and more complex.

CRITIQUES OF *THE AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY*

Acquiescence response set

The earliest criticism was mild and methodological. Cohn (1953) argued that authoritarian individuals tended to acquiesce to authority and say 'yes' to

items. This posed a problem because most items were phrased as assertions of anti-Semitic, ethnocentric or authoritarian sentiments, rather than denials or assertions of liberal alternatives. If Cohn were right, then the scores of authoritarian individuals would be artificially accentuated. Conventions of questionnaire design recommended equal numbers of positively and negatively worded items (see, for example, Edwards, 1957). This convention was generally ignored by the study. Seeking to improve the measure of authoritarianism, Bass (1955) reversed half the items. However, the revised scale produced a lower split-half reliability correlation than the original. In his later review of the debate Brown felt that reversed items might lack face validity. He observed that the item 'Some people are born with an urge to jump from high places' might be reversed to read 'No people are born with an urge to jump from high places', which seemed inappropriate (Brown, 1965: 512). He felt that reversed items should be carefully designed and concluded that acquiescence was not a major factor in the F-score.

In response to methodological and theoretical issues and the large amount of subsequent research, Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda (1954) edited a book entitled *On the Method and Scope of The Authoritarian Personality*. Their intention was to consolidate and extend the body of research on authoritarianism as had been done with the study *On the Method and Scope of the American Soldier* which evaluated a major wartime social science project. Jahoda argued: 'it is in the interest of all to re-examine dispassionately the assumptions on which the book rests, the methods it uses and the guides it contains for further research' (1954: 20). However, one chapter, 'Authoritarianism, Right and Left', fundamentally challenged the study's theoretical framework. This, in turn, generated many empirical studies, and led to a long and continuing debate.

Cognitive style: rigidity and dogmatism

Else Frenkel-Brunswik (1954), one of the original authors, contributed to the Christie and Jahoda collection a chapter entitled 'Further Explorations by a Contributor to *The Authoritarian Personality*'. Here she explained authoritarianism as the result of a 'rigid cognitive style' and a consequent 'intolerance of ambiguity' that resulted from childhood emotional pressures and was a 'perceptual personality variable'. While the authoritarian personality research relied on adult recollections of childhood Frenkel-Brunswik actually studied children. Her work is important because it began to explore the relationship between potentiality, implicit trends and the emergence of fascist personalities. This is central to the theoretical framework of the original study, but research up to this point lacked a longitudinal element. The proposal that educators should stress

flexible and non-dogmatic thinking in children was an early research-based recommendation for action.

These ideas could also be taken in a slightly different direction. In *The Open and Closed Mind*, Rokeach (1960) presented authoritarianism as 'dogmatic cognitive style'. His search for cognitive processes associated with authoritarianism tended to divert attention from the rich content of specific attitudes and made it easier to think of authoritarianism as either right-wing or left-wing, contrary to the original research. Sensitive to this point, Rokeach argued that dogmatic thinkers tended to be right-wing. *However, another chapter pursued this argument in a more radical way.*

Left-authoritarianism

The idea of 'left-authoritarianism' challenged the original project and determined the agenda of much subsequent research. The critique was advanced by E. A. Shils, a political scientist whose chapter 'Authoritarianism, Right and Left' appeared in the Christie and Jahoda collection. At a pre-publication meeting Shils had praised the study as 'isolating the set of personality and attitudinal characteristics which make for receptivity of anti-Semitic ideas'. But, by the early 1950s his views had shifted. Decades later Stone and Smith (1993: 144) commented:

Many former liberal commentators and social scientists caught the spirit of the times and perceived the threat posed by Communism. Among the intellectuals so affected were Norman Podhertz, Daniel Bell and, most notably, Edward Shils. . . . The term 'neo-conservative' came to be applied to these former liberals.

Shils came to argue against the conceptual framework of the authoritarian personality research and advanced a view of world politics in line with contemporary American government thinking. He criticized the long-established representation of the political spectrum as a left-right continuum and, in particular, the consistency of the category 'left-wing'. He wrote of *The Authoritarian Personality*:

The entire team of investigators proceeds as if there were a unilinear scale of political and social attitudes at the extreme right of which stands the Fascist, the product and proponent of monopoly capitalism and at the other end what the authors call the complete democrat who – as I shall presently demonstrate – actually holds the views of the non-Stalinist Leninist. (Shils, 1954: 28)

Thus, for Shils, the 'complete democrats' of the study were crypto-communists. This conclusion required a rearrangement of political categories:

The failure to discriminate the substantially different types of outlook which could be called liberal, liberal collectivist, radical, Marxist, etc. is not just the outcome of the deficiency of the questionnaire technique in general, nor does it arise from carelessness. It flows from the authors' failure to perceive the distinction between totalitarian Leninism, . . . humanitarianism, and New Deal Interventionism. (1954: 30)

Shils proposed to aggregate the categories of right-wing and left-wing authoritarianism, stressing what he saw as their essential similarity. He concluded that

Anyone well-acquainted with the works of Lenin and Stalin, or with European and American Communists of recent decades, will immediately recognize that the cognitive and emotional orientations enumerated above correspond very closely with the central features of the Bolshevik Weltanschauung. (1954: 33)

His argument continued:

As a product of war-time collaboration, Communist tactics and a well-intentioned lack of political and economic sophistication, the intellectual currency of American humanitarian liberalism for some years was much influenced by the Marxist outlook. (1954: 38)

Shils did not indicate which authors of *The Authoritarian Personality* he considered were well intentioned and unsophisticated, and which were communist tacticians.

While Rokeach retreated from political content to cognitive style, Shils brought the content of political ideas back to the centre of the discussion. But he rearranged categories of political belief, combining 'left-extremes' and 'right-extremes' as essentially similar and both undemocratic. Indeed, as the political theorizing of the Cold War developed, 'left-wing authoritarianism' came to be judged as worse because it was 'totalitarian'. Lewis Coser, writing in the 1960s, noted that

The authoritarian model may be said to stand midway between the totalitarian and the liberal models. While totalitarian societies suppress all forms of autonomous organisation and all independent sources of information, the authoritarian regimes suppress organised opposition and public criticism. (1963: 264)

But Shils's critique lacked empirical evidence. A series of studies was then launched to find left authoritarian individuals. This work concentrated on the F-scale, largely excluding the attitude scales and making little or no use of interviews or projective tests.

THE SEARCH FOR THE LEFT AUTHORITARIAN

The project began with a practical disadvantage. The obvious place to look for left-wing authoritarians was in the ranks of the American Communist Party and its affiliate organizations. However, during the McCarthy period and in its aftermath, members and sympathizers were understandably reluctant to identify themselves, even to the extent of completing questionnaires. It is ironic that research aiming to demonstrate the threat to democracy posed by so-called left-wing authoritarianism could not be carried out because of the level of fear within the American left. Nor could such research be carried out in the Eastern bloc. In Britain, however, fascist parties and the Communist Party operated openly and legally. In 1953 Thelma Coulter, a research student with Hans Eysenck, administered the F-scale to 43 fascists, followers of Sir Oswald Mosley, 43 members of the Communist Party, and a group of soldiers, seen as politically neutral. The fascists scored an average of 5.3 on a scale ranging from 1 (egalitarian) to 7 (authoritarian). This was the most authoritarian group mean so far obtained, higher than the 4.73 found among San Quentin prisoners in the original study, and marginally higher than the 5.26 for a group of German factory workers, which may have included former Nazis. In comparison the Communists averaged 3.13. However, on the basis that the 'politically neutral' soldiers scored 2.50, Eysenck concluded that 'Communists make almost as high scores on this scale as fascists'. This was published as 'The Psychology of Politics and the Personality Similarities between Fascists and Communists' (Eysenck, 1956b).

Christie took Eysenck to task for his interpretation of this data and, in a bitter exchange of views in the (American) *Psychological Bulletin*, accused Eysenck of 'abuses of psychology'. In his subsequent review Brown (1965: 528) called Eysenck's a 'truly extraordinary conclusion' and went on to point out that the 'politically neutral' British soldiers were, in fact, very egalitarian when compared with other groups that had been researched. By any fair assessment the British communists were egalitarian. Subsequent research by Rokeach (1960) showed communist students to be more egalitarian even than Liberal or Labour students. In the same volume of *Psychological Bulletin* Rokeach and Hanley criticized the inconsistency of Eysenck's tough and tender-mindedness dimension, and responded to Eysenck's spirited defence with an accusation that he carelessly ignored criticism.

Rokeach had a further disagreement with Eysenck. His 'dogmatism' scale was in competition with Eysenck's 'tough and tender-mindedness' scale, reflecting current differences between cognitive and behaviourist approaches. Eysenck's (1954) *The Psychology of Politics* offered a behaviourist account of the relationship between personality and political

attitude which covered similar ground to *The Authoritarian Personality*. Two dimensions were suggested by Eysenck, one primarily attitudinal, 'radical-conservative', and the other a reflection of personality, 'tough and tender-minded'. In this scheme fascists were summed up as tough-minded conservatives, and communists as 'tough-minded radicals'. Eysenck argued that differences in the radical-conservative dimension were explained by instrumental conditioning and differences in the tough and tender-minded dimension by classical conditioning, to which there was an inherited predisposition such that extroverts were likely to be tough-minded. This scheme offered a behaviourist alternative both to *The Authoritarian Personality* and its cognitive variant, *The Open and Closed Mind*. Eysenck stressed the symmetry of his model, in a manner similar to Shils.

The reason for the strength of feeling went beyond psychology. Christie and his colleagues were defending the left-liberal milieu under attack in contemporary America, its broad-mindedness and internationalism. They were defending the critical analysis of prejudice, epitomized by the Berkeley study and undermined by Cold War attitudes. In 1990, at a symposium marking the 40th anniversary of *The Authoritarian Personality*, Daniel Levinson complained of 'the unfair and politically biased treatment the research received' and said that, 'by the late 1950's it had become almost impossible to get this type of research sponsored' (Meloan, 1991: 121).

In contrast, the search for left-authoritarianism intensified. Studies concentrated on the members of Western communist parties. Sample sizes were typically small and it was hard to test the hypothesis adequately. Nonetheless a number of studies were carried out and they failed to show attitudinal or personality similarities between fascists and communists. Roger Brown's (1965) review of the debates surrounding *The Authoritarian Personality* concluded that

It has not been demonstrated that fascists and communists resemble one another in authoritarianism or in any other dimension of ideology. No one has thus far shown that there is an authoritarian of the left. Still the impression exists that such a type exists and that some Communists belong to it. (1965: 542)

He added that 'when Russia invaded Hungary there were wholesale defections from European Communist parties which argues that many members were not dynamic authoritarians' (1965: 542). He concluded that the idea that all people associated with an extremist political party showed similar personality characteristics was simple-minded. In his review of the methodological and theoretical arguments surrounding the study, Brown observed 'that no work in social psychology has been given a more meticulous methodological and conceptual examination than *The Authoritarian Personality*' (1965: 509).

Smith expressed a similar sentiment more graphically in 1967:

In spite of the critical guns that have been trained on it and time and again have found their mark, behemoth refused to keel over. Weak in evidence as it turned out to be, the book remained rich in conception and fertile in implication. . . . it proved bigger than the swarm of critical studies that one would have thought would destroy it. (Kirscht and Dillehay, 1967: viii)

However, when Brown (1986: xi) wrote, in the mid-1980s, a greatly revised second edition of his textbook he commented:

Several research stories told in the first edition have been omitted because the stories were largely complete in 1965. . . . This is what happened, for instance, to *The Authoritarian Personality*. (1986: xi)

This was a harsh judgement, on two counts. Meloen's (1991: 120) analysis shows that the 1970s 'was the most prolific decade for F-scale research'. It was only in the 1980s that the number of publications fell. In addition, during that decade, there was also a diversification of research. One psychologist, inspired by Brown's chapter, developed a new tradition of research by shifting the focus from personality to attitude.

RIGHT-WING ATTITUDES

From personality to attitude

The Canadian psychologist Bob Altemeyer (1981, 1988, 1996, 1998) developed a Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale to explore three attitudinal clusters: authoritarian submission; authoritarian aggression; and conventionalism. He included both positive and negative items in his scale, thus responding to the early criticism that the F-scale items were all positively phrased. In addition, he also designed a scale to measure left-wing authoritarianism. This gave a response to the nagging criticism that researchers had ignored the possibility of left-wing authoritarianism. This very point had been made about his earlier book *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (1981), of which Eysenck said that it was 'odd because one would have expected a modern author to deal equally with left-wing authoritarianism' (1982: 325). Altemeyer established that his new scale was internally consistent and he was satisfied with its face validity (1996: 229). After considerable research he could find no evidence of left-wing authoritarian individuals. His concluding response was knowingly directed at Shils, the originator of the debate over left-wing authoritarianism:

Is there an authoritarian of the left? No, not if you are talking about Shils's left, not if you require scientific evidence. Lots of people have looked in several different ways in several different countries for this creature of lore. But no one has found it yet. (1996: 229)

During the last two decades there has been a renewed stream of research using the Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale. A substantial body of findings has now been gathered. As with the original tradition there have been critics. Though Eysenck ceased to write in this area, his critical role was taken over by the Australian psychologist J. J. Ray. He argued that authoritarian individuals were symmetrically distributed along the left-right continuum. In 1983 he wrote an article entitled, 'Half of All Authoritarians Are Left-wing' and said that Altemeyer's measures were fundamentally flawed. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s Altemeyer and Ray continued to debate. Duckitt in South Africa and Meloen in Holland weighed in on the side of Altemeyer. Heaven and Connors (1998) conducted a study of Australian undergraduates finding 'tough-minded' subjects to be on either side of the Radical-Conservative divide, supporting Eysenck's hypothesis. However they noted that 'rightists were found to hold authoritarian attitudes, whereas leftists were found to manifest anti-submissive behaviour' (Heaven and Connors, 1998: 217). Ray subsequently said that interest in researching authoritarianism was in decline and complained that left-wing respondents were reluctant to fill in questionnaires. He then designed a Conservatism scale and Meloen and de Witte's (1998) rhetorical response was that this constituted 'Ray's last stand'.

However, Altemeyer carefully notes that his research cannot be taken as endorsing the original syndrome in its entirety because the authors used a Freudian conception of early childhood influences on subsequent personality development. This, in turn, made more likely the acquisition of the range of ethnocentric and conservative attitudes. In contrast Altemeyer adopts a theoretical explanation for the acquisition of attitudes in terms of Bandura's social learning theory, which he sees as explaining the psychological roots of authoritarianism (Bandura, 1977). Thus Altemeyer contests Ray's argument that the RWA scale is 'just another conservatism scale' (1996: 7). In addition he modestly observes that the number of studies using the original California F-scale has continued to be greater than those using his own RWA scale (1996: 316).

Altemeyer's work is clearly in the tradition of *The Authoritarian Personality*. He was initially a lone figure pursuing this new avenue of research. But he was encouraged by M. Brewster Smith and received academic recognition in 1986 when he won the annual prize for behavioural research from the American Association for the Advancement of Science for the draft of his book *Enemies of Freedom*, published in 1988. Stone

(1993: 160) also praised his work: 'the most dogged modern worker in the authoritarian vineyards is Bob Altemeyer, whose research has been widely acknowledged, discussed and criticised.'

In a key respect Altemeyer's research accords with the original research. He argues that there is a fascist potential within modern society.

If my findings have shown me anything they have revealed that what happened in Germany in 1933 can happen in North America too. Many people are already disposed to support a fascist overthrow of democracy. For example the militias publicised after the Oklahoma City bombing bear more than a passing resemblance to the disgruntled, military minded men whom Hitler moulded into his private army of S.A. storm-troopers for his rise to power. (1996: 5)

AUTHORITARIANISM IN EUROPE AND RUSSIA

Emergence of neo-fascism

In the late 1970s a neo-fascist organization developed in Britain. Psychologists could now study actual fascists rather than potential ones. Billig's (1978) book *Fascists, a Social Psychological View of the National Front* provides a thorough description of this resurgence and a convincing, empirically based, account of its fascist nature. He acknowledged a debt to *The Authoritarian Personality*, which he called 'a major landmark in the history of psychology, as well as being the single most important contribution to the study of fascism' (1978: 36). He argued that subsequent research was too focused on the F-scale: 'It is as if later psychologists have extracted this one scale and treated the whole book as little more than a nine-hundred and ninety-nine page test manual' (1978: 49). This was an understandable oversight in the context of American society where there were many authoritarians but few fascists. However, Billig studied actual fascists and used a different methodology, conducting extended interviews with a few individuals. He made qualitative typological characterizations of 'a classic authoritarian' and 'a man of violence' noting similarities between their attitudes and items on the F-scale (Billig, 1978: 196). From an analysis of National Front publications using Rokeach's list of values he further concluded that the organization had an authentic fascist ideology (Billig, 1978: 72–80).

Collapse of the Soviet Union

In the 1980s the authoritarian regimes of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were besieged by popular uprising and began to falter and collapse.

Research into psychological authoritarianism then became possible in Eastern Europe and Russia. If left-wing authoritarian individuals existed they would surely now be found. An American-Russian team, McFarland, Ageyev and Abalakina (1993), used Altemeyer's Right-Wing Attitudes scale with culturally appropriate changes in item wording. They found Russians to be, on average, less authoritarian than North Americans and, interestingly, also found that Russian communists were significantly more authoritarian than non-communists (1993: 210) as Shils would have predicted. However, these comparisons should be made with caution because, for instance, the trait of 'conventionalism' would, by definition, be lacking in a Western communist and likely to be present in a Russian one. Nonetheless, Meloen felt able to comment that

The authoritarian syndrome, with its nucleus of ethnic prejudices, ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, anti-feminism, anti-dissidents, anti-democracy, anti-free press and pro-nationalism, can be found in much the same way in the Soviet Union as it has manifested itself in forty years of Western research. (Meloan, 1991: 3)

Subsequent researchers have looked at the rapidly changing patterns of belief in Eastern Europe. Under the heading of 'transitology' they looked at new political formations in Hungary. Csepeli *et al.* (1996) examined 'authoritarianism and the ideological spectrum'. Their study is reminiscent of Fromm's (1984) pre-war study of workers in Weimar Germany, in which it was argued that patterns of authoritarian, ambivalent and radical attitudes were reflected in the programmes of the major political parties. These recent studies have certainly found authoritarianism in the former Eastern bloc and Soviet Union. However, it does not follow that this authoritarianism is left-wing. Indeed much of it is clearly right-wing.

THE 'END OF HISTORY' DEBATE

The historical contingency of authoritarianism was an important feature of the original study. As Horkheimer stated in his preface,

A central theme of the work is a relatively new concept, the rise of an 'anthropological' species we call the authoritarian type of man. In contrast to the bigot of the older style he seems to combine the ideas and skills of a highly industrialised society with irrational or anti-rational beliefs. (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: ix)

Thus any change in the political economy of industrial society should be examined for its impact on the human psyche generally and authoritarianism in particular. In the 1950s and 1960s no such change was apparent. But,

in the early 1970s, the political theorist Daniel Bell (1974), listed by Stone and Smith as a 'neo-conservative' along with Edward Shils, wrote a book entitled *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. This end-of-era theme was noted by Nevitt Sanford in an article, 'The Authoritarian Personality in Contemporary Perspective'. His otherwise sterling defence of the original study included this intriguing point:

The study of pre-fascist personalities in the highly industrialised society of the 1940s cannot be expected to tell us all we need to know about rightwing extremism in the post-industrial society of today. (1973: 164)

The 'post-industrial personality'

Sanford was ahead of his time. It was not until 1992 that Francis Fukuyama, American political scientist and government advisor, wrote *The End of History and the Last Man* which took up this theme on a grand scale. Here he endeavoured to outline the political economy of post-industrial society. He declared a new chapter in world history, arguing that, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a decline in authoritarian government and an increase in liberal democracy. He said that both the totalitarian governments of the Eastern bloc and the authoritarian governments of Latin America were giving way in a 'world-wide liberal revolution'. The phrase 'New World Order' was coined and has been widely used in this context.

These ideas gained considerable currency in the United States, replacing the picture given by Shils in the 1950s. In this new situation Shils's authoritarian extremes of left and right would moderate towards a liberal centre. Like Shils, Fukuyama extends his arguments to the level of individual psychological characteristics, saying that there can be 'no democracy without democrats' (1992: 131). He goes on to outline the general characteristics of humankind starting with the Hobbesian 'first man', whose life was 'nasty, brutish and short', and concluding with the democratic 'last man', now emerging at the end of history. Though Fukuyama's reference to individual characteristics is brief, others have commented in more detail on the psychological aspects of the 'end of history' thesis. Thus, J. J. Ray (1990a) wrote about 'The Death of Authoritarianism: Psychological Parallels to a Political Phenomenon?' He suggested that Communist Party members were now denying authoritarian attitudes in their questionnaire responses. He argued that authoritarian government was receding both in the communist world and among right-wing dictatorships. He concluded that authoritarianism now had little relevance either politically or psychologically. Consistently he pronounced the authoritarian as a person of the past and re-labelled those scoring high on the F-scale as 'old-fashioned personalities' (Ray, 1990b).

Fukuyama updates Shils and Ray updates Eysenck, but neither account is

convincing. In the years since Fukuyama's book was published the concept of the New World Order has not fared well. There has been chaos in the countries of the former Soviet Union and in the newly industrializing countries of the third world. The concept of world-wide liberal revolution has proved problematic. Indeed, neo-liberal economics has become associated with a renewed political authoritarianism.

STRANGE DEATH AND CONTINUING RESEARCH

Over five decades *The Authoritarian Personality* has been the victim of several determined attempts at psychological and political assassination. These have included Shils in the 1950s, Eysenck in the 1960s, Ray in the 1980s and 1990s and, indirectly but clearly relevant, Fukuyama in the 1990s. Altemeyer's work on right-wing authoritarianism has been similarly attacked. On several occasions the debate was seen as over and both *The Authoritarian Personality* and its attitudinal counterpart were pronounced 'dead' or 'things of the past'. But, time and again, the original study and its successors have been effectively defended by supporters who saw the importance of continuing psychological research into the dangers of fascist resurgence. The failure of its critics to establish convincingly the existence of left-authoritarian individuals considerably vindicates the original work. It was nearer the mark than its detractors argued and than the alternatives they had to offer.

Continuing research

In a review of publications marking the 40th anniversary of *The Authoritarian Personality*, Meloen (1991) charted over 1,000 studies between 1950 and 1989 which had used the authoritarianism scale. Their frequency peaked in the late 1950s and fell sharply in the 1960s, perhaps prompting Brown's dour assessment. But the number of studies subsequently rose. They then declined around 1980, which he attributed to the anti-liberal climate of Reagan's first term of office, but revived again in the late 1980s. Meloen commented that 'After a period of underground existence authoritarianism studies seem to be back on the social scientific agenda' (1991: 122). This assessment has been borne out. Several research themes can be identified.

First, there is research that examines emerging patterns of political ideology in societies where authoritarian governments have been overthrown. Csepeli *et al.*'s (1996) research on 'transitology' is in this category. It studies the politics and psychology of an Eastern European society in uneasy transition from authoritarian to democratic government.

Secondly, there is continuing research into the potential for fascism in modern society using both the existing scales and new scales to measure related phenomena. A good example of this is 'social dominance orientation', measured by the SDO scale. This is defined as a 'general attitudinal orientation toward inter-group relations, reflecting whether one generally prefers such relations to be equal versus hierarchical and the extent to which one desires that one's in-group dominates and be superior to outgroups' (Duckitt, 2001: 41). This flows from the work of McFarland and Adelson (1996), it has been pursued by Altemeyer (1998), and its progress is reviewed by Duckitt (2001).

Thirdly, there is a newer line of research that applies measures of authoritarianism not to individuals, but to aspects of government. Meloen (2000) examined state-imposed beliefs, censorship, repression of homosexuality, suppression of opposition, capital punishment, legal status of trade unions, and a number of other measures, each rated on a four-point scale to give governmental authoritarianism scores. This draws on the *New State of the World Atlas* (Kidron and Segal, 1991) that charted political and economic indices across the world. This brings the tradition of individual authoritarianism research into contact with the new political movements concerned with issues of poverty, prejudice and war. The manner in which these new bodies of ideas and individuals map onto the older categories described in earlier studies may be a fruitful area for research.

The research tradition has survived. It has spread geographically. It has broadened its scope to examine authoritarianism in governmental systems as well as in individuals. Indeed the changing world political landscape continues to suggest new opportunities for research into authoritarianism, both at the individual and the systemic levels. The research tradition continues, and so, also, does the controversy.

J. L. Martin (2001) delivered a sharp critique in an article 'The Authoritarian Personality, 50 Years Later. What Lessons Are there for Political Psychology?' It makes detailed criticisms of Altemeyer's scales and accuses him, *inter alia*, of being a typologist. It also suggests that the debate is drawing to a close. But Altemeyer's vigorous response, currently circulating as email, is likely to appear in print, and it is certain that the debate will continue. The anticipation of this continuation is based both on the vigour of the debate within social science and the obvious and persisting difficulties that beset the politics of modern society. Our concluding remarks will attempt to place this research in a broader social context, reviewing our knowledge of the relationship between attitude and personality, the way in which the potential fascist might become the actual fascist and how that eventuality might be prevented.

POTENTIAL AND PREVENTION

Potentials and outcomes

Both Fromm in pre-war Germany and Adorno in post-war America diagnosed a proportion of authoritarian individuals. In Germany the result was fascism, but in America it was not. Apart from the brief period of McCarthyism, subsequent decades did not witness the emergence of fascism in the USA. Indeed the growth of the civil rights, women's liberation and anti-war movements of the 1950s and 1960s indicated liberal shifts of attitudes. Nor were subsequent right-wing shifts, such as those monitored by Altemeyer's research, accompanied by an emergence of fascism, despite his comparison of the Oklahoma bombers with Hitler's storm-troopers.

How authoritarianism at the individual level might translate into fascism in society, and how that prospect could be avoided, remains problematic. Horkheimer and Flowerman's foreword to the original study raised these issues carefully:

At this moment in world history anti-Semitism is not manifesting itself with the full and violent destructiveness of which we know it to be capable. Even a social disease has its periods of quiescence during which the social scientists, like the biologist or physician, can study it in the search for a more effective way to prevent or reduce the effectiveness of the next outbreak. (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: v)

Concluding remarks in the book see prevention as a complex task:

We may be able to say something about the readiness of an individual to break into violence, but we are pretty much in the dark as to the remaining necessary conditions under which an outbreak would occur. . . . Outbreaks into action must be considered the results of both the internal potential and a set of eliciting factors in the environment. (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: 972)

This model suggests that unhealthy proto-fascist personalities develop during childhood within a predisposing culture. Then 'eliciting factors' cause the latent potential to emerge within the individual. The person may then combine with others into a fascist organization and 'outbreaks of violence' result. But prevention remains problematic. The authors admit as much:

The therapeutic possibilities of individual psychology are severely limited. How could one cure one of our high scorers? . . . One turns naturally to the question of whether the prospects for healthy personality structure would not be greater if the influences were brought to bear earlier in the individual's life.

Early prevention is doubtless to be recommended. But it may also be asked why the problem is posed in such individual and quasi-medical terms, and why there is such stress on personality.

Personality and attitude

The concept of personality received disproportionate attention in the study and in subsequent research and debates. This balance was not challenged until Altemeyer's research. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that, in the original study, four of the five scales used were attitudinal. Indeed the research project was a joint undertaking between the Institute of Social Research and the Berkeley Public Opinion Study (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: xi). Precursor studies carried out by the Institute for Social Research concerned prejudiced attitudes and, at the end of the book, the authors call for 'nation-wide opinion-polls to monitor the extent of prejudiced views' (Adorno *et al.*, 1950: 972). It is interesting, then, that such stress was placed on personality as measured by the F-scale rather than attitude as measured by the other scales.

Nor is there clarity on the process of fascist emergence. Of course one should be relieved that the researchers did not witness this process at first hand. However, it is a process that can be discussed in theory and by reference to events outside America. Put simply, there are two available models. The process may be latent-emergent and based on personality, or it may be cumulative and attitudinal. These would have different implications for social action, stressing prevention during childhood in the first case and programmes of attitude change at any age in the second.

A comment relevant to this discussion is contained in Smith's re-review of the study 46 years after his initial assessment. He maintained his generally favourable assessment, but added an interesting point, namely that the book had been refused the Walter Bernay's award for inter-group relations in 1949. He relates:

One entry was the massive galley proofs of *The Authoritarian Personality*, which I remember ploughing through with laborious fascination. TAP did not receive the Bernay's award, because, as I dimly remember, the committee thought that its characterological analysis did not give much guidance for corrective social action. (Smith, 1997: 159–63)

The committee's point was perceptive. In the book's conclusion, the authors recommended action research (1950: 572–6) to explore remedial measures. But the emphasis on character, rather than attitude, restricted the scope of such recommendations. Smith's critique points towards an alternative and more attitudinal approach. Fascism could be modelled as a cumulative cluster, connecting together increasingly prejudicial attitudes,

and these would tend towards outbreaks of action. Thus fascism would become possible as a minimal array became maximal, and where a few individuals grew in number and influence. It is simpler to model 'outbreaks of violence' on the basis of attitude than personality. It is also simpler to conceptualize reversals of attitude change than reformations of character.

In consequence the idea of preventative action would be seen less in developmental and therapeutic terms and more as concerned with specific changes of attitude brought about by direct intervention. As we have noted, such an approach was available within contemporary American social psychology. Research by Citron *et al.* (1950) dealt with countering 'anti-minority remarks'. It was argued that particular prejudices could be challenged, making action less likely.

Such an approach has been used against a fascist organization. In Britain in the late 1970s a party emerged called the National Front. Attitudes expressed in its publications were ethno-centric, anti-Semitic, politically and economically conservative and implicitly anti-democratic, indeed sometimes explicitly so. Billig's (1978) study concluded that this party was authentically fascist. The fact that it publicly denied this made it vulnerable. Anti-fascists campaigned to expose this weakness. They succeeded in separating actual fascists from potential ones and in separating them from individuals who had sufficient prejudices to make them likely voters for a fascist organization cloaked in respectability. When this cloak was removed the party became divided, losing most of its voters in a few years.

The dynamics of such movements are now better understood. The researchers of *The Authoritarian Personality*, their predecessors in the Frankfurt School and their successors in American and European psychology, have contributed greatly to this understanding. Though they emphasized personality too much, their central thesis remains sound, namely that advanced industrial society encourages the formation of authoritarian individuals who may become fascists and form fascist organizations. This danger has not gone away and its continued study remains essential for an applied and socially concerned social psychology.

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