

The Authoritarians

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## Preface



I realize that my making this book available for free on the internet raises questions about my judgment, especially since I am a psychologist. The well-known theory of cognitive dissonance says that people will value something more if they pay a lot of money to get it. So how much will people value what they get for free? Also, if somebody can make money off a book, how much common sense can he have if he gives it away? Why should you read a book

written by someone who has so little common sense?

There's a lot of convincing evidence that dissonance theory is right, and so I am running the risk of your saying, "It can't be any good if it's free." But there is another psychological principle which says if people experience something that meets a need, it will be a rewarding experience. So even though this book is free, I hope that you will find it worth your reading, and that if you think it's a good book, you will tell others about this web site so they can read it too. I'm not doing any advertising in the *New York Times*.

If you want to know why I'm passing on the big bucks, fame, and cocktail party hors d'oeuvres that a blockbuster best seller brings an author, it's partly because this book would never have rung up big sales. I did make one attempt to place it with a "trade" publisher, but when their editor said no I stopped acting out of habit and started reflecting. I think what I have found is rather important to the survival of American democracy. As such, it should be made available to everyone, and be essentially free. The "www" makes this possible, and that is why we have met here. So how do you do? Allow me to introduce my friend in the photo above, whose name is Harvey. ☺

## Acknowledgments



If it turns out you do not like this book, blame John Dean. You never would have heard of my research if he had not recently plowed through my studies, trying to understand, first, various people he knew in the Nixon White House, and then some leading figures of the Republican Party of 2004. John Dean is quite a guy. I think I offended him once by addressing him as “Honest John,” which I meant in the sense of “Honest Abe.” John strikes one with his candor and openness. I treasure his friendship as much as I treasure his unfailing help. Some of his closest friends, I have discovered, go back to his high school days. I think that says a lot about a person, especially given what John went through in the 1970s. The “former counsel to the president” has campaigned endlessly on behalf of my research, making it known wherever he could. This book was his idea, and you would not be reading it if he had not kept “bringing me up on the stage” with him as he talked about his *Conservatives Without Conscience*.



John is too young to be my mentor, a position that was filled many years ago by the distinguished psychologist, M. Brewster Smith. No one would probably have discovered any of my findings on authoritarianism if Brewster had not given a ringing endorsement to my first book many years ago. That endorsement was particularly gratifying because Brewster has been *the* knowledgeable, critical voice in the field since its beginnings over 50 years ago. And it was Brewster who suggested some years ago that I submit my studies of authoritarian aggression to the American Association for the Advancement of Science’s competition for best research in the behavioral sciences. I sent him a basket of fruit when it won, and now I would like to thank him again, and more publicly. Brewster has won almost all the honors that psychology can bestow, but my appreciation of him is even more heartfelt.



I must honor as well Bruce Hunsberger, who joined me--before his death from leukemia in 2003--in much of the research described in the chapter on religion. Bruce was my best (guy) friend for most of my life. I still miss him, and every now and then when I log on I fantasize that there'll be a message from Bruce saying that one can do research in the afterlife. "So hurry up."

Above: Jean Altemeyer, Bruce Hunsberger, Emily Hunsberger, & a big acorn.

Then there is my much maligned wife, Jean. I have created the impression in previous acknowledgments that she has no interest in my research. In truth, she asks about it frequently. She just would never do what you're on the threshold of doing: read about it. But she is more than my best friend, period, more than "the girl I gave up Lent for" in the Tom Lehrer song, more than my co-adventurer in the Byzantine world of parenting. She is the love of my life. I have no idea why she agreed to marry me after our second date in 1964. But she did, and I am forever grateful for that--as she well knows.



Andrew Perchaluk of the University of Manitoba expertly designed my original web site and got the book onto it. However I failed to renew the domain in 2014. (Who knew that an email telling me to pay up or I'd lose my website could be legit?) Ken Murdoch, an old friend who helps geezers get their toes wet in the ether came to my rescue. He not only got the 2006 PDF version back up, he responded to many requests to make an Epub version as well. All he asked was 100% of the profits from the sale of the book, which I gladly gave him.

Dedication:  
To our son Sean



## Introduction

In the fall of 2005 I found myself engaged, most unexpectedly, in a heavy exchange of emails with the man who had blown the whistle on Watergate, John Dean. He was writing a book about “conservatives without conscience”--which the late Senator Barry Goldwater was to have co-authored. Dean, Goldwater, and others with solid Republican credentials had been alarmed by the capture of the Grand Old Party by the Religious Right and its seemingly amoral leaders. Dean was plowing through the social science literatures on conservatism and religion to see what perspective academics could offer his analysis, and eventually he ran across my name.

Who am I? I’m a nearly retired psychology professor in Canada who has spent most of his life studying authoritarianism. I got into this field by being lazy. When I took the exams for getting a Ph.D. at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh in 1965, I failed a question about a famous early effort to understand the authoritarian personality. I had to write a paper to prove I could learn at least something about this research, which had gotten itself into a huge hairy mess by then. However, I got caught up in the tangle too. Thus I didn’t start studying authoritarianism because I am a left-winger (I think I’m a moderate on most issues)<sup>1</sup> (if you want to read a note, click on the number) or because I secretly hated my father. I got into it because it presented a long series of puzzles to be solved, and I love a good mystery.

Now, 40 years later, everyone who knows me would rather volunteer for a root canal operation at a school for spastic dental students than ask me a question about authoritarianism. My wife has never read a single page in any of my books. Few of my colleagues in the psychology department at the University of Manitoba have asked about my research since 1973. People I meet at parties, including folks in their 70s, inevitably discover they have to call the baby-sitter about three minutes after casually asking me, “What do you do?” You can’t shut

me up once I get going. Yet John Dean was reading everything I had written and pummeling me with insightful questions for months on end. I had died and gone to heaven. And since John's best-selling book, *Conservatives Without Conscience* had used my research to help explain how America was going to the devil, he thought I should write an easy-read, non-technical account of what I have found before I do die, and go to heaven or the devil. It will begin appearing on a screen near you soon.

### *What is Authoritarianism?*

Authoritarianism is something authoritarian followers and authoritarian leaders cook up between themselves. It happens when the followers submit too much to the leaders, trust them too much, and give them too much leeway to do whatever they want--which often is something undemocratic, tyrannical and brutal. In my day, authoritarian fascist and authoritarian communist dictatorships posed the biggest threats to democracies, and eventually lost to them in wars both hot and cold. But authoritarianism itself has not disappeared, and I'm going to present the case in this book that the greatest threat to American democracy today arises from a militant authoritarianism that has become a cancer upon the nation.

We know an awful lot about authoritarian followers. In one way or another, hundreds of social scientists have studied them since World War II. We have a pretty good idea of who they are, where they come from, and what makes them tick. By comparison, we know little about authoritarian leaders because we only recently started studying them. That may seem strange, but how hard is it to figure out why someone would like to have massive amounts of power? The psychological mystery has always been, why would someone prefer a dictatorship to freedom? So social scientists have focused on the followers, who are seen as the main, underlying problem.



I am going to tell you about my research on authoritarianism, but I am not going to give the kind of technical scientific report I lay on other scientists. Whatever ends up getting crunched in this book, it's not going to be a pile of numbers. Instead, I'll very briefly describe how the studies were done and what then happened. In many cases I'll invite you to pretend you are a subject in an experiment, and ask what you would say or do. I hope you'll generally find the presentation relaxed, conversational, even playful, because that's the way I like to write--even on serious topics--to the annoyance of many a science editor. (A sense of humor helps a lot when you spend your life studying authoritarians.)

But I have not "dumbed down" anything. This is not "Authoritarianism for Dummies." ("Six months ago I couldn't even spell 'authoritarian,' and now I am one.") It's an account of some social science research for people who have not sat through a lot of classes on research methods and statistics--a good many of which, it so happens, I also never attended, especially on nice days. I'll put some of the technical mumbo-jumbo in the optional notes for pitiful people such as I who just can't live without it. If you want to bore through even denser presentations of my research, with methodological details and statistical tests jamming things up, the way poor John Dean had to, click here for note <sup>2</sup>.

But why should you even bother reading this book? I would offer three reasons. First, if you are concerned about what has happened in America since a radical right-wing segment of the population began taking control of the government about a dozen years ago, I think you'll find a lot in this book that says your fears are well founded. As many have pointed out, the Republic is once again passing through perilous times. The concept of a constitutional democracy has been under attack--and by the American government no less! The mid-term elections of 2006 give hope that the best values and traditions of the country will ultimately prevail. But it could prove a huge mistake to think that the enemies of freedom and equality have lost the war just because they were

recently rebuffed at the polls. I'll be very much surprised if their leaders don't frame the setback as a test of the followers' faith, causing them to redouble their efforts. They came so close to getting what they want, they're not likely to pack up and go away without an all-out drive. But even if their leaders cannot find an acceptable presidential candidate for 2008, even if authoritarians play a much diminished role in the next election, even if they temporarily fade from view, they will still be there, aching for a dictatorship that will force their views on everyone. And they will surely be energized again, as they were in 1994, if a new administration infuriates them while carrying out its mandate. The country is not out of danger.

The second reason I can offer for reading what follows is that it is *not* chock full of opinions, but experimental evidence. Liberals have stereotypes about conservatives, and conservatives have stereotypes about liberals. Moderates have stereotypes about both. Anyone who has watched, or been a liberal arguing with a conservative (or vice versa) knows that personal opinion and rhetoric can be had a penny a pound. But arguing never seems to get anywhere. Whereas if you set up a fair and square experiment in which people can act nobly, fairly, and with integrity, and you find that most of one group does, and most of another group does not, that's a fact, not an opinion. And if you keep finding the same thing experiment after experiment, and other people do too, then that's a body of facts that demands attention.<sup>3</sup> Some people, we have seen to our dismay, don't care a hoot what scientific investigation reveals; but most people do. If the data were fairly gathered and we let them do the talking, we should be on a higher plane than the current, "Sez you!"

The last reason why you might be interested in the hereafter is that you might want more than just facts about authoritarians, but *understanding* and insight into why they act the way they do. Which is often mind-boggling. How can they revere those who gave their lives defending freedom and then support moves to take that freedom away? How can they go on believing things that have been disproved over and over again, and disbelieve things that are well established? How can they think they are the best people in the world, when so much of what they do ought to show them they are not? Why do their leaders so often turn out to be crooks and hypocrites? Why are both the followers and the

leaders so aggressive that hostility is practically their trademark? By the time you have finished this book, I think you will understand the reasons. All of this, and much more, fit into place once you see what research has uncovered going on in authoritarian minds.

Ready to go exploring?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have found that some people make assumptions about why I study authoritarianism that get in the way of what the data have to say. The stereotype about professors is that they are tall, thin, and liberals. I'm more liberal than I am tall and thin, that's for sure. But I don't think anyone who knows me well would say I am a left-winger. My wife is a liberal, and she and all her liberal friends will tell you I am definitely not one of them. Sometimes they make me leave the room. I have quite mixed feelings about abortion, labor unions, welfare and warfare. I supported the war in Afghanistan from the beginning; I disapproved of the war in Iraq from its start in March 2003.

I am not now, nor have I ever been, a member of the Communist Party, or any other political party. I do give money to various parties, trying to defeat whomever I am most disgustatated with at the time. (My political contributions have almost become automatic withdrawals from my bank account since one of our sons became a Member of the Legislative Assembly in our province.) I did not flee to Canada in 1968 because of the war in Viet-Nam. I crossed the border

with my draft board's good wishes because the University of Manitoba offered me the best job I could find. And my research has not been funded by "some liberal think-tank" or foundation. Instead, I paid for almost all of it out of my own pocket. I have not had a research grant since 1972--not because I am opposed to people giving me money, but because I proved so lousy at getting grants that I gave up. (Whereas I, like my politician son, found I was a soft touch whenever I hit me up for some dough.) [Back to introduction](#)

<sup>2</sup> The best scientifically up-to-snuff presentation of my research on authoritarian followers is contained in *The Authoritarian Specter*, published in 1996 by Harvard University Press. The only reports of my research on authoritarian leaders are 1) a chapter entitled, "The Other 'Authoritarian Personality'" in Volume 30 (1998) of a series of books called *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, edited by Mark Zanna and published by Academic Press, and 2) an article in the *Journal of Social Psychology*, edited by Keith Davis, in 2004 entitled "Highly Dominating, Highly Authoritarian Personalities" (Volume 144, pages 421-447).

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<sup>3</sup> I hope you'll agree that the studies were fair and square. It's your call, of course, and everybody else's. That's the beauty of the scientific method. If another researcher--and there are hundreds of them--thinks I only got the results I did because of the particular way I set things up, phrased things, and so on, she can repeat my experiment her way, find out, and let everybody know what happened. It's the wonderful way science polices and corrects itself.

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## Chapter 1

### Who Are the Authoritarian Followers?

Because this book is called *The Authoritarians*, you may have thought it dealt with autocrats and despots, the kind of people who would rule their country, or department, or football team like a dictator. That is one meaning of the word, and yes, we shall talk about such people eventually in this book. But we shall begin with a second kind of authoritarian: someone who, because of his personality, *submits* by leaps and bows to his authorities. It may seem strange, but this is the authoritarian personality that psychology has studied the most.

We shall probably always have individuals lurking among us who yearn to play tyrant. Some of them will be dumber than *two* bags of broken hammers, and some will be very bright. Many will start so far down in society that they have little chance of amassing power; others will have easy access to money and influence all their lives. On the national scene some will be frustrated by prosperity, internal tranquility, and international peace--all of which significantly dim the prospects for a demagogue -in-waiting. Others will benefit from historical crises that automatically drop increased power into a leader's lap. But ultimately, in a democracy, a wannabe tyrant is just a comical figure on a soapbox unless a huge wave of supporters lifts him to high office. That's how Adolf Hitler destroyed the Weimar Republic and became the Fuhrer. So we need to understand the people out there doing the wave. Ultimately the problem lay in the followers.

In this chapter we'll consider the way I measure people's tendency to be authoritarian followers and whether this approach has any merit. And if after that you find yourself thinking, "More, more, I still want more. I simply love reading books on a monitor!" I'll tell you the story of what happened at my university on the night of October 19, 1994, When Authoritarians Ruled The Earth.

### *Right-Wing and Left-Wing Authoritarian Followers*

Authoritarian followers usually support the established authorities in their society, such as government officials and traditional religious leaders. Such people have historically been the “proper” authorities in life, the time-honored, entitled, customary leaders, and that means a lot to most authoritarians. Psychologically these followers have *personalities* featuring:

- 1) a high degree of submission to the established, legitimate authorities in their society;
- 2) high levels of aggression in the name of their authorities; and
- 3) a high level of conventionalism.

Because the submission occurs to traditional authority, I call these followers *right-wing* authoritarians. I’m using the word “right” in one of its earliest meanings, for in Old English “riht”(pronounced “writ”) as an adjective meant lawful, proper, correct, doing what the authorities said. (And when someone did the lawful thing back then, maybe the authorities said, with a John Wayne drawl, “You got that riht, pilgrim!”)

<sup>1</sup> [\(Click on a note’s number to have it appear.\)](#)

In North America people who submit to the established authorities to extraordinary degrees often *turn out* to be political conservatives,<sup>2</sup> so you can call them “right-wingers” both in my new-fangled psychological sense and in the usual political sense as well. But someone who lived in a country long ruled by Communists and who ardently supported the Communist Party would also be one of my *psychological right-wing* authoritarians even though we would also say he was a political left-winger. So a right-wing authoritarian follower doesn’t necessarily have conservative political views. Instead he’s someone who readily submits to the established authorities in society, attacks others in their name, and is highly conventional. It’s an aspect of his personality, not a description of his politics. Right-wing authoritarianism is a personality trait, like being characteristically bashful or happy or grumpy or dopey.

You could have left-wing authoritarian followers as well, who support a revolutionary leader who wants to overthrow the establishment. I knew a few in the 1970s, Marxist university students who constantly spouted *their* chosen authorities, Lenin or Trotsky or Chairman Mao. Happily they spent most of their time fighting with each other, as lampooned in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* where the People's Front of Judea devotes most of its energy to battling, not the Romans, but the Judean People's Front. But the left-wing authoritarians on my campus disappeared long ago. Similarly in America "the Weathermen" blew away in the wind. I'm sure one can find left-wing authoritarians here and there, but they hardly exist in sufficient numbers now to threaten democracy in North America. However I have found bucketfuls of right-wing authoritarians in nearly every sample I have drawn in Canada and the United States for the past three decades. So when I speak of "authoritarian followers" in this book I mean right-wing authoritarian followers, as identified by the RWA scale.

### *The RWA Scale*

The what? The Right-Wing Authoritarianism scale. Get out a pencil. I'm going to take you into the inner sanctum of a personality test. Just don't be **FRIGHTENED!**

Below is the latest version of the RWA scale. Read the instructions carefully, and then write down your response to each statement on a sheet of paper numbered 1-22.

This survey is part of an investigation of general public opinion concerning a variety of social issues. You will probably find that you agree with some of the statements, and disagree with others, to varying extents. Please indicate your reaction to each statement on the line to the left of each item according to the following scale:



Write down a -4 if you very strongly disagree with the statement.

Write down a -3 if you strongly disagree with the statement.

Write down a -2 if you moderately disagree with the statement.

Write down a -1 if you slightly disagree with the statement.

Write down a +1 if you slightly agree with the statement.

Write down a +2 if you moderately agree with the statement.

Write down a +3 if you strongly agree with the statement.

Write down a +4 if you very strongly agree with the statement.

If you feel exactly and precisely neutral about an item, write down a "0."

**("Dr. Bob" to reader: We'll probably stay friends longer if you read this paragraph.)** Important: You may find that you sometimes have different reactions to different parts of a statement. For example, you might very strongly disagree ("-4") with one idea in a statement, but slightly agree ("+1") with another idea in the same item. When this happens, please combine your reactions, and write down how you feel on balance (a "-3" in this case).

- \_\_\_ 1. The established authorities generally turn out to be right about things, while the radicals and protestors are usually just "loud mouths" showing off their ignorance.
- \_\_\_ 2. Women should have to promise to obey their husbands when they get married.
- \_\_\_ 3. Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.
- \_\_\_ 4. Gays and lesbians are just as healthy and moral as anybody else.
- \_\_\_ 5. It is always better to trust the judgment of the proper authorities in government and religion than to listen to the noisy rabble-rousers in our society who are trying to create doubt in people's minds
- \_\_\_ 6. Atheists and others who have rebelled against the established religions are no doubt every bit as good and virtuous as those who attend church regularly.
- \_\_\_ 7. The only way our country can get through the crisis ahead is to get back to our traditional values, put some tough leaders in power, and silence the troublemakers spreading bad ideas.

- \_\_\_ 8. There is absolutely nothing wrong with nudist camps.
- \_\_\_ 9. Our country needs free thinkers who have the courage to defy traditional ways, even if this upsets many people.
- \_\_\_ 10. Our country will be destroyed someday if we do not smash the perversions eating away at our moral fiber and traditional beliefs.
- \_\_\_ 11. Everyone should have their own lifestyle, religious beliefs, and sexual preferences, even if it makes them different from everyone else.
- \_\_\_ 12. The “old-fashioned ways” and the “old-fashioned values” still show the best way to live.
- \_\_\_ 13. You have to admire those who challenged the law and the majority’s view by protesting for women’s abortion rights, for animal rights, or to abolish school prayer.
- \_\_\_ 14. What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will crush evil, and take us back to our true path.
- \_\_\_ 15. Some of the best people in our country are those who are challenging our government, criticizing religion, and ignoring the “normal way things are supposed to be done.”
- \_\_\_ 16. God’s laws about abortion, pornography and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late, and those who break them must be strongly punished.
- \_\_\_ 17. There are many radical, immoral people in our country today, who are trying to ruin it for their own godless purposes, whom the authorities should put out of action.
- \_\_\_ 18. A “woman’s place” should be wherever she wants to be. The days when women are submissive to their husbands and social conventions belong strictly in the past.
- \_\_\_ 19. Our country will be great if we honor the ways of our forefathers, do what the authorities tell us to do, and get rid of the “rotten apples” who are ruining everything.
- \_\_\_ 20. There is no “ONE right way” to live life; everybody has to create their own way.
- \_\_\_ 21. Homosexuals and feminists should be praised for being brave enough to defy “traditional family values.
- \_\_\_ 22. This country would work a lot better if certain groups of troublemakers would just shut up and accept their group’s traditional place in society.

Done them all, as best you could? Then let's score your answers, and get an idea of whether you're cut out to be an authoritarian follower. First, you can skip your answers to the first two statements. They don't count. I put those items on the test to give people some experience with the -4 to +4 response system. They're just "warm-ups." Start therefore with No. 3.

If you wrote down a "-4" that's scored as a 1.

If you wrote down a "-3" that's scored as a 2.

If you wrote down a "-2" that's scored as a 3.

If you wrote down a "-1" that's scored as a 4.

If you wrote down a "0" or left the item unanswered, that's scored as a 5.

If you wrote down a "+1" that's scored as a 6.

If you wrote down a "+2" that's scored as a 7.

If you wrote down a "+3" that's scored as an 8.

If you wrote down a "+4" that's scored as a 9.

Your answers to Items 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19 and 22 are scored the same way.

Now we'll do the rest of your answers, starting with No. 4.

If you wrote down a "-4" that's scored as a 9.

If you wrote down a "-3" that's scored as an 8.

If you wrote down a "-2" that's scored as a 7.

If you wrote down a "-1" that's scored as a 6.

If you wrote down a "0" or left the item unanswered, that's scored as a 5.

If you wrote down a "+1" that's scored as a 4.

If you wrote down a "+2" that's scored as a 3.

If you wrote down a "+3" that's scored as a 2.

If you wrote down a "+4" that's scored as a 1.

Now simply add up your twenty scores. The lowest total possible would be 20, and the highest, 180, but real scores are almost never that extreme. Introductory psychology students at my Canadian university average about 75. Their parents average about 90. Both scores are below the mid-point of the scale, which is 100, so most people in these groups are not authoritarian followers in absolute terms. Neither are most Americans, it seems. Mick McWilliams and Jeremy Keil administered the RWA scale to a reasonably representative sample of 1000 Americans in 2005 for the Libertarian Party and discovered an average score of 90.<sup>3,4</sup> Thus the Manitoba parent samples seem similar in overall authoritarianism to a representative American adult sample.<sup>5</sup> My Manitoba students score about the same on the RWA scale as most American university students do too.

Let me give you three compelling reasons why you should treat your personal score with a grain of salt. First, psychological tests make mistakes about *individuals*, which is what you happen to be, I'll bet. Even the best instruments, such as the best IQ tests, get it wrong sometimes--as I think most people know. Thus the RWA scale can't give sure-thing diagnoses of individuals. (But it can reliably identify levels of authoritarianism in *groups*, because too-high errors and too-low errors tend to even out in big samples. So we'll do the group grope in this book, and not go on the individual counseling trip.<sup>6</sup>)

Second, how you responded to the items depended a lot on how you interpreted them. You may have writhed in agony wondering, "What does he *mean* by \_\_\_\_\_?" as you answered. If I failed often to get the gist of what I was saying over to you, your score will certainly be misleading.<sup>7</sup>

Third, you knew what the items were trying to measure, didn't you, you rascal! The RWA scale is a personality test disguised as an attitude survey, but I'll bet you saw right through it.<sup>8</sup> In fact, you could probably take each statement apart and see how I was trying to slyly tap the various components of the RWA personality trait.

Take that first-scored item, No. 3: “Our country desperately needs a mighty leader (authoritarian submission) who will do what has to be done to destroy (authoritarian aggression) the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us” (conventionalism). Well if you’re smart enough to do that, you’re smart enough to realize how easily you might have slanted your answers to look good.<sup>9</sup>

So I didn’t ask you to answer the RWA scale to see if you’d find true happiness and fulfillment as a stormtrooper in some dictator’s army. It’s not a vocational test. Instead, I wanted you to experience for yourself the instrument used to identify and study authoritarian followers. Most of what I have uncovered about authoritarianism, I have dug up with this tool, and now you know what it is and how it works.<sup>10</sup>

### *Is the RWA Scale Valid?*

According to the High Laws of Science (you do *not* have to genuflect here), ideas must be repeatedly tested to see if they fail. So the next (and extremely important) question is, does the RWA scale really measure what it says it measures? Are the test scores valid? If they are, we should find that high scorers submit to established authority more than most people do, aggress more in the name of such authority, and are much more conventional. What’s the evidence?

*Authoritarian Submission.* Everybody submits to authority to some degree. Imagine a world in which people ignored traffic laws and sped through red lights. The cost of auto insurance would shoot through the roof (although the line-ups to buy it would become much shorter). But some people go way beyond the norm and submit to authority even when it is dishonest, corrupt, unfair and evil. We would expect authoritarian followers especially to submit to corrupt authorities in their lives: to believe them when there is little reason to do so, to trust them when huge grounds for suspicion exist, and to hold them blameless when they do something wrong. We don’t expect absolutes here; people are much too complicated to completely, always, blindly

submit, no matter what. But IF the RWA scale truly measures the tendency to be an authoritarian follower, those who score highly on it should tend to do these things, right? So do they?

Well, they will tell you that people *should* submit to authority in virtually all circumstances. If you give them moral dilemmas (e.g. should one steal an absurdly expensive drug to save a life?) they're more likely to say, "The law is the law and must be obeyed" than most people are. High RWAs also say they would *bow* more to show respect for their fathers, the president of companies where they worked, and so on, than most people indicate. (An astronomer suggested I ask about the bowing, which I thought was silly, but he was right. "Social scientists are such blockheads!")

High RWAs trusted President Nixon longer and stronger than most people did during the Watergate crisis.<sup>11</sup> Some of them still believed Nixon was innocent of criminal acts even after he accepted a pardon for them.<sup>12</sup> (Similarly the Allies found many Germans in 1945 refused to believe that Hitler, one of the most evil men in history, had ordered the murder of millions of Jews and others. "He was busy running the war," Hitler's apologists said. "The concentration camps were built and run by subordinates without his knowing it.") To pick a more current example, authoritarian followers believed, more than most people did, President George W. Bush's false claims that Saddam Hussein had extensive links to al-Qaida, and that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. And they supported the invasion of Iraq, whereas less authoritarian Americans tended to doubt the wisdom of that war from the start.<sup>13</sup>

*Caution No. 1.* On the other hand, right-wing authoritarians did *not* support President Clinton during his impeachment and trial over the Monica Lewinsky scandal. So as I said, the support is not automatic and reflexive, but can be trumped by other concerns. In Clinton's case his administration not only had advocated for groups anathema to authoritarians, such as homosexuals and feminists, his sexual misdeeds in the White House deeply offended many high RWAs.

Shifting our focus a bit, please give your reaction to the story below:

It has been reported in the press that the FBI has maintained illegal wiretaps of the telephones of about 60 persons in the United States who were suspected of being sympathetic toward radical political organizations. The FBI is reported to be taking no chances that these persons might become active in their support of these groups. Under current legislation such wiretaps are legally permissible only if a judge has signed a court order authorizing them. The FBI reportedly has never sought court approval of these wiretaps because they believed their case was too weak and the courts would deny them. The FBI has denied the wiretaps exist, and described the report as a “complete fabrication.”

If the story is true, how serious a matter would you say the illegal wiretaps are?

0 = Not serious at all; they clearly are justified by the circumstances.

1 = Mildly serious

2 = Somewhat serious

3 = Pretty serious

4 = Extremely serious; such acts strike at the foundation of a free society.

What would you say? You can put me down for a “4.” What’s the point of having laws protecting privacy if the law enforcers can decide to ignore them whenever they wish, and then get away with it?

The issue may remind you of the Bush administration’s policy of authorizing the National Security Agency to engage in electronic spying, without warrants, on Americans suspected of supporting terrorism--which simply ignored the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that required prior court approval of such surveillance. And indeed, David Winter at the University of Michigan discovered that high RWAs felt Bush’s policy was “both necessary and appropriate” because of terrorism. But the wiretaps case presented above comes from a study I did over thirty years ago, in the autumn of 1974, using students from five scattered American universities. I found that persons who scored highly on the RWA scale tended to answer with 0's, 1's and 2's, while those who scored low in RWA used 3's and 4's much more often. (The overall

average in those months immediately following Watergate equaled 3.0.)

And this is just the beginning. Over the years I have found that authoritarian followers blissfully tolerated many illegal and unjust government actions that occurred in the United States and Canada, such as:

- a police burglary of a newspaper office to get confidential information.
- drug raids carried out without search warrants because judges wouldn't give them.
- denial of right to assemble to peacefully protest government actions.
- "dirty tricks" played by a governing party on the opposition during an election.
- immigration office discrimination against radical speakers.
- placing *agents provocateurs* in organizations to create dissension and bad press relations.
- burning down the meeting place of a radical organization.
- unauthorized mail openings.

Authoritarian followers seem to have a "Daddy and mommy know best" attitude toward the government. They do not see laws as social standards that apply to all. Instead, they appear to think that authorities are above the law, and can decide which laws apply to them and which do not--just as parents can when one is young. But in a democracy no one is supposed to be above the law. Still, authoritarians quite easily put that aside. They also believe that only criminals and terrorists would object to having their phones tapped, their mail opened, and their lives put under surveillance. They have bought their tickets and are standing in line waiting for *1984*, *The Real Thing*. There might as well not be a Fourth Amendment to the Constitution. And when the Military Commissions Act of 2006 is used to deny people the right of *habeas corpus*--one of the oldest rights in western law--it is unlikely that right-wing authoritarians will object to the loss of this constitutional guarantee either.



In fact, who even needs the whole Bill of Rights? Here is a (fake) letter-to-the-editor I asked some San Francisco State University students to respond to in 1990.

If a person stops to think about it, most of the problems we are having can be traced to the Bill of Rights--or more precisely, to the way it has been interpreted by the Supreme Court. "Freedom of speech" has been twisted to mean that pornographers can sell their filth, and that anybody can say whatever he wants, whether it's good for society or not. And "freedom of religion" has been twisted to mean children can't pray in public schools any more. And the "right to happiness" has been twisted to mean women can have abortion after abortion if they're "unhappy" being pregnant. And think how many drug pushers and criminals have gotten off scot-free because their "rights" were supposedly violated after they had robbed or killed somebody.

A lot of people hoped the new Supreme Court, rid of the "Liberal Majority" which had made all these terrible rulings, would overturn them. But it's clear now that they won't. No Supreme Court can reverse the ruling of an earlier Supreme Court, so we are stuck with these interpretations as long as there is a Bill of Rights. And we will soon be destroyed as a nation because of them. So the only thing we can do, to make America the free, pure, safe Christian nation that the founding fathers intended it to be, is to repeal the Bill of Rights.

If you like, you can count up how many ignorant, inaccurate, misleading and just plain stupid things there are in this letter. I knew it was ridiculous when I composed it. But I got the material from various people I've heard speak on the subject. If you haven't heard them, tune in to "talk radio" some night.

I asked the students how sensible they thought the letter was, and whether they thought the Bill of Rights should be repealed. High RWAs found the letter pretty sensible, don't you know, and they favored repealing the Bill of Rights more than anyone else did. Which sprinkles a dash of irony into this stew. The founding fathers added the Bill of Rights to the Constitution to prevent tyranny *by the government*. I wonder if they realized that democracy could be undermined from "below" as well as crushed by tyranny from "above" by people who didn't want the freedoms?<sup>14</sup>

The last string of studies I want to lay before you regarding authoritarian submission concerns authoritarians' willingness to hold officials accountable for their misdeeds. Or rather, their lack of willingness--which catches your eye because high RWAs generally favor punishing the bejabbers out of misdoers. But they proved less likely than most people to punish a police officer who beat up a handcuffed demonstrator, or a chief of detectives who assaulted an accused child molester being held in jail, or--paralleling the trial of U.S. Army Lt. William Calley--an Air Force officer convicted of murder after leading unauthorized raids on Vietnamese villages.

The "Milgram experiment," which we shall discuss at the end of this book, offers another example of authoritarian followers "going easy" on authorities. In his famous study Stanley Milgram maneuvered subjects into a situation in which they were ordered by an Experimenter to inflict painful, and possibly lethal, electric shocks on another person (who in fact was not hurt at all). The subjects clearly did not want to deliver the shocks, but the Experimenter told them they had to. The Experimenter even said, if pressed, that he would accept responsibility for whatever happened. Yet Tom Blass of the University of Maryland at Baltimore found that high RWA students tended to blame the Experimenter *less* for what happened to the victim than most students did.<sup>15</sup> Whom did they blame instead? I found, when I replicated the study, they blamed the poor devil who was ordered to deliver the shocks, and the *victim*, more than most others did.

If some day George W. Bush is indicted for authorizing torture, you can bet your bottom dollar the high RWAs will howl to the heavens in protest. It won't matter how extensive the torture was, how cruel and sickening it was, how many years it went on, how many prisoners died, how devious Bush was in trying to evade America's laws and traditional stand against torture, or how many treaties the U.S. broke. Such an indictment would grind right up against the core of authoritarian followers, and they won't have it. Maybe they'll even say, "The president was busy running the war. He didn't really know. It was all done by Rumsfeld and others."<sup>16</sup>

*Authoritarian Aggression.* When I say authoritarian followers are aggressive I don't mean they stride into bars and start fights. First of all, high RWAs go to church enormously more often than they go to bars. Secondly, they usually avoid anything approaching a fair fight. Instead they aggress when they believe right and might are on their side. "Right" for them means, more than anything else, that their hostility is (in their minds) endorsed by established authority, or supports such authority. "Might" means they have a huge physical advantage over their target, in weaponry say, or in numbers, as in a lynch mob. It's striking how often authoritarian aggression happens in dark and cowardly ways, in the dark, by cowards who later will do everything they possibly can to avoid responsibility for what they did. Women, children, and others unable to defend themselves are typical victims. Even more striking, the attackers typically feel morally superior to the people they are assaulting in an unfair fight. We shall see research evidence in the next chapter that this self-righteousness plays a huge role in high RWAs' hostility.

Believe it or not, researchers are not allowed to organize murderous mobs to study hostility. So we have to study authoritarian aggression in subtler ways. For example:

You are a judge presiding at the trial of "The People vs. Robert Smith." Evidence introduced in court indicates that on the evening of May 23<sup>rd</sup>, a Mr. Matthew Burns (a 47-year-old, Caucasian accountant) was walking to his car in a hotel parking lot when he was stopped by a man who produced a pistol and demanded Mr. Burns' wallet. Mr. Burns complied, but as the robber ran from the scene Mr. Burns ducked into a doorway and began shouting "Stop that man!"

These cries were heard by a policeman cruising nearby in a patrol car who after a short chase apprehended a Mr. Robert Smith, (a 28-year-old Caucasian of no fixed address or occupation). The police officer saw Mr. Smith throw what proved to be Mr. Burns' wallet down a sewer as he was being pursued. Smith matched the general description Mr. Burns gave of his assailant, but Mr. Burns was unable to identify Smith "with absolute certainty" because it was dark in the parking lot at the time of the robbery.

Smith told the court he saw *another* man running from the parking lot, and then he found the wallet. He began to run after picking up the wallet because he heard the police siren and realized how incriminating the circumstances were. That was also, according to Smith, the reason he threw the wallet down the sewer.

Smith has a record of two previous “mugging” arrests and one prior conviction. He was found guilty of robbing Mr. Burns by the jury, and it is your duty now to declare sentence. A second conviction of armed robbery of this sort is punishable by up to ten years imprisonment, with parole possible after 1/3 of the sentence has been served.

When asked if he had anything to say before being sentenced, Smith said again that he was innocent. What sentence would you give?

Many factors would undoubtedly shape someone’s decision in this matter, even if s/he were just filling out a booklet of surveys and was suddenly asked to imagine being a judge. But such role-playing does create a situation in which someone can imagine punishing someone else in the name of established authority. I’d give Smith about four or five years of further experience with the penitentiary system, and overall, subjects answering my survey would impose an average sentence of about 3.5 years. But right-wing authoritarians would send Robert Smith to the slammer for a significantly longer time than most people would.

In fact they’d send just about anyone to jail for a longer time than most people would, from those who spit on the sidewalk to rapists. However, as noted earlier, authoritarian followers usually would go *easy* on authorities who commit crimes, and they similarly make allowances for someone who attacks a victim the authoritarian is prejudiced against. (If you were a district attorney prosecuting a lynching case, you would NOT rejoice at a jury filled with high RWAs.) But in general they would sentence most criminals to longer terms than the average Joe would. They also tend to strongly endorse capital punishment.

Why are high RWAs extra-punitive against law-breakers? For one thing, they think the crimes involved are more serious than most people do, and they believe more in the beneficial effects of punishment. But they also find “common criminals” highly repulsive and disgusting, and they admit it feels personally good, it makes them glad, to be *able* to punish a perpetrator. They get off smiting the sinner; they relish being “the arm of the Lord.” Similarly, high RWA university students say that classmates in high school who misbehaved and got into trouble, experienced “bad trips” on drugs, became pregnant, and so on “got exactly what they deserved” and that they felt a secret pleasure when they found out about the others’ misfortune.<sup>17</sup>

Which suggests authoritarian followers have a little volcano of hostility bubbling away inside them looking for a (safe, approved) way to erupt. This was supported by an experiment I ran in which subjects were (supposedly) allowed to deliver electric shocks to someone trying to master a list of nonsense syllables. The subject/teacher could choose the level of shock for each mistake the learner made. Since the punishment was sanctioned by the experimenter, this opened the door for the authoritarian. The higher the subject’s RWA scale score, the stronger the shocks delivered.

Here are some items from another scale. How would you respond to them on a -4 to +4 basis?

1. There are entirely too many people from the wrong sorts of places being admitted into our country now.
2. Black people are, by their nature, more violent and “primitive” than others.
3. Jews cannot be trusted as much as other people can.
4. As a group, aboriginal people are naturally lazy, dishonest and lawless.
5. Arabs are too emotional, and they don’t fit in well in our country.
6. We have much to fear from the Japanese, who are as cruel as they are ambitious.

I'll bet you have figured out that I use these to measure prejudice. You may be taken aback however to discover that these prejudices usually show up bundled together in a person. But social psychologists found long ago that people who are prejudiced against one group are usually prejudiced against a whole lot more as well. Prejudice has little to do with the groups it targets, and a lot to do with the personality of the holder. Want to guess who has such wide-ranging prejudices? Authoritarian followers dislike so many kinds of people, I have called them "equal opportunity bigots." They will not win the gold medal in the Prejudice Olympics (we'll find out who does in a later chapter), but high RWAs will definitely be on the podium.<sup>18</sup>

Here's another one of my measures, which I call "Posse," that you may find so ridiculous that you'd say no one would ever buy into it. Humor me, gentle reader.

Suppose the federal government, some time in the future, passed a law outlawing various religious cults. Government officials then stated that the law would only be effective if it were vigorously enforced at the local level and appealed to everyone to aid in the fight against these cults.

Please respond to the following statements according to the following scale:

-4 indicates the statement is extremely untrue of you.

-3 indicates the statement is very untrue of you.

etc. to:

+4 indicates the statement is extremely true of you.

1. I would tell my friends and neighbors it was a good law.
2. I would tell the police about any religious cults I knew.
3. If asked by the police, I would help hunt down and arrest members of religious cults.
4. I would participate in attacks on religious cult meeting places if organized by the proper authorities.
5. I would support the use of physical force to make cult members reveal the identity of other cult members.
6. I would support the execution of religious cult leaders if the government insisted it was necessary to protect the country.

I'll assume, because I know what a fine person you are, that you would respond to each of these statements with a -4 or a -3. Most people do. But not authoritarian followers. They typically answer with -2s and -1s, and sometimes even say, "Yes I would." If that shocks you, remember that the premise behind "Posse" runs right down Main Street in the authoritarian aggression mind-set. When the authorities say, "Go get *'em*," the high RWAs saddle up.

Who can *'em* be? Nearly everybody, it turns out. I started with a proposition to outlaw Communists and found authoritarian followers would be relatively likely to join that posse. Ditto for persecuting homosexuals, and ditto for religious cults, "radicals" and journalists the government did not like. So I tried to organize a posse that liberals would join, to go after the Ku Klux Klan. But high RWAs crowded out everyone else for that job too. Then I offered as targets the very right-wing Canadian Social Credit Party, the Confederation of Regions Party, and the mainstream Progressive Conservative Party of Canada. These were the parties of choice for most authoritarian followers at the time, yet high RWAs proved more willing to persecute even the movements they *liked* than did others.

Finally, just to take this to its ludicrous extreme, I asked for reactions to a "law to eliminate right-wing authoritarians." (I told the subjects that right-wing authoritarians are people who are so submissive to authority, so aggressive in the name of authority, and so conventional that they may pose a threat to democratic rule.) RWA scale scores did not connect as solidly with joining this posse as they had in the other cases. Surely some of the high RWAs realized that if they supported this law, they were being the very people whom the law would persecute, and the posse should therefore put itself in jail. But not all of them realized this, for authoritarian followers still favored, more than others did, a law to persecute *themselves*. You can almost hear the circuits clanking shut in their brains: "If the government says these people are dangerous, then they've got to be stopped."

One more thing. Remember when I was talking about putting President Bush on trial for authorizing torture? Look back at Items 5 and 6 in my list of acts an ardent authoritarian follower might do in support of a malevolent government. It's been clear in my studies for several decades that lots of people, with no persuading by the authorities at all, were already close to endorsing the torture and execution *of their fellow citizens* if the government simply said it was necessary. So it would be no surprise at all if they supported President Bush's insistence that America be allowed to torture suspected foreign terrorists.

High RWAs tend to feel more endangered in a *potentially* threatening situation than most people do, and often respond aggressively. In 1987 my colleague Gerry Sande and I had five-man teams of male introductory psychology students role-play NATO in an "international simulation" involving (they thought) another team of students playing as the Warsaw Pact. Some of the NATO teams were composed entirely of low RWA students, and other NATO teams were stocked entirely with highs. (We experimenters secretly played the Warsaw Pact.) The simulation began with a couple of ambiguous moves by the Warsaw Pact, such as holding military exercises earlier than anticipated, and withdrawing divisions to rear areas (*possibly* for rest, or --as Dr. Strangelove might argue--possibly for redeployment for an attack). The NATO teams could respond with nonthreatening or threatening moves of varying magnitudes. But if they made threats, the Warsaw pact responded with twice as much threat in return, and the NATO team would reap what it had sown as an escalation of aggressive moves would likely result.

The low RWA teams did not interpret the ambiguous moves at the beginning of the game as serious threats and thus seldom made threatening moves. The high RWAs on the other hand usually reacted to the opening Warsaw Pact moves aggressively, and sowed a whirlwind. Over the course of the simulation, the high RWA teams made *ten times* as much threat as the low teams did, and usually brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.<sup>19</sup>



*Caution No. 2.* Can we conclude from all these findings that authoritarian followers always aggress when they think the “proper authorities” approve? No, no more than they always submit to established authority. “Always” is a lot, and such generalizations ignore the complexity of human motivation. Fear of counter-aggression can freeze the authoritarian’s hand, or belief that the hostility is unlawful and will be punished. Nevertheless, one can easily find settings in which high RWAs’ aggressive inclinations comes bubbling to the surface.

*Conventionalism.* By conventionalism, the third defining element of the right-wing authoritarian, I don’t just mean do you put your socks on before your shoes, and I don’t just mean following the norms and customs that you like. I mean believing that *everybody* should have to follow the norms and customs that your authorities have decreed. Authoritarians get a lot of their ideas about how people ought to act from their religion, and as we’ll see in chapter 4 they tend to belong to fundamentalist religions that make it crystal clear what they consider correct and what they consider wrong. For example these churches strongly advocate a traditional family structure of father-as-head, mother as subservient to her husband and caretaker of the husband’s begotten, and kids as subservient, period. The authoritarian followers who fill a lot of the pews in these churches strongly agree. *And* they want everybody’s family to be like that. (A word of advice, guys: check with your wives first.)

Thanks to Mikhail Gorbachev (Thanks so much, Mikhail!) I can show you how thoroughly some high RWAs sop up the teachings of another set of authorities, their government. As soon as Gorbachev lifted the restraints on doing psychological research in the Soviet Union an acquaintance of mine, Andre Kamenshikov, administered a survey to students at Moscow State University with the same freedom that western researchers take for granted. The students answered the RWA scale and as well a series of questions about who was the “good guy” and who was the “bad guy” in the Cold War. For example, did the USSR start the arms race, or the USA? Would the United States launch a sneak nuclear attack on the Soviet Union if it knew

it could do so without retaliation? Would the USSR do that to the United States? Does the Soviet Union have the right to invade a neighbor who looks like it might become allied with the United States? Does the USA have that right when one of its neighbors starts cozying up to the USSR? At the same time Andre was doing his study, I asked the same questions at three different American universities.

We found that in *both* countries the high RWAs believed their government's version of the Cold War more than most people did. Their officials wore the white hats, the authoritarian followers believed, and the other guys were dirty rotten warmongers. And that's most interesting, because it means the most cock-sure belligerents in the populations on each side of the Cold War, the ones who hated and blamed each other the most, were in fact the same people, psychologically. If they had grown up on the other side of the Iron Curtain, they probably would have believed the leaders they presently despised, and despised the leaders they now trusted. They'd have been certain the side they presently thought was in the right was in the wrong, and instead embraced the beliefs they currently held in contempt.<sup>20, 21</sup>

Gidi Rubinstein similarly found that high RWAs among both Jewish and Palestinian students in Israel tended to be the most orthodox members of their religion, who tend to be among those most resistant to a peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict.<sup>22</sup> If their authorities endorse hostility, you can bet most authoritarian followers will be combative. A lot of high RWAs apparently do not think that the peacemakers will be blessed.

You can also gauge the conventionalism of authoritarian followers through my "feedback-conformity experiments." I simply tell a group who earlier had filled out a scale for me what the average response had been to each item, in the sample as a whole. For example, I would tell them that the average answer to Item 1 of the RWA scale was a "+1," the average answer to Item 2 was a "-2," and so on. Then I ask the sample to answer the scale again, with the average-answers-from-before staring them

right in the face. The point, as you have no doubt surmised, is to see which extreme moves more toward the norm, the lows or the highs. High RWAs shift their answers toward the middle about twice as much as lows do. This even works on hard-core authoritarian beliefs such as their answers about homosexuals and religious fundamentalism.

Which explains another peculiar finding. If I tell a group of former subjects most of what I've told you in this chapter--which I think raise some questions about how "Blessed are the authoritarians"--and then ask the sample what they personally would like their own RWA scale score to be, what do you think happens? The low RWAs say they'd like to be low RWAs. So do the middles. But the highs usually say they want to be *middles*, not lows. I thought this happened because highs often dislike the people who would score low on the RWA scale, and that may be part of the explanation.. But I also discovered that if you ask subjects to rank the importance of various values in life, authoritarian followers place "being normal" substantially higher than most people do. It's almost as though they want to disappear as individuals into the vast vat of Ordinaries.

*Caution No. 3.* Once again, however, I should temper our natural tendency to overgeneralize. High RWAs would like to be rich as much as the next person would, they'd like to be smarter than average, and so on. It's "good" to be different in some ways, it seems. And I found they would not change their opinions about abortion an inch by showing them how different they were from most others. They are quite capable of adhering to the beliefs emphasized by their in-groups when these conflict with what is held by society as a whole. Nevertheless, they *do* get tugged by what they think everybody else is saying and doing. For example, their attitudes toward homosexuals have become markedly more positive recently, just as the rest of society's attitudes have changed. And thirty years ago the solid majority of high RWA students in my samples said premarital sexual intercourse was flat-out immoral. Now most say it is moral if the couple plans to get married.

### *Unauthoritarians and Authoritarians: Worlds of Difference*

By now you must be developing a feel for what high RWAs think and do, and also an impression of low RWAs.<sup>23</sup> Do you think you know each group well enough to predict what they'd do if they ran the world? One night in October, 1994 I let a group of low RWA university students determine the future of the planet (you didn't know humble researchers could do this, did you!). Then the next night I gave high RWAs their kick at the can.

The setting involved a rather sophisticated simulation of the earth's future called the Global Change Game, which is played on a big map of the world by 50-70 participants who have been split into various regions such as North America, Africa, India and China. The players are divided up according to current populations, so a lot more students hunker down in India than in North America. The game was designed to raise environmental awareness,<sup>24</sup> and before the exercise begins players study up on their region's resources, prospects, and environmental issues.

Then the facilitators who service the simulation call for some member, any member of each region, to assume the role of team leader by simply standing up. Once the "Elites" in the world have risen to the task they are taken aside and given control of their region's bank account. They can use this to buy factories, hospitals, armies, and so on from the game bank, and they can travel the world making deals with other Elites. They also discover they can discretely put some of their region's wealth into their own pockets, to vie for a prize to be given out at the end of the simulation to the World's Richest Person. Then the game begins, and the world goes wherever the players take it for the next forty years which, because time flies in a simulation, takes about two and a half hours.

*The Low RWA Game*

By carefully organizing sign-up booklets, I was able to get 67 low RWA students to play the game together on October 18<sup>th</sup>. (They had no idea they had been funneled into this run of the experiment according to their RWA scale scores; indeed they had probably never heard of right-wing authoritarianism.) Seven men and three women made themselves Elites. As soon as the simulation began, the Pacific Rim Elite called for a summit on the “Island Paradise of Tasmania.” All the Elites attended and agreed to meet there again whenever big issues arose. A world-wide organization was thus immediately created by mutual consent.

Regions set to work on their individual problems. Swords were converted to ploughshares as the number of armies in the world dropped. No wars or threats of wars occurred during the simulation. [At one point the North American Elite suggested starting a war to his fellow region-aires (two women and one guy), but they told him to go fly a kite--or words to that effect.]

An hour into the game the facilitators announced a (scheduled) crisis in the earth’s ozone layer. All the Elites met in Tasmania and contributed enough money to buy new technology to replenish the ozone layer.

Other examples of international cooperation occurred, but the problems of the Third World mounted in Africa and India. Europe gave some aid but North America refused to help. Africa eventually lost 300 million people to starvation and disease, and India 100 million.

Populations had grown and by the time forty years had passed the earth held 8.7 billion people, but the players were able to provide food, health facilities, and jobs for almost all of them. They did so by demilitarizing, by making a lot of trades that benefited both parties, by developing sustainable economic programs, and because the

Elites diverted only small amounts of the treasury into their own pockets. (The North American Elite hoarded the most.)

One cannot blow off four hundred million deaths, but this was actually a highly successful run of the game, compared to most. No doubt the homogeneity of the players, in terms of their RWA scores and related attitudes, played a role. Low RWAs do not typically see the world as “Us versus Them.” They are more interested in cooperation than most people are, and they are often genuinely concerned about the environment. Within their regional groups, and in the interactions of the Elites, these first-year students would have usually found themselves “on the same page”--and writ large on that page was, “Let’s Work Together and Clean Up This Mess.” The game’s facilitators said they had never seen as much international cooperation in previous runs of the simulation. With the exception of the richest region, North America, the lows saw themselves as interdependent and all riding on the same merry-go-round.

### *The High RWA Game*

The next night 68 high RWAs showed up for their ride, just as ignorant of how they had been funneled into this run of the experiment as the low RWA students had been the night before. The game proceeded as usual. Background material was read, Elites (all males) nominated themselves, and the Elites were briefed. Then the “wedgies” started. As soon as the game began, the Elite from the Middle East announced the price of oil had just doubled. A little later the former Soviet Union (known as the Confederation of Independent States in 1994) bought a lot of armies and invaded North America. The latter had insufficient conventional forces to defend itself, and so retaliated with nuclear weapons. A nuclear holocaust ensued which killed everyone on earth--7.4 billion people--and almost all other forms of life which had the misfortune of co-habiting the same planet as a species with nukes.

When this happens in the Global Change Game, the facilitators turn out all the lights and explain what a nuclear war would produce. Then the players are given a second chance to determine the future, turning back the clock to two years before the hounds of war were loosed. The former Soviet Union however rebuilt its armies and invaded China this time, killing 400 million people. The Middle East Elite then called for a “United Nations” meeting to discuss handling future crises, but no agreements were reached.

At this point the ozone-layer crisis occurred but--perhaps because of the recent failure of the United Nations meeting--no one called for a summit. Only Europe took steps to reduce its harmful gas emissions, so the crisis got worse. Poverty was spreading unchecked in the underdeveloped regions, which could not control their population growth. Instead of dealing with the social and economic problems “back home,” Elites began jockeying among themselves for power and protection, forming military alliances to confront other budding alliances. Threats raced around the room and the Confederation of Independent States warned it was ready to start another nuclear war. Partly because their Elites had used their meager resources to buy into alliances, Africa and Asia were on the point of collapse. An Elite called for a United Nations meeting to deal with the crises--take your pick--and nobody came.

By the time forty years had passed the world was divided into armed camps threatening each other with another nuclear destruction. One billion, seven hundred thousand people had died of starvation and disease. Throw in the 400 million who died in the Soviet-China war and casualties reached 2.1 billion. Throw in the 7.4 billion who died in the nuclear holocaust, and the high RWAs managed to kill 9.5 billion people in their world--although we, like some battlefield news releases, are counting some of the corpses twice.

The authoritarian world ended in disaster for many reasons. One was likely the character of their Elites, who put more than twice as much money in their own pockets

as the low RWA Elites had. (The Middle East Elite ended up the World's Richest Man; part of his wealth came from money he had conned from Third World Elites as payment for joining his alliance.) But more importantly, the high RWAs proved incredibly ethnocentric. There they were, in a big room full of people *just like themselves*, and they all turned their backs on each other and paid attention only to their own group. They too were all reading from the same page, but writ large on their page was, "Care About Your Own; We Are NOT All In This Together."

The high RWAs also suffered because, while they say on surveys that they care about the environment, when push comes to shove they usually push and shove for the bucks. That is, they didn't care much about the long-term environmental consequences of their economic acts. For example a facilitator told Latin America that converting much of the region's forests to a single species of tree would make the ecosystem vulnerable. But the players decided to do it anyway because the tree's lumber was very profitable just then. And the highs proved quite inflexible when it came to birth control. Advised that "just letting things go" would cause the populations in underdeveloped areas to explode, the authoritarians just let things go.

Now the Global Change Game is not the world stage, university students are not world leaders, and starting a nuclear holocaust in a gymnasium is not the same thing as launching real missiles from Siberia and North Dakota. So the students' behavior on those two successive nights in 1994 provides little basis for drawing conclusions about the future of the planet. But some of what happened in this experiment rang true to me. I especially thought, "I've seen this show before" as I sat on the sidelines and watched the high RWAs create their very own October crisis.

### *Summary*

You have trudged your way through (I suspect) the most boring chapter in this book, and are entitled to some sort of reward. I hope you consider this worthy



payment: You now know that the RWA scale is a reliable, a valid, and (as these things go) a rather powerful instrument for identifying the authoritarian follower personality. That's worth knowing because most of what follows in the later chapters depends on it. The social sciences are awash with attitude scales, opinion surveys, and personality tests, and frankly most of them are not very good imho. But this one appears to be the real deal. A goodly amount of evidence has piled up showing that scores on the RWA scale really do measure tendencies toward authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. We can therefore use it to try to understand the people who seem, so unwittingly, ready to cash in democracy, and perhaps the world.

In the next chapter we'll try to figure out why high RWAs are so aggressive. Then we'll try to understand how nice, ordinary people--like some of your neighbors, some of your co-workers, and perhaps even some of your relatives--became right-wing authoritarians.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Dean, who loves words the way I love pizza, pointed out this early meaning of “right” after pinning me to the wall on how come I called this personality trait right-wing authoritarianism. I’ve always called it *right-wing* authoritarianism rather than simply authoritarianism in acknowledgment that left-wing authoritarianism also exists. An authoritarian follower submits excessively to some authorities, aggresses in their name, and insists on everyone following their rules. If these authorities are the established authorities in society, that’s right-wing authoritarianism. If one submits to authorities who want to overthrow the establishment, that’s left-wing authoritarianism, as I define things.

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<sup>2</sup> When writing for a general audience, I bandy about terms such as “conservative” and “right-wing” with the same exquisite freedom that journalists, columnists and politicians do. It’s actually very hard to define these phrases rigorously, partly because they have been used over the ages to describe such very different people and movements. But we’re all friends here, so let’s pretend I know what I am talking about when I use these words. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>3</sup> If you've heard of an inconvenient truth, I just laid a convenient *untruth* on you so we can compare apples with apples. People who answered McWilliams and Keil's survey answered each RWA scale item on a -3 to +3, seven-point basis; thus scores on the test could go from 20 to 140. The average (mean) was 72.5. When you *map* that onto the 20 to 180 scale that results from the -4 to +4, nine-point format I use, you get 90. (No, not 93.2; it's not a proportion thing because the scales don't start at 0, but at 20. However, you get an "A" in word-problems; give yourself a hug.)

Next, as we touch the statistical bases, the RWA scale had an "alpha" coefficient of .90 in McWilliams and Keil's sample. Does that mean it was the boss coefficient, the way an "alpha animal" is the leader of the pack? No. When you're talking about a personality test, you care a lot about how well the items all measure the same underlying trait, even though on the surface they seem to be talking about lots of different things. That cohesiveness is called the *internal consistency* of the test, and strong item-to-item cohesiveness makes for a good test. The "alpha" coefficient, which can go from .00 to 1.00, reflects a test's internal consistency. If a 20-item test has an alpha of .90, it is very boss, just like 90% is a pretty good grade on a test. (Or is it, these days?) (In my day, 90% was an "A" in college. And we wrote our essays on the back of a coal shovel. And our college was located in an alligator-infested swamp twenty miles away in which we died every day. And....)

Finally you should know, if you are a social scientist on the prowl for scales to throw into the pot for your next project, that I have made a pact with the devil. Hell will be the final destination of any researcher who decides to use *only part* of the RWA scale, or any of my tests, in a study. Some investigators assume they have a right to chop up somebody else's carefully developed instrument as they wish and claim they are still measuring the same thing. I have yet to see one of these fly-by-night versions that measures the "thing" as reliably, or as validly, as the scale they pillaged, and of course these "scales" all tap somewhat different things depending on which items were dropped. Some of these hare-brained modifications aren't even

balanced against response sets. All this short-weighting introduces unnecessary confusion and error in the literature.

Physicists, astronomers, chemists, and so on learned long ago that it is essential to the scientific quest to standardize measurements, but many social scientists can't seem to understand that.

Beelzebub has even agreed to my request that these people be forced to listen to badly played banjo music 24/7/365/Eternity while in hell. There will be another room nearby featuring novice bagpipe players, for editors who accept articles that used a mangled version of one of my scales. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> The Libertarian Party poll also solicited opinions on a variety of social issues and economic attitudes. RWA scale scores correlated highest with attitudes *against* same-sex marriage, abortion, drugs, pornography, women's equality, unconventional behavior and free speech, and *with* support for the Patriot Act and America's "right" to spread democracy by military force. In contrast, the relationships with economic issues (taxation, minimum wage, the public versus private sector, free trade) proved much weaker. The data thus indicate, as do a lot of other findings, that high RWAs are "social conservatives" to a much greater extent that they are "economic conservatives." [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>5</sup> If I were you, I'd be wondering how well my results, which are based mainly on my local Canadian samples, apply to the United States. I wondered that too, so I made a determined effort when I started out to repeat my studies with American samples. I almost always found the same things in Alabama and Pennsylvania and Texas and Indiana and New York and Wyoming and California that I had found in Manitoba. Once American researchers began using my measures, I could simply loll by my hearth and read what others turned up in Massachusetts and Kentucky and Michigan and Nebraska and Washington and so on. The bottom line: A strong record of replication has accumulated over time.

Still, sometimes weird things happen. For example, a Colorado Ph.D. student recently told me she found no correlation between college students' RWA scale scores, and those of their parents--whereas correlations in the .40s to .50s have appeared quite routinely in the past. And naturally other researchers do not get *exactly* the same results I do in my studies. A relationship of .45 in my study might come in at .30 in an American one, or .60. But if I have found authoritarianism correlates significantly with something in a Manitoba-based study, then a significant correlation has appeared at least 90% of the time in American-based studies that tested the same thing. (That ain't bad in the social sciences, and I think it's mainly due to experienced researchers using good measures and careful methodologies.) [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>6</sup> The Weschler Adult Intelligence Survey, probably the most widely used IQ test, has a *reliability* of about .90. So also does the RWA scale, and nearly all the other tests I have developed that are mentioned in this book. (The alpha coefficient, described in note 3, is often used as an index of reliability.) What does that ".90" mean? It tells you that the "signal to noise" performance of your test equals 9 to 1. Most of what you are getting is useful "signal," and only 10% of it is meaningless, confusing "noise" or static. In these days of high definition television you would be all over your cable company if your TV picture was 10% "snow." But the reliability of most psychological tests falls well short of .90, you'll be disheartened to learn--especially after you're denied a job because of your score on one. You can easily find journal articles that say .70 is "adequate" reliability.

P.S. We're going to have a lot of technical notes at the beginning of this chapter as I try to anticipate the questions that you might bring up--if you are the careful, critical reader everyone says you are. Eventually the sailing will get smoother. But you don't have to read these notes, which you see can be rather tedious. They won't be on the exam. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>7</sup> This isn't as big a problem with the RWA scale as it might be. Believe it or not, most people don't writh over the meaning of its statements. The items had to show they

basically meant the same thing to most people to get on the test in the first place. If a statement is terrifically ambiguous, the answers it draws will be all over the lot, connect to nothing else reliably, and explain zilcho. I know because I've written lots of crummy items over the years.

But I stubbornly plodded along until I got enough good ones. It took eight studies, run over three years, involving over 3000 subjects and 300 items to get the first version of the RWA scale in 1973. Then the scale was continually revised as better (less ambiguous, more pertinent) statements replaced weaker ones. Only two of the items you answered (Nos. 6 and 18) survive from the first version. The internal consistency of responses to the test is so high, producing its high alpha and reliability, because items that were too ambiguous fouled out of the game during all this testing. So the years spent developing the test paid off. Let's hear it for fixation. (And can you see why I get so p.o.'d when some researchers chop up my scales?).

But still, to any individual person, any item can mean something quite different from what I intend. And some people will consistently have "unusual" interpretations of the items. And the test, which was designed to measure right-wing authoritarianism in North America, will probably fall apart in markedly different cultures.

While we're on the subject of what the items on the RWA scale measure, people sometimes say "Of course conservatives (or religious conservatives) score highly on it; it's full of conservative ideas." I think this does a disservice to "conservative ideas" and to being "religious." Take Item 16: "God's laws about abortion, pornography, and marriage must be strictly followed before it is too late, and those who break them must be strongly punished." Knowing what you do about the *concept* of right-wing authoritarianism, you can pretty easily see the authoritarian submission ("God's laws...must be strictly followed"), the authoritarian aggression ("must be strongly punished"), and the run-away conventionalism in the underlying sentiment that everyone should be made to act the way someone's interpretation of

God's laws dictates. The item appears on the RWA scale *because* responses to it correlate strongly with responses to all the other items on the scale, which together tap these three defining elements of right-wing authoritarianism.

On the other hand the item, "Abortion, pornography and divorce are sins"--which you may agree reflects a *conservative* and *religious* point of view--would *not* make the cut for inclusion on the RWA scale because it does not ring the bells that identify a high RWA loudly enough. You could in fact sensibly agree with this statement and still *reject* Item 16, could you not? Item 16 isn't just about being conservative and religious. It goes way beyond that.

(My God! You're still reading this!) To put it another way, an empirical way: if you look at how responses to Item 16 correlate with the other items on the RWA scale, and then also look at how it correlates with some measure of traditional religious belief, such as the Christian Orthodoxy scale that measures acceptance of the Nicene Creed (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1982, 21, pp. 317-326), you'll find the former correlations are much stronger. Item 16 does not measure time-honored, customary religious sentiment so much as it measures right-wing authoritarianism dressed up in sanctimonious clothes. The same is true of all the other religion items on the RWA scale--most of which came onto the RWA scale relatively recently as authoritarianism in North America increasingly became expressed in religious terms. Furthermore, these items all individually correlate with the authoritarian behaviors we shall be discussing in this chapter.

Unless you think that *conservatives* (as opposed to authoritarians) are inclined to follow leaders no matter what, pitch out the Constitution, attack whomever a government targets, and so on--which I do *not* think--this too indicates that the items are not revealing conservatism, but authoritarianism. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>8</sup> The RWA scale is well-disguised. Personality tests are usually phrased in the first person (e.g., "I have strange thoughts while in the bathtub") whereas attitude surveys

typically are not (e.g., “Bath tubs should keep to ‘their place’ in a house”). So it is easy to pass off the RWA scale, a personality test, as yet another opinion survey. Most respondents think that it seeks “opinions about society” or has “something to do with morals.” [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>9</sup> For the same good reasons, it’s out of bounds to give the RWA scale to your loved ones, and unloved ones, to show them how “authoritarian they are.”

By the way, chances are you have relatively *unauthoritarian* attitudes. You see, authoritarian followers are not likely to be reading this book in the first place, especially if their leaders told them it was full of evil lies, or schluffed it off as “scientific jibberish.” (This is not exactly a book that an authoritarian leader would want his followers to read. Don’t expect it to be featured as a prime selection by the Authoritarian Book of the Month Club.) Still, the real test of how authoritarian or unauthoritarian we are comes from how we act in various situations. And that, we shall see at the end of this book, is a whole different ball game than answering a personality test.

I am, incidentally, taking a minor chance by letting you score your own personality test in this book. I conceivably could get kicked out of the American or Canadian Psychological Associations--if I belonged to them. And for good reason: people have a long history of *over-valuing* psychological test results--which I have tried to warn you about. A good example of this popped up on the internet right after John Dean’s book, *Conservatives Without Conscience*, was published. Almost immediately a thread was begun on the Daily KOS site by someone who had Googled “authoritarianism” and found (s/he *thought*) the research program summarized in Dean’s book. S/he described the theory and also placed the personality test at the heart of this program right in the posting. Tons of people immediately jumped in, talking about how low they had scored on the test, how relieved they were that they weren’t an authoritarian, and how the theory and the attitudes mentioned on the test seemed so amazingly true and reminded them of “definite authoritarians” they knew.

Trouble was, they got the wrong research program and the wrong test. People were basing their analysis on a theory and scale developed during the 1940s, which has long been discredited and abandoned by almost all of the researchers in the field. So (1) Don't pay much attention to your score on the RWA scale, and (2) Realize how easy it is to *perceive* connections that aren't really there. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>10</sup> One thing we haven't discussed is why half of the statements on the RWA scale (and any good personality test) are worded in sort of the "opposite way" such that you have to *disagree* with them to look authoritarian. The answer, it turns out, is quite important if you care about doing meaningful research with surveys or if you want to be a critical consumer of surveys. People tend to say "Yes" or "Agree" when they (1) don't understand a statement, (2) don't have an opinion, or (3) (Horror!) don't care about your survey. It's similar to what happens to me when I'm walking down the street, and an acquaintance on the other side yells something at me. If I didn't hear clearly what he said (an increasingly likely event, I confess) I'll often just smile and nod and continue on my way. Now this may prove idiotic. Maybe the person yelled, "Bob, you're walking on wet cement!" But I didn't know what he said; I assumed it was just a greeting, so I smiled and nodded and moved on. Well sometimes people just smile and nod and move on when they're answering surveys.

Political party pollsters know this, and that's why they word their surveys so that agreement will make their side look good, as in, "Do you think the governor is doing a good job?" If 50 percent of the public truly thinks so, the poll may well show 65 percent like the gov. But the trouble is, on some personality tests you can get so much smiling and nodding that people who are normal but indifferent will score abnormally high, invalidating the results. So it's wise to balance a scale so that a person has to *disagree* half the time to get a high score. Balancing doesn't stop the nodding and noodling, but meaningless agreement with the negatives cancels out the meaningless agreement with the positives and keeps the total score in the middle of the scale, where it can't do much harm.



(Beware: the last paragraph was the “fun part” of this note, so you can imagine what the rest is going to be like!) “Smiling and nodding” was at the heart of the hairy mess that early research on authoritarianism got itself into. All of the items on the first “big” authoritarian follower measure, something called the F (for Fascism) scale which came out of that 1940s research program mentioned in the previous note, were worded such that the authoritarian answer was to agree. So its scores could have been seriously affected by “yea-saying.” But other researchers said, “Maybe ‘yea-saying’ is itself part of being a compliant authoritarian follower. Let’s get some authoritarian followers and find out.” “Uh, how are we going to get them?” “Let’s use the F scale to identify them!” “But that’s what we’re trying to decide about!”

Many researchers were swamped by this dog-chases-its-own-tail whirlpool of reasoning until the mess was eventually straightened out by a carefully *balanced* version of the F scale. It showed that the original version *was* massively contaminated by response sets. These studies led to the development of the RWA scale, which was built from the ground up to control yea-saying, and studies with the RWA scale have made it clear that authoritarian followers *do* tend to agree more, in general, with statements on surveys than most people do. It is part of their generally compliant nature. It only took me about twenty years to get all this untangled, and would you believe it, some people still think fixated researchers have no fun! [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>11</sup> What is a “high RWA”? When I am writing a *scientific* report of my research I call the 25% of a sample who scored highest on the RWA scale “High RWAs” with a capital-H. Similarly I call the 25% who scored lowest “Low RWAs,” and my computer runs wondrous statistical tests comparing Highs with Lows. But in this book where I’m *describing* results, not documenting them, I’ll use “high RWAs” more loosely to simply mean the people in a study who score relatively highly on the RWA scale, and “low RWAs” will mean those who score relatively low on the test.

If I’ve made myself at all clear here, you’ll know that I am comparing *relative* differences in a sample. I am not talking about *types* of individuals, the way you might

say Aunt Barbara is *an* extrovert while Uncle Jim is *an* introvert. High and low RWAs are different from one another but not opposites. It's a matter of degree, not a hard cut, "100% versus 0%" distinction. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>12</sup> (As always, reading this note is purely voluntary and in this particular case may even be a sign of madness.) We need to talk about generalizations, don't we. All of the findings I shall be presenting in this book are generalizations-with-exceptions, which means that whatever the issue, *some* high RWAs acted the way low RWAs typically did, and *some* lows acted like highs usually did. That's the stuff that the social sciences crank out, journal article after journal article: general truths, but hardly perfect ones.

Some generalizations have so many exceptions that you wonder why they're worth the bother; a lot of gender differences, for example, turn out to be miniscule. Other generalizations have so few exceptions you can almost take them to the bank; I'll show you a connection in Chapter 6 between RWA scale scores and political party affiliation *among politicians* that will knock your socks off--if you're a social scientist (wearing socks).

If you really want to know more about this (and you certainly don't have to; this is going to take a while), let's look at the fact that tall people tend to be heavier than short people. You compute *correlations* to get a fix on how well two things, like height and weight, go together. A correlation can go from 0.00 (no connection at all) to 1.00 (a perfect association). The correlation between height and weight among North American adults comes in at about .50, which means the two are "middlin'" connected. That's important if you're wondering how big to make the jackets for tall men. So the generalization is valid, and useful, but we all know some tall, skinny people and my wife knows a "Mr. Short and Dumpy" very well.

As a generalization about generalizations, the RWA scale correlations I present in this book usually run between .40 and .60. Thus they're about as solid as the

connection between height and weight. But how good is that in absolute terms? [*Warning: the next sentence will take you back to your high school algebra class, which may trigger unconscious memories of bizarre hair-dos and “meat loaf” in the cafeteria every Thursday. Proceed at your own risk.*] Social scientists commonly *square* a correlation to get an idea of how much of the “Mystery of Thing X” you can explain by Clue Y. So if weight and height correlate .50, ( $.50 \times .50 = .25$ , or) 25 percent of the difference in people’s weight can be explained by taking into account how tall they are. That’s rather good in this business, because our weight is affected by so many other things, such as how many Big Macs you stuff into yourself, and whether you jog or crawl to the fridge to get more Haagen-Dazs. (Some psychologists, I must confess, say you don’t have to square the correlation to see how much you have explained. Instead, the simple correlation itself tells you that. Bet you wish you were reading a book written by one of them, huh?)

(Have you ever had so much fun in one note? It gets even worse.) Most relationships reported in psychology research journals can only explain about 5--10 percent of why people acted the way they did. I call those “weak”. If one thing can explain 10 to 20 percent of another’s variability (the statistical phrase is “they share 10 to 20 percent of their variance”), I call that a “moderate” connection. I call 20 to 30 percent a “sturdy” relationship, and 30 to 40 percent gets the designation “strong” in my book. Above 40% equals “very strong,” and you could call above 50% “almost unheard of” in the behavioral sciences.

This may seem quite under-achieving to you, but it’s tough figuring people out and, as Yogi Berra might put it, everybody already knows all the things that everybody already knows. Social scientists are slaving away out on the frontiers of knowledge hoping to find big connections that nobody (not even your mother) ever realized before, and that’s practically impossible. Ask your mom.

In terms of precise correlation coefficients, a correlation less than .316 is weak, .316 to .417 is moderate, .418 to .548 is sturdy, .549 to .632 is strong, .633 to .707 is very strong, and over .707 is almost unheard of. These are my own designations, and they are probably set the bar higher than most behavioral scientists do. You can easily

find researchers who call .30 “a strong correlation,” whereas I think it is weak. (I could have used labels like “hefty,” “stout,” and “a great big fat one!” But for some reason I don’t like these designations.) Back to Chapter.

<sup>13</sup> David Winters of the University of Michigan found in 2005 that the high RWAs in a large sample of university students believed the invasion of Iraq constituted a just war. They thought the danger posed by Iraq was so great, the United States had no other choice. They thought the invasion occurred only as a last resort, after all peaceful alternatives had been exhausted, and that the war would bring about more good than evil. They thought the “pre-emptive” attack for self-defense had been justified even though no weapons of mass destruction were discovered. They also rejected the suggestion that the war was conducted to control oil supplies and extend American power, or as an act of revenge. And they still believed that Saddam had been involved in the 9/11 attacks.

If you want a star-spangled example of authoritarian submission by an ordinary citizen, it would be hard to beat the sentiment of Clydeen Tomanio of Chickamauauga, Georgia, who was quoted on a CNN.com report dated September 7, 2006 as saying, “There are some people, and I’m one of them, that believe George Bush was placed where he is by the Lord. I don’t care how he governs, I will support him.”

In turn, you won’t find a better example of authoritarian submission in government than that displayed by Steven Bradbury, the Acting Assistant Attorney General in the Justice Department, on July 11, 2006. At the end of June the Supreme Court ruled that the Pentagon’s use of special military commissions to try suspected terrorists at Guantanamo Bay violated the Geneva Conventions and the United States Uniform Code of Military Justice. Bradbury appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee to explain what the administration was therefore going to do instead. Pressed by Senator Leahy of Vermont to say whether President Bush was right in his assessment of the situation, Bradbury replied, “The president is always right.” Is Bradbury wildly atypical? Investigations into the December, 2006 firing of the eight U.S. attorneys suggests that George W. Bush has placed hundreds of “true believers” in the highest levels of his administration, many of them products of Pat Robertson’s Regency University, who put loyalty to the president above all other concerns.

For a truly horrifying argument that the president *ought* to be above the law, see Professor H. Mansfield’s op-ed piece in the May 2, 2007 *Wall Street Journal*. Back to Chapter

<sup>14</sup> Lest I seem to be Yank-bashing, when some of my best friends are Americans (including I), let me add that I have obtained the same results many times in Canadian samples regarding Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms. And Sam McFarland, Vladimir Ageyev and Marina Abalakina (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1992, 63, 1004--1010) discovered "very strong" to "almost unheard of" correlations (see the end of note 12) between RWA scale scores and dislike of dissidents, rejection of a free press, and opposition to democracy in a representative poll of Soviet adults during the last days of the USSR. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>15</sup> Blass, T. (1992) "Right-Wing Authoritarianism and Role as Predictors of Attributions about Obedience to Authority." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Boston. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>16</sup> This is the third time I have referred to George W. Bush, his administration, or his supporters, and we're only half-way through chapter 1. I am running a risk, in a book I hope will have some lasting value, by anchoring it so much in the here-and-now. I'm doing so partly because the here-and-now naturally appeals to contemporary readers. But mainly I am doing it because the past six years have provided so many examples of authoritarian behavior in American government. There has never been a more obvious, appropriate, and pressing time for this discussion. The threat that authoritarians pose to American democracy has probably never been clearer. It is just a coincidence, but human affairs have provided the foremost example of how badly right-wing authoritarianism can damage the United States at the same time my work has come to an end and I am telling everyone what I've found. George W. Bush has been the most authoritarian president in my lifetime, as well as the worst. And that's *not* a coincidence. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>17</sup> High RWAs are also *slightly* more likely to "blame the victim" for misfortunes suffered. This is especially so when the victim has done something the authoritarian disapproves of (e.g., a young woman who is raped after going to a party sexily

dressed, a young man who gets beaten after leaving a bar, a woman who is killed by her husband when she leaves him, seeks a divorce and starts dating another man). But it even shows up in some situations in which the victim was utterly blameless (e.g., a family that was standing on a grate on a downtown sidewalk when an electrical transformer underneath them exploded).

Social psychologists generally think that people blame victims because it maintains belief in a just world. You see, if tragedies happen to the virtuous, and you think you are virtuous, then bad things could happen to you. It's more comforting to believe bad things usually happen to bad people--so you are safe. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>18</sup> Right-wing authoritarians are prejudiced *compared to other people*. That does not mean they think that Jews can't be trusted at all, that all Black people are naturally violent, or that every Japanese is cruel. High RWAs may, as a group, even disagree with these blatantly racist statements. However they don't disagree very much, while most people strongly or very strongly disagree. So authoritarian followers are *relatively* prejudiced, which means it would presumably take less persuasion or social pressure to get them to discriminate than it would most people. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>19</sup> Of course, what would have happened if the Warsaw Pact had been preparing an attack on NATO? Wouldn't the low RWA teams have been caught unprepared? Probably not, because the ambiguous opening moves by the Communist Bloc were not that immediately serious. But many people perceive "liberals" as being "weak on defense," too trusting of their enemies, and proven fools when dealing with potentially dangerous situations. So in 1996 I asked students to pretend they were the leader of Israel. Israel wanted to be recognized by its Arab neighbors and live in peace. But it also feared that Arab nations would destroy it if they had the chance. So Israel had the strongest armed forces in the region. One thing Israel could do, the subjects were told, that *might* open the door to peace would be to return the strategic Golan Heights to Syria. Suppose the chances of this bringing a lasting peace were only one in four. Would the subject do it? Suppose it had a 50-50 chance of working, other subjects

were asked. Would they take the chance? Suppose, a third group was told, the odds were three-to-one that Syria would prove trustworthy and a lasting peace would result. Would you surrender the Heights?

What did the low RWAs do in these various conditions? Only 37 percent said they would take the chance against 3-1 odds, but most of the lows (61 percent) facing the 50-50 situation would have given back the Golan Heights. With 3-1 odds in favor of a lasting peace, 73 percent of those lows would have made the move. Whether you think all of these foolishly high, or foolishly low, they do follow the logic of being more willing to take the chance as the odds of success increase.

What did the high RWAs say? Nothing very logical, I'm afraid. Nearly half (48 percent) said they'd return the Golan Heights if the odds for peace were 3-1 *against*. Increasing the odds for a successful outcome to 50-50 made highs *less* willing (41 percent) to make the gesture. When the odds got to 3-1 in favor of peace, 60 percent said "Go for it." The authoritarian followers thus didn't seem to pay much attention to the odds for success, and *they* proved to be the ones who'd take a foolish chance for peace in this situation. So who's the peacenik?

I ran the experiment again with a sample of parents in 1997, using just the first and third conditions. The low RWAs again showed sensitivity to the chances for success, with 37 percent willing to return the Heights if the odds for peace were 3-1 against, but 57 percent saying they would do so if the odds were 3-1 in favor. The high RWAs again proved unfathomable and bigger risk takers, with 62 percent and 63 percent returning the Heights in the two respective conditions.

Maybe high RWAs don't like Israel. But I doubt they like Syria more. Or maybe this has something to do with religious fundamentalists wanting a big war in the middle east so the End of the World can gloriously occur. But just as the data from the NATO simulation indicate high RWAs tend to make an ambiguous situation

dangerous, the Golan Heights experiment indicates that high RWAs are likely to turn a secure situation into a dangerous one. Their thinking simply baffles one at times--a topic we'll take up in chapter 3. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>20</sup> I'm not saying that the United States was the bad guy in the Cold War and the Soviet Union was the good guy. The people of Russia and other Communist-controlled European countries made it clear how evil they thought the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist dictatorships were. But in the context of this study, I think you can point out instances in which both sides invaded neighbors to control their international allegiance, lied to their own people and to the world, made disarmament proposals for public relations purposes on the world stage, and so on. And when their government did such things, the authoritarian followers in *both* countries tended to believe and support them more than others did. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>21</sup> This and a study by McFarland, Ageyev and Abalakina-Papp (see note 14) confirmed--you will please notice because it means a lot to me--what I said about *right-wing* authoritarianism at the beginning of this chapter. High RWAs in the USSR turned out to be mainly members of the Communist Party. So *psychologically* they were right-wing authoritarian followers, even though we would say they were, as Communists, extreme political and economic left wingers. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>22</sup> See Gidi Rubinstein, "Two Peoples in One Land: A Validation Study of Altemeyer's Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale in the Palestinian and Jewish Societies in Israel," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 1996, 27, 216-230.

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<sup>23</sup> People often ask me two questions when they know as much about right-wing authoritarians as I've told you so far. 1) Who scores higher, men or women? and 2) Have scores on the scale gone up or down over the decades? Virtually every study I know of has found men and women score about the same, on the average. Men probably tend to be more aggressive than women, but women are supposed to be more conventional, so it seems to even out. As for changes over time, that's rather



interesting because as I have kept on giving the test to students entering my university year after year, the successive 18 year olds' answers have seemed to reflect the mood of their times. So in the early 1970s, when the test was invented, scores were pretty low. They've never been as low since. Instead they slowly climbed up and up, peaking in the mid 1980s. Then they started dropping and have remained about half-way between the low and high extremes since 1998. By age 18 university students appear to be "carriers" of their times. [Back to chapter](#)

<sup>24</sup> I knew about the Global Change Game because one of our sons, Rob, helped develop it. It has been used from coast to coast to coast in Canada, and elsewhere, in high schools and universities, to raise environmental awareness. Rob had certainly heard of authoritarianism. (Had he experienced it in his upbringing? Never say it!) He (and other) facilitators might have guessed the independent variable I was manipulating in this experiment, especially from the conservative dress and religious emblems worn by the highly authoritarian students at their game. But the facilitators have little to do with the decisions made by each region in the Global Change Game, and certainly they had no hand in causing the blood-bath that ensued on high RWA night. [Back to chapter](#)

## Chapter 2

### The Roots of Authoritarian Aggression, and Authoritarianism Itself

I said in the Introduction that we would dig up the roots of authoritarian aggression. We're going to do that now for authoritarian *followers* (and we'll take up the hostility that roars so relentlessly from their leaders in a later chapter). After we have exposed the psychological causes of the followers' aggression here, we'll wrestle with the issue of how they became authoritarian followers in the first place.

Since followers do virtually all of the assaulting and killing in authoritarian systems--the leaders see to this most carefully--we are dealing with very serious matters here. Anyone who follows orders can become a murderer for an authoritarian regime. But authoritarian followers find it easier to bully, harass, punish, maim, torture, "eliminate," "liquidate," and "exterminate" their victims than most people do. We saw in chapter 1 that high RWAs are more likely to inflict strong electric shocks in a fake learning experiment in which they choose the punishment level, are more likely to sentence common criminals to long jail sentences, are more likely to be prejudiced, are more willing to join "posses" organized by authorities to hunt down and persecute almost any group you can think of, are more mean-spirited, and are more likely to blame victims of misfortune for the calamities that befall them. So while on the surface high RWAs can be pleasant, sociable, and friendly, they seemingly have a lot of hostility boiling away inside them that their authorities can easily unleash. Indeed, this authoritarian aggression is one of the three defining elements of right-wing authoritarianism. What causes it?

#### *A Psychoanalytic Explanation*

Several theories have tried to explain authoritarian aggression, and the Freudian one has long been the best known. I was quite seduced by its ingenuity and drama when I first heard of it. Let's see if it can seduce you.

Supposedly the future authoritarian follower was severely punished as a child by his cold, distant parents for any signs of independence or rebellion. So such urges were repressed. Instead through a reaction-formation the child became obedient, loyal, even adoring of his parents. But deep down inside he hated them. However the Freudian “deep down inside” doesn’t have a shredder or burn-basket, so ultimately the repressed hostility has to come out some way. Thus the authoritarian follower projected his hostility onto safe targets, such as groups whom the parents disliked or people who couldn’t fight back, and decided they were out to get him. That projection provided the rationalization for attacking them and, voila, you have authoritarian aggression--thanks to just about all the ego defense mechanisms in Freud’s book.

Seduced? Resistance is futile? Ready to be assimilated into the Freudian bloc? You’ll find it lonely there. You may have heard that Freud no longer rules the roost in psychology, and this explanation of authoritarian aggression reveals a big reason why. It’s basically untestable. You have no way of discovering whether it is right or wrong, because it supposedly involves deeply unconscious defense mechanisms which the defending mechanic knows nothing about and so will quite honestly deny.

If you try instead to study the “leaks” from the Freudian unconscious, such as dreams or fantasies, you get a mishmash that can be interpreted however you wish. Suppose you did a study of dreams and concluded that authoritarians greatly love their parents. “Ah ha,” the theory would say with goose bumps breaking out, “there’s that reaction-formation I told you about.” Suppose you found, on the other hand, that authoritarians seemed to hate their parents. “Ah ha,” the Freudians would remark, “Just as we said; their unconscious mind is so filled with dislike for dad and mom, it can’t be held back any more.” Suppose you found that authoritarians dream both good things and bad things about their parents. “Ah ha,” goes the explanation. “You see both repression and the true feelings are at work.”

One gets nowhere with a theory that can “predict” whatever happened, *after* it happens. Having an answer for everything may make one a great used car salesman, but it rings the death knell for a theory in science. In science, the best explanations are nailed-down-testable.

### *Bandura's Social Learning Theory of Aggression*

A more testable explanation of aggression in general has been provided by Albert Bandura of Stanford University. Bandura says that aggression occurs after two switches are thrown. First some bad feeling like anger or envy stirs up hostility. But that by itself won't lead to aggression. An angry individual who wants to attack someone may anticipate getting punched in return, or ending up in jail. Or he may have moral restraints against hurting others. So the second stage involves overcoming these restraints, setting aside these inhibitions, letting the aggression erupt and flow.

*The Instigator.* What sort of bad feelings are likely to be burning away inside high RWAs that would create an urge to attack? I looked at a lot of possibilities. Do they feel guilty about sins they have committed, and attack “sinners” to distance themselves from Satan? Do they secretly envy the jolly good times that sinners seem to be having, and attack them out of jealousy? Are they unsure God will punish the sinners--remembering the parable of the laborers in the vineyard--and so get in a few whacks in the here-and-now just to make sure sinners pay something?

Well, maybe. But please have a look at the statements below.

1. Any day now, chaos and anarchy could erupt around us. All the signs are pointing to it.
2. Our society is **not** full of immoral and degenerate groups who viciously attack decent people.  
News reports of such cases are often sensationalized and misleading.
3. If our society keeps degenerating the way it has been lately, it's liable to collapse like a rotten log and everything will be chaos.
4. If our society continues to sink into wickedness and corruption, God will destroy us someday as

surely as he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

5. We do **not** live in an increasingly dangerous world headed for anarchy.
6. Law and order still prevail in our society. The rule of reason has **not** been replaced by the law of the jungle

These items and others like them comprise the Dangerous World scale. Items 1, 3, and 4 are worded such that agreement means the person believes society is about to collapse from depravity and decadence. For Items 2, 5, and 6, *disagreement* means you think The End Is Near.

Authoritarian followers score highly on the Dangerous World scale, and it's not just because some of the items have a religious context. High RWAs are, in general, more afraid than most people are. They got a "2 for 1 Special Deal" on fear somehow. Maybe they've inherited genes that incline them to fret and tremble. Maybe not. But we do know that they were raised by their parents to be afraid of others, because both the parents and their children tell us so.

Sometimes it's all rather predictable: authoritarians' parents taught fear of homosexuals, radicals, atheists and pornographers. But they also warned their children, more than most parents did, about kidnappers, reckless drivers, bullies and drunks--bad guys who would seem to threaten everyone's children. So authoritarian followers, when growing up, probably lived in a scarier world than most kids do, with a lot more boogeymen hiding in dark places, and they're still scared as adults. For them, gay marriage is not just unthinkable on religious grounds, and unnerving because it means making the "abnormal" acceptable. It's yet one more sign that perversion is corrupting society from the inside-out, leading to total chaos. Many things, from stem cell research to right-to-die legislation, say to them, "This is the last straw; soon we'll be plunged into the abyss." So probably did, in earlier times, women's suffrage, the civil rights movement, sex education and Sunday shopping.

Thus it turns out in experiments that a person's fear of a dangerous world predicts various kinds of authoritarian aggression better than any other unpleasant feeling I have looked at. As my mentor, Brewster Smith of the University of California at Santa Cruz, said when I told him that fear set off authoritarian aggression more than anything else, "We do have to fear fear itself." And of course fear rose in the United States after 9/11. As Dave Barry put it in a column in November 2004, "Attorney General John Ashcroft has issued one of those vague, yet at the same time, unhelpful federal terrorism warnings that boil down to: 'Be afraid! Be very afraid!'"

Events like the attacks of 9/11 can drive large parts of a population to being as frightened as authoritarian followers are day after day. In calm, peaceful times as well as in genuinely dangerous ones, high RWAs feel threatened. They have agreed on the RWA scale, year after year since the 1970s, that sinfulness has brought us to the point of ruin. There's always a national crisis looming ahead. All times are troubled times that require drastic action.

Things are so bad that many high RWAs believe the world will end soon. As the year 2000 drew near, I found many authoritarian followers agreed with the statement, "The 'end times' predicted in the Bible are going to begin at the start of 2000," and "Floods, famines, wars and other disasters are occurring so often now, the world is going to end in 2000." As you know, it did not end. But I suspect this failed prediction has not changed authoritarians' beliefs one bit, and this year's floods, famines, and other disasters will clearly signal (to them) the end of this dangerous, wicked world. As the leader of a disappointed doomsday group says in the closing lines of the British review *Beyond the Fringe*, "Never mind lads. Same time tomorrow. We must get a winner someday."

*The Releaser.* What *releases* the aggressive impulse that comes from fear? What slides off the safety on the gun? This, it turns out, is a no-brainer.

How good, how moral are you, compared to other people? (You get to say what is “good” and “moral.”) As I mentioned in chapter 1, if you’re an average human being, you’ll think you’re a better than average human being. Almost everybody thinks she’s more moral than most. But high RWAs typically think they’re way, way better. They are the Holy Ones. They are the Chosen. They are the Righteous. They somehow got a *three-for-one* special on self-righteousness. And self-righteousness appears to release authoritarian aggression more than anything else.

Chronically frightened authoritarian followers, looking for someone to attack because fighting is one of the things people do when they are afraid, are particularly likely to do so when they can find a moral justification for their hostility. Despite all the things in scriptures about loving others, forgiving others, leaving punishment to God, and so on, authoritarian followers feel empowered to isolate and segregate, to humiliate, to persecute, to beat, and to kill in the middle of the night, because in their heads they can almost hear the loudspeakers announcing, “Now batting for God’s team, his designated hitter, (their name).”

Thus in the experiments done on this subject, if you know how highly people scored on the Dangerous World scale, and if you know how self-righteous they are, you can explain rather well the homophobia of authoritarian followers, their heavy-handedness in sentencing criminals, their prejudices against racial and ethnic minorities, why they are so mean-spirited toward those who have erred and suffered, and their readiness to join posses to ride down Communists, radicals, or whomever.

Why is this better than the Freudian explanation? Because you can’t predict anything with that. But once we have those fear and self-righteousness scores, we can predict rather well who, in a sample of people, will show authoritarian aggression. So we *do* have to try to control fear, not pump it up, and also appreciate the cruel contradiction that the people who feel holiest are likely to do very unholy things precisely *because* they feel holiest.

Before leaving this topic, we should also realize that fear can increase submission as well as aggression. This was illustrated by a series of studies in which I asked people to answer the RWA scale while imagining their country was undergoing some internal crisis. A violent left-wing threat featuring a general strike and urban guerrilla warfare understandably caused RWA scale scores to soar. But *so also* did violent right-wing threats, such as a military-aided coup in the halls of power, or “brownshirt” violence in the streets. Most people seem spring-loaded to become more right-wing authoritarian during crises. The only situation I found in which a crisis lowered RWA scores involved a repressive government that assaulted nonviolent protestors (which I have termed “the Gandhi trap”). Otherwise, when there’s trouble, people generally look to the authorities to fix things. And some authorities will gladly amass greater power in times of peril, whether they have any intention of fixing the problem or not.

### *The Personal Origins of Right-Wing Authoritarianism*

If we line up the usual suspects for explaining anything we do, *viz.*, our genes and our experiences, we have to wonder, “Do some people get *born* authoritarian followers?” Maybe they do. Much of the social interaction within animal species is shaped by who submits to whom, and we know from breeding experiments that one can turn out increasingly dominant, or increasingly submissive offspring by controlling who mates with whom. That’s where pit bulls came from, on the one hand, and gentle laboratory rats, on the other. For some reason, psychology students will not let us run such experiments on them. (“Uh, Patricia Knowles, you will reproduce with James Riley.”) But studies of identical and fraternal twins have produced some evidence that authoritarianism has hereditary roots.<sup>1</sup>

The more obvious expectation that our level of authoritarianism is shaped by our experiences and environment has more support, but it still may not work the way you’d suppose. We might expect parents to be the chief determiners of their children’s



attitudes. My fellow Missourian, Mark Twain, called this the “corn-pone” theory, which he got from a young slave who said, “You tell me where a man gets his corn pone, and I’ll tell you what his ‘pinions is.” And there’s no doubt most parents want their children to have the same attitudes they do, right down to answers to the RWA scale. But even though parents supply the genes and the corn pone, and have the first crack at their children’s learning, they seldom turn out carbon copies of themselves in their offspring. Are you a clone of your mother or father, attitude-wise? Well why not? What nudged you off their selected path? What will nudge (has nudged) your children, the stinkers, off *yours*? Nudge, nudge?<sup>2</sup>

If you think it’s that mortal enemy of good parenting, other people’s children, that’s a great idea but one also basically unsupported by research. University students show much greater sensitivity to their peers’ dress style (55 percent of the students in my classes now expose their belly buttons) than to the issues raised on the RWA scale. So where do young people get their notions?

Here are some items from a scale I developed to answer this question. Feel free to answer them. Only this time I am *not* looking for your opinions; instead I want to know if you have had the *experiences* described.

1. It has been my experience that things work best when fathers are the head of their families. (Do you know families where fathers are *not* the head of the family? Do things work badly in such families?)
2. The homosexuals I have known seemed to be normal, decent people, just like everybody else except for their sexual orientation. (If you don’t know any homosexuals, don’t answer. But if you do, are they like everybody else except for their sexual orientation?)
3. The people I have known who are unpatriotic and disrespectful toward authority have seemed to me to be ignorant troublemakers.
4. My parents have always known what was right for me.
5. I have found that breaking the rules can be exciting and fun at times.
6. Most of the young people I know who have taken advantage of today’s greater freedom have messed up their lives.

7. It has been my experience that physical punishment is an effective way to make people behave.
8. I have learned from my contact with lots of different kinds of people that no one group has “the truth” or knows “the right way” to live.

If a group of first-year university students tells me of their experiences in life thus far, in terms of these and other questions, I can make pretty sharp predictions of how they will score on the RWA scale.<sup>3</sup>

Why then aren't we clones of our parents? Because life has taught us many lessons besides theirs (and our parents may have taught us some they didn't intend). Some of us found authorities were wise, honest and fair. Others, like my children on occasions, found the Old Man didn't have a clue as to how to handle a “situation.” Some students have seen vice-principals abuse their power, and national leaders lie through their teeth, and read about TV evangelists who got caught in cat houses. In my own life I have met some protestors who were total jerks; but I have also met dissenters who knew far more about the issues than anyone I had met before. Maybe you broke the rules and had such a good time you broke them over and over again. But maybe you broke the rules, totaled the car, and were filled with shame and guilt.

*A General Model.* If you take the entering freshman class at some big North American public university, you can develop an explanation of the differences among them in right-wing authoritarianism by again using Bandura's social learning theory. By and large the students were probably pretty authoritarian as children, submitting to authority, learning whom to fear and dislike, and usually doing what they were supposed to do. But when adolescence struck with all its hormones, urges, and desires for autonomy, *some* of them began to have new experiences that could have shaken up their early learnings. If the experiences reinforced the parents', teachers', and clergies' teachings (e.g. that wrecked car), authoritarian attitudes would likely remain high. But if the experiences indicated the teachings were wrong (e.g. “Sex isn't bad. It's great!”), the teen is likely to become less authoritarian. (Of course, if the wrecked

car and one's first sexual encounter occur at the same moment, the lesson will be mixed. But doubtless memorable.) It's naturally easier for children from authoritarian homes to remain authoritarian, and it's easier for kids with unauthoritarian parents to become decidedly unauthoritarian. But ultimately the experiences do most of the shaping.

I have discovered in my investigations that, by and large, high RWA students had simply missed many of the experiences that might have lowered their authoritarianism. Take that first item on page 59 about fathers being the head of the family. Authoritarian followers often said they didn't know any other kind of families. And they hadn't known any unpatriotic people, nor had they broken many rules. They simply had not met many different kinds of people or done their share of wild and crazy things. Instead they had grown up in an enclosed, rather homogeneous environment--with their friends, their schools, their readings, their amusements all controlled to keep them out of harm's way and Satan's evil clutches. They had contentedly traveled around on short leashes in relatively small, tight, safe circles all their lives.

Interestingly enough, authoritarian followers show a remarkable capacity for change IF they have some of the important experiences. For example, they are far less likely to have known a homosexual (or realized an acquaintance was homosexual) than most people. But if you look at the high RWAs who do know someone gay or lesbian, they are much less hostile toward homosexuals in general than most authoritarians are. Getting to know a homosexual usually makes one more accepting of homosexuals as a group. Personal experiences can make a lot of difference, which is a truly hopeful discovery. The problem is, most right-wing authoritarians won't willingly exit their small world and try to meet a gay. They're too afraid. And "coming out" to a high RWA acquaintance might have long-term beneficial effects on him, but it would likely carry some risks for the outgoing person.<sup>4</sup>

### *A Tale of Two High School Seniors*

Let's put some faces to these general findings by talking about two extremely different cases, and then work our way to the "ordinary people" in the middle. Imagine you're standing in a hallway at your local high school just as classes are about to begin for the day. Hugh, a senior, is standing in front of his locker. Your intuition might tell you, from his clothes and quiet demeanor, that he grew up in a very "straight," traditional family that featured parental dominance and made obedience to authority a high virtue. His folks were not brutes, Freudians notwithstanding, but they taught him in hundreds of ways to be "mindful" and "respectful" of authorities, including themselves, and "dutiful" within narrow tolerances. If he stepped over the line he was punished in one way or another, and received occasional spankings when he was young.<sup>5</sup> Some kids specialize in not getting caught for breaking the rules. Hugh learned instead not to step over the line. He is what his parents want him to be--a lot like them.

Hugh's idea of what is right and wrong has been profoundly shaped by the family religion, which is Protestant and fundamentalist. His family all go to church at least once a week, usually more, and he and his friends regularly attend the church's youth group. He has heard from the earliest age, week after week in Sunday school and summer after summer in Bible camp, that the Holy Book is the revealed word of God. The people Hugh knows best say the Bible is completely true, completely without error. He dutifully reads the parts he is assigned to read, along with other sections, and finds it very meaningful. He understands that almighty God is talking *to him* then, which thrills him. He similarly feels blessed and enriched when participating in church services with his community of fellow-believers, and is deeply moved by his belief when he is praying that God is listening *to him* then.

Hugh has thus believed for most of his life that the Truth is already known, and it was not his job to discover it, but to read it, even memorize it. He had a tough time

in his biology course two years ago because it was based on the theory of evolution, which his religion says is wrong and sinful. He learned what he had to learn to get a good grade, but he refused to believe a lot of it, although he could not tell you in any detail what was wrong with it except “it simply can’t be true.” His family and friends praised Hugh for being strong and resisting a lot of “scientific fiddle-faddle.”

Hugh was taught that the world is a dangerous place, full of people who will hurt him or lead him astray. Powerful evil forces could lie in ambush anywhere. But he would be safe if he stuck with his own kind. He identifies strongly with his family, his religion, and America, which his parents often say is the greatest nation in the world. His parents may at the same time find a lot wrong with the way America is changing day by day, but they believe everyone should obey the government and honor its leaders in almost all circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

Hugh has taken a pass on nearly all the activities that might create some distance between himself and his folks. His clothes, his friends, the books and magazines he reads, his hobbies, the TV shows he watches, the movies he attends are all monitored by his parents, even though he is nearly 18 now. But “issues” seldom arise between them because Hugh would not ordinarily want to do something his parents said was wrong. Although he takes a certain amount of teasing from other students at his high school, he does not mind the short leash but rather feels reassured when he leans away a bit and feels its tug. He knows that trustworthy authority, safety and righteousness lie within his tight circle, while danger, devils, and damnation stalk without.

Hugh has seen classmates surrender to Satan, and he has learned from their experiences. That’s not going to happen to him. Still, he had some adolescent sexual adventures with one of the girls in his church group last summer, about which he feels both incredibly guilty and incredibly excited. But Hugh is a virgin and intends to remain so until he gets married, to another virgin. He may well succeed.

*Lou.* Banging her locker shut down the hall is another senior, Lou, who is one of the people Hugh believes has surrendered to Satan and who, from the way she just slammed her locker door, is going to give her teachers a hard time today. Lou comes from a family that is much more egalitarian than most. Her father has never been the absolute authority in the family castle, and her parents' goal in child rearing was not to supply copies of themselves to the next generation, but competent, independent adults who would make up their own minds about things.

Lou had to obey when she was younger. Her parents did not let her toddle into the street to play. So she too was punished, with spankings when necessary, when she crossed the line. But her parents did not view mild "rebelliousness" as a threat to their authority. Instead they understood and even felt gratified when Lou showed some spirit and independence. They basically tried to guide her with advice as she grew older, but often said, "It's up to you"--and then stood by to pick up the pieces.

Lou's parents did not teach her that authority was always right. Precious little "rendering unto Caesar" occurred around her dinner table, as her parents openly criticized the government and its leaders. By now Lou has witnessed authorities being clearly unjust, she quickly spots incompetence in teachers, unfairness in employers, and dishonesty in politicians, and she'll let you know about it. Nor does she think her parents are always right, although she loves them as much as Hugh loves his. In her own way, she has turned out to be what her parents wanted--just as Hugh did.

Rather than accept dominance and competition as givens in life, Lou was taught to value equality and cooperation. Lou's parents belong to a liberal Protestant denomination, but seldom darken a church door. The family Bible is used for recording births and deaths. Lou went to Sunday school when she was young, but she came home one day asking why God got so mad at Cain for sacrificing vegetables to him, since that's what Cain grew? And whom did Cain marry? While some parents would have scolded their child for asking such "impertinent" questions, Lou's father

told her it was good to wonder about these things, and maybe the whole story was a fairy tale. When she was 12 she began reading the Book of Revelation because a classmate told her it “proved” the world was going to end soon. She found it so absurd she couldn’t make herself finish it. At 18 she resists going on her family’s token excursions to church on Christmas and Easter. She does not believe in God, and says that the more she talks to believers, the more she thinks one should be an atheist.

Lou was not raised with well-defined in-groups, nor was she taught that “different” people were probably dangerous and evil. In fact her mother got Lou involved in various inner-city activities as a young teen so she could see how unfair life is to some. Lou has a diverse set of friends now, some of whom are almost “opposites” from one another; but she likes them all. She knows a much wider range of people than Hugh does, and sometimes, with her heart in her throat, she does new and different things just to see what they are like. She chooses her own clothes and she changes her “look” when she wants. The idea of a curfew has evaporated and her parents lie awake in a very still bed at 2 AM afraid the phone is going to ring. Lou’s virginity disappeared when she was 16, and intercourse is a regular part of her relationship with her boyfriend. She is on the pill, and her parents know it.

Unlike Hugh, Lou did not learn from her parents that Truth was in the bag, but that she’d have to figure it out for herself. If Hugh were to abandon his parents’ faith, he might be cast out from the family forever. So even if he somehow came to believe the family religion was wrong, he would likely keep his doubts strictly to himself as long as they were alive--and probably longer. If Lou were to become very different from her parents in religion--say she became a Protestant fundamentalist--her parents would definitely not like it. But they would recognize that Lou is entitled to make up her own mind, that in fact they raised her that way, so it serves them right.

If Hugh and Lou go to university next year, take intro psych, and answer the RWA scale, Hugh is going to score very highly on it, and Lou quite low.

*The “Middles”*

People can end up with extreme scores on the RWA scale in other ways. Cataclysmic events, for example, can undo everything you have learned before and throw you up on a far-away beach. But most people who end up on one extreme or the other land there because most of the influences in their life got in line and pushed in the same direction, as happened to Hugh and Lou.

Then where do the masses of moderates come from? From the masses of more moderate moms and dads, for one thing. Most parents, for example, are not as restrictive as Hugh's but also are not as white-knuckled permissive as Lou's. In-groups are identified, but less emphatically than they were in Hugh's family. On the other hand few parents deliberately jack up their children's social consciousness as Lou's did. Unconventional behaviors and strange friends from different backgrounds are accepted but not gushingly welcomed. The family religion has some importance, but it hardly dominates daily life. And so on.

On balance, the Moderates' experiences in adolescence made them less authoritarian than they had been earlier. They got into disputes with their parents, teachers, the police, and often came away feeling wronged. They spotted hypocrisy in the pews, and found that a literal interpretation of Genesis made no sense at all. They jumped with joy over the independence a driver's licence brought. They met some different people and were “broadened.”

But not everything pushed them toward Lou's end of the RWA scale. For one thing, they might have had one high RWA parent and one low. They may have played on a team run by a strict disciplinarian coach and kicked-ass up and down their schedule. They may have smoked a little of this and tried a little of that and drunk a whole lot of something else--and then smashed, crashed and burned. They may have met “someone different” who robbed them, or left them holding the bag when the cops



broke up the party. In short, their experiences generally took them away from Hugh's domain, but were not nearly as uniform as Lou's. So they ended up more in the middle, with most other people.

### *Then There's The Rest of Life*

What will happen to Hugh and Lou's high school classmates as they go through life? What will they be like when their high school holds their Five-Year Reunion?

That will depend some on if, and where, they continue their educations. Those who go to a fundamentalist Bible college featuring a church-related curriculum, taught by a church-selected faculty to a mainly High RWA student body that lives in men's dorms and women's dorms separated by a moat with alligators in it, will probably graduate about as authoritarian as they were when they went in. If, however, they go to a different kind of school, their education may well lower their authoritarianism.

I teach at the "big state university" in my province, and over the four years of an undergraduate program at the University of Manitoba students' RWA scale scores drop about 10%. Liberal arts majors drop more than that, "applied" majors such as management and nursing drop less. But the students who drop the most, no matter what they major in, are those who laid down high RWA scale scores when they first came in the front door. If Hugh goes to a big university like the one that has graciously deposited money into my bank account over the past forty years, he's likely to come out changed. Not overhauled but still, different.

High RWA parents may anticipate this and try to send their kids to "safe" colleges. They may also blame the faculty at the public university for "messing up the Jones kid so badly." But as much as some of the profs might like to take credit for it, I think the faculty usually has little to do with the 10% drop. Instead, I think when High RWA students get to a big university whose catchment area is the world, and

especially if it's located some distance from mom and dad, they simply begin to meet all kinds of new people and begin to have some of the experiences that most of their classmates had some years earlier. The drop does not come from reading Marx in Political Science or from the philosophy prof who wears his atheism as a badge. These attempts at influence can be easily dismissed by the well-inoculated high RWA student. It probably comes more from the late night bull-sessions, where you have to defend your ideas, not just silently reject the prof's, and *other* activities that take place in the dorms, I'll bet.

*Three longitudinal studies.* What happens after graduation *from university*? Over the years I have collected RWA scale scores from three different groups of Manitoba alumni. One group answered 12 years after they had first completed the scale as introductory psychology students; the second set responded 18 years after they were freshmen; and the third had to wait 27 years to repeat the thrill. What do you think I found?

If you swear by Freud, there should be only minimal change over all these intervals because Freud thought our personalities were pretty much set in stone by age six. If you believe the man on the street instead, you'll think RWA scale scores rose after college because "everybody knows people get more conservative as they get older." But if you believe the data from these three studies, you'll pay less attention to both Freud and the man in the street from now on. Many alumni did stay more or less the same; but others (usually folks, as I said above, who had been highly authoritarian as freshmen) changed substantially.<sup>7</sup> And overall RWA scale scores showed a *decrease* in all of the studies: 5% over 12 years, 9% over 18 years, and 11% over 27 years.

"But wait a minute," I hear you thinking. "Something's peculiar here, isn't it? We believe a four-year undergraduate education lowers RWA scores about 10%, and many of these alumni had gone on to graduate school. Shouldn't the final drop be something like 15%?" Yes, it *should*. You're right! So the effects of higher education

seem to have worn off some, the scores appear to have bounced back up somewhat, and the man in the street may be partly right.

What would have caused this rebound? Just getting older and wiser? Career advancement? Having a mortgage to pay off? Nope, the data say. But what about having kids? In all three studies, alumni who were parents showed much smaller drops in authoritarianism (i.e. they showed noticeable rebounds) than did those who were childless. Just getting older doesn't make you more authoritarian. The *non*-parents in the longest study showed almost a 20% drop in RWA at the age of 45, compared to what they had been at 18. But their classmates who were now raising a family and saying-all-the-things-their-mothers-and-fathers-said-which-they-SWORE-they-would-never-say-to-their-own-children were only 10% below their entering freshman level--essentially where they probably had been when they got their bachelor's degrees.<sup>8</sup> But, miracle of miracles, the parents *still* were less authoritarian, as a group, than they once had been, even though they now had (shudder) teen-aged children themselves! Who'd have thunk? Higher education matters, and its effect lasts a long, long time.

Finally, if you want to know what happens to authoritarianism after middle age, I don't think anybody knows yet. But you do seem to spend less time talking with your friends about kids and careers than you used to, and more time talking about medical procedures, good doctors, and prescription drugs.

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Support for genetic origins of things like right-wing authoritarianism increased recently when Jack and Jeanne Block of the University of California at Berkeley reported some results of a longitudinal study they ran. They found that females who became liberals as adults had shown some distinctive characteristics while in *nursery school*, compared with little girls who grew up to become conservatives. The future liberals had been talkative and dominating, expressed negative feelings openly, teased other children rather than got teased, were verbally fluent, sought to be independent, were self-assertive, attempted to transfer blame onto others, were aggressive and set high standards for themselves. Little girls who grew up to be conservatives, in turn, had been indecisive and vacillating, were easily victimized by other children, were inhibited and constricted, kept their thoughts and feelings to themselves, were shy and reserved, were anxious in an unpredictable environment, tended to yield and give in to others, were obedient, and compliant, and were immobilized by stress.

The liberal versus conservative men showed far fewer differences as children than the women had. But future liberals were resourceful, independent and proud of their accomplishments, while tomorrow's conservative men at nursery school were visibly deviant from their peers, appeared to feel unworthy, had a readiness to feel guilty, were anxious in an unpredictable environment, and tended to be suspicious and distrustful of others.

By the time children get to nursery school they bring with them not only the genes that created them but also several years of experiences at home. But a study that shows connections between such early childhood behaviors and adult attitudes--even weak ones, which were the rule in the data--has to lend weight to the genetic possibility. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>2</sup> See Circus, M. P. F., 1969, “How to Recognise Different Trees from Quite a Long Way Away.” [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>3</sup> If you want some numbers, students’ RWA scale scores correlate in the .40s to the .50s with their parents’ RWA scale scores (a “moderate” to “strong” connection), and over .70 (an “almost unheard of” relationship) with their answers to the Experiences scale. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> This is backed up by an experiment I did with my own introductory psychology classes one year. I told one class I was gay (which I am not), and another class served as a control group and received no such information. Then they both evaluated (1) me as a person, and (2) gays as a group. Compared to the control group, the class that thought I was a homosexual lowered their opinions of me a touch, but raised their opinions of gays in general. (This study came to the attention of a *New York Times* columnist who misunderstood that I actually was gay. He wrote a piece about my “coming out” to my class, and it gave my father-in-law quite a jolt the next day.)

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<sup>5</sup> The well-known cognitive scientist George Lakoff proposes in *Moral Politics* (1996, U. of Chicago Press) that conservatives and liberals think differently because they use different moral systems based upon different ideal family types. He also states (p. 110) that conservatives actually tend to come from one of these family backgrounds, and liberals from the other. Because authority plays such a pivotal role in the development of *conservative* thought in Lakoff’s analysis, one can easily imagine it might also explain right-wing authoritarians.

Conservatives, it is proposed, grew up in a family featuring “strict father morality.” Fundamentally, life was seen as difficult and the world as dangerous. Typically the father had primary “responsibility for supporting and protecting the family as well as authority to set overall family policy. He taught children right from wrong by setting strict rules for their behavior and enforcing them through punishment.

The punishment was mildly to moderately painful, commonly being corporal punishment administered with a belt or a stick. He also gained their cooperation by showing love and appreciation when they followed the rules” (p. 65).

Liberals, on the other hand, seemingly came from a “nurturant parent” family background, which featured “being cared for and cared about, having one’s desires for loving interactions met, living as happily as possible, and deriving meaning from mutual interaction and care” (p. 108). Supposedly liberals had more secure and loving attachments to their parents, which leads them to develop nurturing, empathetic social consciences.

This briefest of summaries does not do justice to Lakoff’s conceptualizations, but I am happy to report that some of what he proposes is supported by my own findings. For example the statement, “Obedience and respect for authority are the most important virtues that children should learn” appeared on the RWA scale for many years and goes back to the first attempt to measure authoritarianism during the 1940s. Similarly the reader knows from this chapter that parents of high RWA students, and high RWA students themselves tend to believe the world is a dangerous place. The story of Hugh and Lou, which is based on my own research with the RWA scale and which first appeared in my 1988 book *Enemies of Freedom*, resonates with Lakoff’s model in many places, as I’m sure you will notice.

I would point out some differences, however. First, the early childhood explanations of adult authoritarianism have always been way ahead of the data--and in some cases were trotted out in spite of the data. (See pp. 33-49 of my 1981 book, *Right-Wing Authoritarianism* for a critique of some of this literature). It now appears that adult *authoritarianism* begins to coalesce as an organized set of attitudes during adolescence, where (to be sure) it sometimes follows the furrow plowed by the parents. But it also can take off in quite a different direction depending on the child’s experiences in life.

In particular, the connection between receiving corporal punishment in childhood and becoming an authoritarian has always been a wandering stereotype searching for evidence. I have looked several times for an association between students' RWA scale scores and their accounts, or their parents' accounts, of how often they were struck when growing up. The correlations usually turned up, but were always weak. (less than .20; see pages 260-265 of *Right-Wing Authoritarianism*). In 2000 and 2001 I revisited the issue asking nearly 1000 students how they had been punished when younger. Virtually all of them (92%) reported having been struck at least once, with the average being five times. Again high RWAs tended to have received more spankings than the rest of the sample, but only modestly so. I don't know of anyone who has found even a moderate connection between childhood physical punishment and adult RWA scores. (I also would not bet the farm on a big reliable difference emerging in how securely liberals versus conservatives were attached to their parents.)

Second, some of Lakoff's explanation appears to apply (as we shall see later in this book) much more to authoritarian leaders than to authoritarian followers. His stress upon competition's being a crucial ingredient (p. 68) in the conservative outlook well describes the leaders, but authoritarian followers seldom endorse this point of view.

Third, I believe the process of becoming a high RWA, or a low one, is more complicated than Lakoff's model allows. Religion's ability to sometimes independently pump up right-wing sentiments, and higher education's ability to lower them get little play in *Moral Politics*, and the genetic possibilities are barely touched upon (pp. 134-135). Instead the focus remains on parental practice. But if you look at pages 73-74 of my 1996 book, *The Authoritarian Specter* (go ahead; I'll wait) you'll find that the correlation on the RWA scale between members of 299 pairs of same-sexed fraternal twins averaged .50. While this constitutes a sturdy relationship, far bigger than the things social scientists usually discover, it still leaves most of the individuals' personal level of authoritarianism *unexplained*. And these pairs of people were born at the same time, raised at the same time by the same parents, went to the

same schools and churches, had the same peer group, probably watched lots of TV together, and so on. (Identical twins raised together [N = 418 pairs] understandably correlated a hunkier .65 with each other.) Thus the origins of right-wing authoritarianism appear much more complicated than those advanced by the dichotomous, one-factor typology one might project from Lakoff's model.

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<sup>6</sup> See if you can top this one. My local newspaper recently carried a story about a woman in a nearby city who wrote a letter to the editor criticizing the mayor and city council. She said the present council lacked initiative and acted too often in the interest of "boys with money and toys." A few days later the pastor of the Pentecostal church she attends wrote her, saying her letter was an embarrassment because good Christians do not publicly criticize their leaders. He told her to find another church if she was not going to change her ways. (" 'Bad sheep' raises ire of pastor," *Winnipeg Free Press*, August 22, 2006, P. A6.) [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>7</sup> The correlations between the first and second set of answers to the RWA scale were .62 over 12 years, .59 over 18 years, and .57 over 27 years. Since the RWA scale sports quite a high test-retest reliability, these numbers indicate the considerable extent to which these people changed after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Roll over, Sigmund.

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<sup>8</sup> Here are two analgesics that parents can take for their aching psyches. When your kids start giving you action about what a tyrant you are, tell them you didn't believe so much in submitting to authority until they came along. And when you do something dumb and your kids find out, you can at least wrap yourself in the warm blanket of realizing you have probably made your kids less authoritarian by displaying your incompetence. I know I did. [Back to Chapter](#)



### Chapter Three

#### How Authoritarian Followers Think

If you are keeping track of my promises, as we roll along together on the Internet, I said in the Introduction that we would figure out why authoritarian followers think in the bizarre and perplexing way they so often do. The key to the puzzle springs from Chapter 2's observation that, first and foremost, followers have mainly copied the beliefs of the authorities in their lives. They have not developed and thought through their ideas as much as most people have. Thus almost anything can be found in their heads if their authorities put it there, even stuff that contradicts other stuff. A filing cabinet or a computer can store quite inconsistent notions and never lose a minute of sleep over their contradiction. Similarly a high RWA can have all sorts of illogical, self-contradictory, and widely refuted ideas rattling around in various boxes in his brain, and never notice it.

So can everybody, of course, and my wife loves to catch inconsistencies in my reasoning when we're having a friendly discussion about one of my personal failures. But research reveals that authoritarian followers drive through life under the influence of impaired thinking a lot more than most people do, exhibiting sloppy reasoning, highly compartmentalized beliefs, double standards, hypocrisy, self-blindness, a profound ethnocentrism, and--to top it all off--a ferocious dogmatism that makes it unlikely anyone could ever change their minds with evidence or logic. These seven deadly shortfalls of authoritarian thinking eminently qualify them to follow a would-be dictator. As Hitler is reported to have said, "What good fortune for those in power that people do not think."

#### *1. Illogical Thinking*

Sitting in the jury room of the Port Angeles, Washington court house in 1989, Mary Wegmann might have felt she had suddenly been transferred to a parallel

universe in some Twilight Zone story. For certain fellow-jury members seemed to have attended a different trial than the one she had just witnessed. They could not remember some pieces of evidence, they invented evidence that did not exist, and they steadily made erroneous inferences from the material that everyone could agree on. Encountering my research as she was later developing her Ph.D. dissertation project, she suspected the people who “got it wrong” had been mainly high RWAs. So she recruited a sample of adults from the Clallam County jury list, and a group of students from Peninsula College and gave them various memory and inference tests. For example, they listened to a tape of two lawyers debating a school segregation case on a *McNeil/Lehrer News Hour* program. Wegmann found High RWAs indeed had more trouble remembering details of the material they’d encountered, and they made more incorrect inferences on a reasoning test than others usually did. Overall, the authoritarians had lots of trouble simply thinking straight.

Intrigued, I gave the inferences test that Mary Wegmann had used to two large samples of students at my university. In both studies high RWAs went down in flames more than others did. They particularly had trouble figuring out that an inference or deduction was *wrong*. To illustrate, suppose they had gotten the following syllogism:

All fish live in the sea.  
Sharks live in the sea..  
Therefore, sharks are fish.

The conclusion does not follow, but high RWAs would be more likely to say the reasoning is correct than most people would. If you ask them why it seems right, they would likely tell you, “Because sharks are fish.” In other words, they thought the reasoning was sound because they agreed with the last statement. If the conclusion is right, they figure, then the reasoning must have been right. Or to put it another way, they don’t “get it” that the reasoning matters--especially on a reasoning test.

This is not only “Illogical, Captain,” as Mr. Spock would say, it’s quite dangerous, because it shows that if authoritarian followers like the conclusion, the logic involved is pretty irrelevant. The reasoning should justify the conclusion, but for a lot of high RWAs, the conclusion validates the reasoning. Such is the basis of many a prejudice, and many a Big Lie that comes to be accepted. Now one can easily overstate this finding. A lot of people have trouble with syllogistic reasoning, and high RWAs are only *slightly* more likely to make such mistakes than low RWAs are. But in general high RWAs seem to have more trouble than most people do realizing that a conclusion is false.

Deductive logic aside, authoritarians also have trouble deciding whether empirical evidence *proves*, or does not prove, something. They will often think some thoroughly ambiguous fact verifies something they already believe in. So if you tell them that archaeologists have discovered a fallen wall at ancient Jericho, they are more likely than most people to infer that this proves the Biblical story of Joshua and the horns is true--when the wall could have been knocked over by lots of other groups, or an earthquake, and be from an entirely different era (which it is).

High RWAs similarly think the fact that many religions in the world have accounts of a big flood proves that the story of Noah is true--when the accounts vary enormously, big floods hardly mean the story of the ark, etcetera also occurred, and the tale of Noah was likely adapted from an earlier Sumerian myth. They are sure that accounts of near-death experiences in which people say they traveled through a dark tunnel toward a Being of Light prove the teachings of Christianity are true--even though these stories also vary enormously, the “Being” is usually interpreted according to whom one expects to meet at death, and the vision could just be an hallucination produced by an oxygen-depleted brain.

Not only do authoritarian followers uncritically accept conclusions that support their religious beliefs, they have a problem with evidence in general. They are more

likely than most people to think that, since airplane crashes *sometimes* occur when the pilots' "biorhythms" are at a low point, this proves biorhythms affect our lives. They buy the argument that if skeptics have introduced controls against cheating in ESP experiments, and no ESP appears, that proves skepticism interferes with the ESP powers. They think that any time science cannot explain something, this proves mysterious supernatural forces are at work. True, they are less likely to believe in Bigfoot than in the Shroud of Turin. But they do not in general have a very critical outlook on anything unless the authorities in their lives have condemned it for them. Then they can be extremely critical.

You can appreciate their short-fall in critical thinking by how easily authoritarian followers get alarmed by things. When I asked a group of students if the *most* serious problem in our country today was the drug problem and the crime it causes, a solid majority of the high RWAs said yes.<sup>1</sup> When I asked another group if the destruction of the family was our most serious problem, the great majority of authoritarians in that group said it was. When I asked a third group if our most serious problem was the loss of religion and commitment to God, a solid majority of those authoritarians said yes. And a solid majority of the high RWAs in a fourth group agreed the destruction of the environment was our biggest problem. We've apparently got a truck load of "biggest" problems.

It's much harder to catch low RWAs doing this sort of thing. When someone says one of their favorite issues is our biggest problem (e.g. the destruction of individual freedom, or poverty), they seem to ask themselves, "Is it?"--whereas authoritarian followers usually respond, "It is!" So what happens when a demagogue asserts "The Jews are our biggest problem" (or feminists or the liberal press or the United Nations or Iraq--you name it)? Are high RWAs likely to make an independent, thoughtful evaluation of that statement? Or are they going to get riled up and demand repression or censorship or a war? "Yes sir, we've got trouble, right here in River City, Trouble, with a capital T and that rhymes with P and that stands for pool!"<sup>2</sup>

The lack of independent, critical thinking goes back some ways in the authoritarian's life. Here's a question I asked a large sample of university students.

"Almost everybody believes in God when they are children, and polls show the vast majority of adults continue to believe in God--although a distinct minority does not. It turns out that almost everyone goes through a period of *questioning* the existence of God, usually during their teen years. "Does God really exist?" we ask ourselves. It is obviously a very important question. If you ever began to question the existence of the traditional God, to wonder--because of things that happened or doubts that arose in your mind--if this God really exists, *HOW did you decide?* Below are ten things that people *might* do in this situation to help them make of their minds.

I talked it over with friends and acquaintances who believed in God.

I read books by atheists or agnostics to see what their arguments were.

I brought my questions to a religious authority, such as a minister, priest or rabbi.

I talked with my parents, asking for their help in figuring things out.

I talked with people who had decided God did not exist, or who had big doubts about it.

I prayed for enlightenment and guidance.

I studied up on scientific findings that would challenge the traditional account of God, creation, etc.

I read scriptures, or other religious books, believing they would contain the answers to my questions.

I purposely read books, plays, etc. that went against my family's religious beliefs.

I made a determined effort to figure it out for myself, not going to anyone else nor seeking any new information.

Which one of these did you do *the most* to reach your decision?

What else did you do, *more than anything else except* the answer you just gave?

Did you do something else besides these two? If so, what?

(If you never questioned the existence of God, then skip these questions.)"

Interestingly, virtually everyone said she had questioned the existence of God at some time in her life. What did the authoritarian students do when this question arose? Most of all, they prayed for enlightenment. Secondly, they talked to their friends who believed in God. Or they talked with their parents. Or they read scriptures. In other words, they seldom made a two-sided search of the issue. Basically they seem to have been seeking *reassurance* about the Divinity, not pro- and con- arguments about its existence-- probably because they were terrified of the implications if there is no God.

Did low RWA students correspondingly immerse themselves in the atheist point of view? No. Instead they overwhelmingly said they had tried to figure things out for themselves. Yes they talked with nonbelievers and studied up on scientific findings that challenged traditional beliefs. But they also discussed things with friends who believed in God and they talked with their parents (almost all of whom believed in God). They exposed themselves to both yea and nay arguments, and then made up their minds--which often left them theists. In contrast, High RWAs didn't take a chance on a two-sided search.

## *2. Highly Compartmentalized Minds*

As I said earlier, authoritarians' ideas are poorly integrated with one another. It's as if each idea is stored in a file that can be called up and used when the authoritarian wishes, even though another of his ideas--stored in a different file--basically contradicts it. We all have some inconsistencies in our thinking, but authoritarians can stupify you with the inconsistency of their ideas. Thus they may say they are proud to live in a country that guarantees freedom of speech, but another file holds, "My country, love it or leave it." The ideas were copied from trusted sources, often as sayings, but the authoritarian has never "merged files" to see how well they all fit together.

It's easy to find authoritarians endorsing inconsistent ideas. Just present slogans and appeals to homey values, and then present slogans and bromides that invoke opposite values. The yea-saying authoritarian follower is likely to agree with all of them. Thus I asked both students and their parents to respond to, "When it comes to love, men and women with opposite points of view are attracted to each other." Soon afterwards, in the same booklet, I pitched "Birds of a feather flock together when it comes to love." High RWAs typically agreed with *both* statements, even though they responded to the two items within a minute of each other.

But that's the point: they don't seem to scan for self-consistency as much as most people do. Similarly they tended to agree with "A government should allow total freedom of expression, even if it threatens law and order" and "A government should only allow freedom of expression so long as it does not threaten law and order." And "Parents should first of all be gentle and tender with their children," and "Parents should first of all be firm and uncompromising with their children; spare the rod and spoil the child."

### *3. Double Standards*

When your ideas live independent lives from one another it is pretty easy to use double standards in your judgments. You simply call up the idea that will justify (afterwards) what you've decided to do. High RWAs seem to get up in the morning and gulp down a whole jar of "Rationalization Pills." Here is a "Trials" case I have used many times in my research, except only half of the sample gets this version.

Imagine that you are the judge presiding over the trial of Mr. William Langley. Mr. Langley is a 44-year old civil servant who is also the founder and president of a local chapter of Canadians for Gay Rights, a noted pro-homosexual organization. Last spring Mr. Langley was leading a demonstration on the steps of a provincial legislature, supporting Bill 38--a proposed law that would redefine marriage and allow homosexuals to be legally married across Canada. A crowd of approximately 100, mainly

members of Mr. Langley's organization, had gathered around his speaker's stand. A large banner that read, "GAY POWER" was tied between two columns immediately behind Mr. Langley, and some of his supporters were passing out literature to adults passing by.

About half an hour after the rally began, a group of about 30 counter-demonstrators appeared and began walking slowly and silently around the outside of Mr. Langley's audience. They carried signs which read, "THE FAMILY IS SACRED" and "MARRIAGE IS BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN." At first Mr. Langley did not seem to notice the counter-demonstrators, but when he did he stopped his speech and, according to several witnesses, said, "There are some of the people who are trying to keep this bill from passing. I say we run them out of here right now. Let's show everybody we mean business."

Upon hearing this, many members of Mr. Langley's audience turned on the counter-demonstrators and began physically to attack them. By the time the police restored order, many of the counter-demonstrators had been injured and one person had to be taken to hospital for overnight observation.

A jury has found Mr. Langley guilty of inciting a riot. He may be sentenced to from 0 to 18 months in jail, with parole possible after 1/3 of the sentence has been served. To how many months in jail you would sentence Mr. Langley?

The other half of the sample gets a mirror-image version of the case. Mr. Langley headed "Canadians Against Perversion" and he was addressing a demonstration opposed to legalizing marriage between homosexuals. The banner behind him read, "The Family is Sacred." When 30 counter-demonstrators appeared carrying signs which read, "Gay Power" and "Rights for Gays," Mr. Langley directed his supporters to attack them, with the same results. He was found guilty of inciting a riot, and the subject was asked what sentence, up to 18 months, he would impose.

When you look at the sentences low RWA subjects imposed on the gay Mr. Langley and the sentences other low RWAs imposed on the anti-gay Mr. Langley, you find no difference. Lows typically punish the crime, not the person. But among high



RWAs, Mr. Langley's beliefs make a large difference. The gay Mr. Langley always gets a stiffer jail term than the anti-gay Mr. Langley. Highs think the attack led by the former was more serious than that led by the latter. But the attacks were identical, so that amounts to pure rationalization. Highs simply have a big fat double standard about homosexuals and punish the person as well as the crime. A jury composed of high RWAs would hardly administer "blind justice."

I have found many other instances in which authoritarian followers show a double standard in their judgments of people's behavior or the rightness of various causes. For example they will punish a panhandler who starts a fight with an accountant more than an accountant who (in the same situation) starts a fight with a panhandler. They will punish a prisoner in jail who beats up another prisoner more than they will punish a police officer who beats up that second prisoner. (Remember when I said in chapter 1 that high RWAs will go easy on authorities, and on a person who attacks someone the authoritarian wants to attack?) On the other hand I have found it difficult to catch low RWAs using double standards. In all the cases above they seem to operate by principles which they apply in even-handed ways.

#### *4. Hypocrisy*

You can also, unfortunately, find a considerable amount of hypocrisy in high RWAs' behavior. For example, the leaders of authoritarian movements sometimes accuse their opponents of being anti-democratic and anti-free speech when the latter protest against various books, movies, speakers, teachers and so on. They say leftists impose restrictions for "political correctness." I know some who would. So I wondered if ardent liberals' desire to censor ideas they disliked was as strong, or stronger, than that of right-wing authoritarians. I asked two large samples of parents of university students to give an opinion in the following twelve cases.

Should a university professor be allowed to teach an anthropology course in which he argues that men are naturally superior to women, so women should resign themselves to inferior roles in our society?

Should a book be assigned in a Grade 12 English course that presents homosexual relationships in a positive light?

Should books be allowed to be sold that attack “being patriotic” and “being religious”?

Should a racist speaker be allowed to give a public talk preaching his views?

Should someone be allowed to teach a Grade 10 sex education course who strongly believes that all premarital sex is a sin?

Should commercials for “telephone sex” be allowed to be shown after 11 PM on television?

Should a professor who has argued in the past that black people are less intelligent than white people be given a research grant to continue studies of this issue?

Should a book be allowed to be published that argues the Holocaust never occurred, but was made up by Jews to create sympathy for their cause?

Should sexually explicit material that describes intercourse through words and medical diagrams be used in sex education classes in Grade 10?

Should a university professor be allowed to teach a philosophy course in which he tries to convince his students there is no God?

Should an openly white supremacist movie such as “The Birth of a Nation” (which glorifies the Ku Klux Klan) be shown in a Grade 12 social studies class?

Should “Pro-Choice” counselors and abortion clinics be allowed to advertise their services in public health clinics if “Pro-Life” counselors can?

I hope you’ll agree that half of the situations would particularly alarm liberals, and the other half would raise the hackles on right-wingers. Would low RWAs want to censor the things they thought dangerous as much as high RWAs would in their areas of concern? It turned out to be “no contest,” because in both studies authoritarian followers wanted to impose more censorship in *all* of these cases--save the one involving the sex education teacher who strongly believed all premarital sex was a sin. How can this be?

It happened because the lows seldom wanted to censor anyone. They apparently believe in freedom of speech, even when they detest the speech. Some low RWAs may insist on political correctness, but the great majority seemingly do not. Authoritarians on the other hand, spring-loaded for hostility, seem all wound up to clamp right down on lots and lots of people. So when authoritarians reproach other people who call for censorship, the reproach may be justified. But a lot of windows probably got broken in the authoritarians' own houses when they flung that stone.<sup>3</sup>

### *5. Blindness To Themselves*

If you ask people how much integrity they personally have, guess who pat themselves most on the back by claiming they have more than anyone else. This one is easy if you remember the findings on self-righteousness from the last chapter: high RWAs think they had lots more integrity than others do. Similarly when I asked students to write down, anonymously, their biggest faults, right-wing authoritarians wrote down fewer than others did, mainly because a lot of them said they had *no* big faults. When I asked students if there was anything they were reluctant to admit about themselves to themselves, high RWAs led everyone else in saying, no, they were completely honest with themselves.

Now people who abound in integrity, who have no faults, and who are completely honest with themselves would seem ready for canonization. But we can wonder if it is really true in the case of authoritarian followers, given what else we know about them. So I have done a simple little experiment in my classes on several occasions in which I give some students higher marks on an objective test--supposedly through a clerical error--than they know they earned. High RWAs, for all their posturing about being better than others, are just as likely to take the grade and run as everyone else. But I 'spect they forget such misdeeds pretty quickly. Self-righteousness comes easily if you can tuck your failings away in boxes and put them at the back of the shelf.

In fact, despite their own belief that they are quite honest with themselves, authoritarians tend to be highly defensive, and run away from unpleasant truths about themselves *more* than most people do. Thus I once gave several classes of students, who had filled out a booklet of surveys for me, personal feedback about how they had done on a measure of self-esteem. Half the students were told they had scored quite high in self-esteem, and the other half were told they had scored quite low. (These scores were assigned at random, which I confessed to them at the end of the experiment.) I then told them these self-esteem scores predicted later success in life, and I would bring copies of the evidence supporting the scale's validity to the next class meeting for all the students who wanted to see the evidence.

High RWAs were quite interested in finding out the test was valid IF they thought they had done well on the scale. But if they had been told they had low self-esteem, most right-wing authoritarians did not want to see evidence that the test was valid. Well, wouldn't everyone do this? No. Most low RWA students wanted to see the evidence whether they had gotten good news, OR bad news about themselves.

What do you think would happen if someone gave right-wing authoritarians a list of all the things that research has found high RWAs are likely to do--such as be prejudiced and conformist and supportive of government injustices? The respondents are simply asked, for each characteristic, "How true do you think this is of you, compared with most other people?" (Are you more prejudiced? Are you more of a conformist? Etcetera.)

High RWAs show little self-awareness when making these comparisons. Sometimes they glimpse themselves through a glass, darkly. For example they agree more than most people do with, "I like to associate with people who have the same beliefs and opinions I do." But they have no idea *how much* they differ from others in that way. And most of the time they get it quite wrong, thinking they are not different from others, and even that they are different in the opposite way from how

they actually are. For example they are sure they are *less* self-righteous than most people are--which of course is what self-righteous people would think, isn't it? And when I give feedback lectures to classes about my studies and describe right-wing authoritarians, it turns out the high RWAs in the room almost always think I am talking about someone else.<sup>4</sup>

## 6. A Profound Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism means dividing the world up into in-groups and out-groups, and it's something people do quite automatically. You can see this by how easily we identify with the point of view of a storyteller. If we're watching a cavalry & Indians movie, told from the point of view of the cavalry, that's whom we cheer on. If we're watching the same kind of movie, only from the aboriginal point of view, as in *Little Big Man* or *Dances with Wolves*, we root for the Indians, don't we?

As natural as this is, authoritarians see the world more sharply in terms of their in-groups and their out-groups than most people do. They are so ethnocentric that you find them making statements such as, "If you're not with us, then you're against us." There's no neutral in the highly ethnocentric mind. This dizzying "Us versus Everyone Else" outlook usually develops from traveling in those "tight circles" we talked about in the last chapter, and whirling round in those circles reinforces the ethnocentrism as the authoritarian follower uses his friends to validate his opinions.

Most of us associate with people who agree with us on many issues. Birds of a feather do, empirically, tend to flock together. But this is especially important to authoritarians, who have not usually thought things out, explored possibilities, considered alternate points of view, and so on, but acquired their beliefs from the authorities in their lives. They then *maintain* their beliefs against new threats by seeking out those authorities, and by rubbing elbows as much as possible with people who have the same beliefs.

As a path to truth, this amounts to skipping on quicksand. It essentially boils down to, “I know I’m right because the people who agree with me say I am.” But that *works* for authoritarians. And it has lots of consequences. For example, this selective exposure is probably one of the reasons high RWAs do not realize how prejudiced they are “compared with most people.” If you spend a lot of time around rather prejudiced people, you can easily think your own prejudices are normal.

Because authoritarians depend so much on their in-group to support their beliefs (whereas other people depend more on independent evidence and logic), high RWAs place a high premium on group loyalty and cohesiveness. Consider the following statements:

For any group to succeed, all its members have to give it their complete loyalty.

If you belong to a club or some other identifiable group, you should always be a faithful member of that group.

Working side by side for a group goal and “sticking together” come what may are among the best things in life.

There is nothing lower than a person who betrays his group or stirs up disagreement within it.

If we become truly united, acting with one mind on all issues, there is no difficulty we could not overcome.

A person should stick with those who think the way he does, and work together for their common beliefs.

Authoritarian followers usually agree with these notions more than most people do. Similarly they *disagree* more than most with these ideas:

People can easily lose their individuality in groups that stress being “a good, loyal member.”

Lots and lots of “group loyalty” is bad for the individual and bad for the group.

It would be very dangerous if everyone had the same ideas and beliefs about life.

Members of a family do NOT have to be loyal to each other, no matter what.

Just because you work for a company, you do NOT have to feel “team spirit” with your co-workers.

The worst thing in the world would be for us to all start acting together “with one mind” about something.

Authoritarian followers want to belong, and being part of their in-group means a lot to them. Loyalty to that group ranks among the highest virtues, and members of the group who question its leaders or beliefs can quickly be seen as traitors. Can you also sense from these items the energy, the commitment, the submission, and the zeal that authoritarian followers are ready to give to their in-groups, and the satisfaction they would get from being a part of a vast, powerful movement in which everyone thought the same way? The common metaphor for authoritarian followers is a herd of sheep, but it may be more accurate to think of them as a column of army ants on the march.

The ethnocentrism of high RWAs makes them quite vulnerable to unscrupulous manipulators. Suppose your city is electing a new mayor and the big issue becomes how to handle urban crime. Suppose further that a poll shows the citizens of your fair burg strongly favor a “tough, law and order” approach to the problem. After the poll is released, one of the candidates steps forward and fearlessly endorses a “tough, law and order” approach to crime. Can you trust him? I’d say there’s room for doubt, since he might simply be saying whatever will get the most votes. It would be more convincing, wouldn’t it, if he came out for law and order after polls showed only half the voters favored that course, while the other half wanted a “community development” approach aimed at eliminating the causes of crime.

You’ve probably already figured out that high RWAs generally *do* favor a tough law and order approach to crime. And you know what? If somebody comes out for that during an election, but only *after* polls show this is a popular stand, authoritarian followers still believe him. It doesn’t matter whether the candidate really believes it, or might just be saying it to get elected. High RWAs tend to ignore the many devious reasons why someone might lie and say something they find agreeable. They’re just glad to have another person agree with them. It goes back to their relying on social support to maintain their ideas, because that’s really all they’ve got besides their authorities (and one “last stand” defense to be discussed soon).

Well, aren't most people likely to trust someone who seems to agree with them? Probably, but people differ enormously in gullibility. Low RWAs are downright suspicious of someone who agrees with them when they can see ulterior motives might be at work. They pay attention to the circumstances in which the other fellow is operating. But authoritarians do not, when they like the message.

So (to foreshadow later chapters a little) suppose you are a completely unethical, dishonest, power-hungry, dirt-bag, scum-bucket politician who will say whatever he has to say to get elected. (I apologize for putting you in this role, but it will only last for one more sentence.) Whom are you going to try to lead, high RWAs or low RWAs? Isn't it obvious? The easy-sell high RWAs will open up their arms and wallets to you if you just sing their song, however poor your credibility. Those crabby low RWAs, on the other hand, will eye you warily when your credibility is suspect *because* you sing their song? *So the scum-bucket politicians will usually head for the right-wing authoritarians*, because the RWAs hunger for social endorsement of their beliefs so much they're apt to trust anyone who tells them they're right. Heck, Adolf Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany running on a law-and-order platform just a few years after he tried to overthrow the government through an armed insurrection.

You sometimes hear that paranoia runs at a gallop in "right-wingers". But maybe you can see how that's an oversimplification. Authoritarian followers *are* highly suspicious of their many out-groups; but they are credulous to the point of self-delusion when it comes to their in-groups. So (in another experiment I ran) subjects were told a Christian Crusade was coming to town led by a TV evangelist. The evangelist (the subjects were further told), knowing that people would give more money at the end of the evening if he gave them the kind of service they liked, asked around to see what that might be. Finding out that folks in your city liked a "personal testimonial" crusade, he gave them one featuring his own emotional testimonial to Jesus' saving grace. How sincere do you think he was? Most subjects had their doubts, given the circumstances. But High RWAs almost always trusted him.



The need for social reinforcement runs so deeply in authoritarians, they will believe someone who says what they want to hear even if you tell them they should *not*. I have several times asked students or parents to judge the sincerity of a university student who wrote arguments either condemning, or supporting, homosexuals. But some subjects were told the student had been *assigned* to condemn (or support) homosexuals as part of a philosophy test to see how well the student could make up arguments for anything, on the spot. Other subjects were told the student could *choose* to write on either side of the issue, and had chosen to make the case she did.

Obviously, you can't tell anything about the real opinions of someone who was assigned the point of view of her essay. But high RWAs believed that the *anti-homosexual* essay that a student was *forced* to write reflected that student's personal views almost as much as when a student had chosen this point of view. In other words, as in the previous experiments, the authoritarians ignored the circumstances and believed the student really meant what she had been assigned to say--when they liked what she said.

You've got to feel some sympathy for authoritarian followers at this point, don't you, because they get nailed coming and going. First of all, they rely on the authorities in their lives to provide their opinions. Usually they don't care much what the evidence or the logic for a position is, so they run a considerable chance of being wrong. Then once they have "their" ideas, someone who comes along and says what authoritarian followers want to hear becomes trustworthy. High RWAs largely ignore the reasons why someone might have ulterior motives for saying what they want to hear; it's enough for them that another person indicates they are right. Welcome to the In-group! As Gilbert and Sullivan put it in *The Mikado*, "And I am right and you are right and everything is quite correct."

But everything is not correct, for the authoritarian follower makes himself vulnerable to malevolent manipulation by chucking out critical thinking and prudence

as the price for maintaining his beliefs. He's an "easy mark," custom-built to be snookered. And the very last thing an authoritarian leader wants is for his followers to start using their heads, to start thinking critically and independently about things.<sup>5</sup>

### *7. Dogmatism: The Authoritarian's Last Ditch Defense*

But the leaders don't have to worry, because their followers are also quite dogmatic. By dogmatism I mean relatively unchangeable, unjustified certainty. And I'm certain that is right, beyond a doubt. So that establishes how dogmatic I am. If you want a hint as to how dogmatic you are, simply answer the items below--completely ignoring the fact that if you strongly agree with them it means you are a rigid, dogmatic, and totally bad, bad, bad person--and you get no dessert.

The things I believe in are so completely true, I could never doubt them.

My opinions and beliefs fit together perfectly to make a crystal-clear "picture" of things.

There are no discoveries or facts that could possibly make me change my mind about the things that matter most in life.

I am absolutely certain that my ideas about the fundamental issues in life are correct.

These statements are from a survey I call the DOG scale, and as usual there are some items that you'll have to strongly *disagree* with to look awful. Such as:

There are so many things we have not discovered yet, nobody should be absolutely certain his beliefs are right.

It is best to be open to all possibilities, and ready to reevaluate all your beliefs.

Flexibility is a real virtue in thinking, since you may well be wrong.

I am a long way from reaching final conclusions about the central issues in life.

Guess who tend to strongly agree with the first set of items, and strongly disagree with the second set. Yep, high RWAs. Which, all kidding aside, suggests they have a dogmatic streak in them a mile wide and a hundred denials deep.

It's easy to see why authoritarian followers would be dogmatic, isn't it? When you haven't figured out your beliefs, but instead absorbed them from other people, you're really in no position to defend them from attack. Simply put, *you don't know* why the things you believe are true. Somebody else decided they were, and you're taking their word for it. So what do you do when challenged?

Well first of all you avoid challenges by sticking with your own kind as much as possible, because they're hardly likely to ask pointed questions about your beliefs. But if you meet someone who does, you'll probably defend your ideas as best you can, parrying thrusts with whatever answers your authorities have pre-loaded into your head. If these defenses crumble, you may go back to the trusted sources. They probably don't have to give you a convincing refutation of the anxiety-producing argument that breached your defenses, just the assurance that you nonetheless are right. But if the arguments against you become overwhelming and persistent, you either concede the point--which may put the whole lot at risk--or you simply insist you are right and walk away, clutching your beliefs more tightly than ever.

That's what authoritarian followers tend to do. And let's face it, it's an awfully easy stand to take. You have to know a lot nowadays to stake out an intelligent, defensible position on many issues. But you don't have to know anything to insist you're right, no matter what. Dogmatism is by far the best fall-back defense, the most impregnable castle, that ignorance can find. It's also a dead give-away that the person doesn't know why he believes what he believes.

To illustrate, evidence has been slowly mounting over the years that sexual orientation is, to some extent, biologically determined. Particular genes may have a say, events in the prenatal environment may play a role, and so on. The upshot is that people *may* have about as much control over which gender attracts them as they do over their eye color. I present this evidence in my introductory psychology classes

when we are discussing prenatal development, and sometimes I run a little study to see if the findings have had any effect on people's attitudes toward homosexuals.

Some of my students do become more accepting, and people in general say such biological findings have led them to feel more positive toward homosexuals. But High RWAs seldom move an inch. When I ask them why, they typically say they still believe homosexuals have chosen to be homosexuals, and if homosexuals wanted to they could become heterosexual. The evidence of any biological determination simply bounces off their hardened position. You might as well talk to a brick wall. Thus authoritarian followers may really mean it when they say no discoveries or facts could change their beliefs about the important things in life.<sup>6</sup>

You can often find elements of dogmatism in religion. Thus I have asked people who believe in the traditional God, "What would be required, what would have to happen, for you to not believe in the traditional Judeo-Christian God? That is, are there conceivable events, or evidence, that would lead you to not believe? Virtually all right-wing authoritarians say there simply is nothing that could change their minds.

Here's another example. I have often asked students and parents how they would react if an archaeological discovery revealed that most of the Gospels came from an earlier Greek myth. *Suppose* a parchment were discovered that clearly predated the time of Jesus, but it contained almost all of the New Testament accounts of his teachings and his life, including the crucifixion and resurrection. Only the central character is someone named Attis who lived in Asia Minor after being born of a virgin and a Zeus-like god. The parchment is inspected and tested by scientists and declared to be genuine and from an era before Jesus' time. Scholars eventually conclude that the long forgotten myth of Attis was adapted and embellished by a group of Jewish reformers during the Roman occupation of Palestine, and there never was a Jesus of Nazareth.

I remind my subjects that the whole story is made-up. But IF this all actually happened, I ask them, what effect would it have on their beliefs in Jesus' divinity? Most Christians acknowledge that they would have to qualify their belief. They seldom say their faith would disappear, but they confess they would be less certain than they had been before. But the great majority of high RWA Christians do not budge at all. They say their belief in Jesus is based on personal experience and could never be affected by such a discovery. Others say, "I know it would be a test by God to see if I would remain true." Others respond, "This would just be one of Satan's tricks."<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps one should admire such conviction. One person's dogmatism is another person's steadfast commitment. But if authoritarian followers *are* mistaken about something, will they ever realize it? Not likely, for they appear to have been inoculated against catching the truth when they are wrong.

Before I close this chapter I want to remind us that none of the shortcomings we have discussed is some mysterious illness that only afflicts high RWAs. They just have extra portions of quite common human frailties. The difference in their inability to discover a conclusion is false, in the inconsistency of their ideas, in their use of double standards, and so on are all *relative*, not absolute. Almost everyone rationalizes, thinks he's superior, etcetera. When high RWAs condemn "political correctness" and we say they are "kettles calling the pot black," we should bear in mind the darkness of our own kettle.

### *A Little Application*

That said, let's take what we have learned in this chapter about how authoritarian followers think and see if it explains what otherwise might seem quite baffling. Beginning in late 2001, the Bush administration stated that Saddam Hussein was a source of terrorist activities around the world, and frequently implied he was

involved in the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, even though nearly all the attackers had come from Saudi Arabia, and none had come from Iraq. The administration also said Saddam had weapons of mass destruction, even though United Nations inspectors had never found any, so an invasion of Iraq was necessary. A choir of “theocons” seconded this “neocon” outlook with the argument, however implausible, that it was *highly moral* to start a war with Iraq. In fact, it was God’s will.<sup>8</sup>

The polls showed most Americans supported the president, although a significant minority did not. Besides observing that no terrorist connections had been demonstrated, and no “WMDs” or facilities for making them had been discovered, critics said an invasion would make it easier for Muslim fanatics to launch suicide attacks on Americans, and would probably tie down America’s mobile armed forces for years to come because civil war was likely to develop after Saddam’s removal. They also observed that the war would seem not only unjustified to most Muslims, but totally unfair given America’s greatly superior military forces. An American/British slam-dunk victory would probably create so much hatred for those countries in Islam that the number of zealots plotting terrorist attacks against them would probably *increase* rather than decrease as a result of the war. It *would* prove a monumental step in the war against terror--but backwards.

The critics were castigated by administration officials and their backers with a vehemence not seen since the anti-Vietnam war protests. Those who urged caution were denounced, even as late as the fall of 2006, as traitors, fools, and idiots by officials and supporters who will likely never admit that the critics were proved right. For after the successful military invasion of Iraq, no pre-existing ties to al-Qaida were discovered and no weapons of mass destruction were found. Some Americans then realized their country had invaded another country on false premises--which would seem to be very wrong morally, and which would have outraged many supporters of the war had certain other countries done such a thing. But several months after the administration itself conceded that no weapons of mass destruction had been

discovered, pollsters found a lot of Americans believed such weapons *had been found*.<sup>9</sup> And for these believers and others the new justification for the invasion, viz., to remove Saddam and bring freedom to Iraq, to make it a shining example in the Middle East of what democracy will bring, was good enough anyway.

But as American casualties steadily mounted after the war was declared over, and as chaos descended upon Iraq, and as the Bush administration had no response other than, “We know this is the right thing to do, no matter what,” and as the war helped drive the national debt to such unprecedented heights that the United States became the world’s largest debtor, most Americans finally saw the war had become a national disaster.

Still, nationwide polls for Newsweek, CNN, and USA Today revealed that in October 2006, as the mid-term election drew near, 40 percent of the American people did *not* think the United States made a mistake in invading Iraq, 30 to 34 percent approved of President Bush’s handling of the situation in Iraq, 30 percent said the administration did not misinterpret or misanalyze the intelligence reports they said indicated Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and 36 percent said the administration had not purposely misled the public about this evidence to build support for the war. Thirty-seven percent even thought the U.S. military effort was going “well” (either “fairly” or “very”)” And 35 to 37 percent approved of how Bush was doing his job in general, while 35 percent also were satisfied with the way things were going in the country. In all cases, the solid majority of Americans saw it otherwise. But you have to wonder, who were all those people who thought everything was fine?

Well, what’s not to understand, if that hard-core of supporters mainly consists of authoritarian followers, given what the experiments described in this chapter show us about them? The justification for the war in the first place was largely irrelevant to high RWAs. They liked the conclusion; the reasoning didn’t matter. If the United Nations refused to sanction the war, so what? There’s no contradiction, in a highly

compartmentalized mind, between believing that America stands for international cooperation and the peaceful resolution of conflict on the one hand, while on the other hand insisting it has the “right” to attack whomever it wants, no matter how weak they are, whenever it wants for whatever reasons *it* decides are good enough. Those who protested were trouble-makers; everyone should support the government.

If no connections to al-Qaida and no weapons of mass destruction turned up after the invasion, just believe they had turned up. An aluminum tube that could have been designed to help enrich uranium *was* used to enrich uranium, *proving* Saddam was making atomic bombs! Trailers that could have been used to make biological weapons *were* used to make them.<sup>10</sup> Besides, people whom the followers look to, such as the evangelist Franklin Graham (son of Billy Graham) said they still believed Saddam had such weapons, even if there was no evidence he had. And anyway, if the first reason for the war comes up lame, just invent a new one. Everybody knows Saddam is our *biggest* problem! And when later the president insisted he never said America would “stay the course” in Iraq, when actually he had said it over and over again, most people knew that was an outright, almost pathological lie. But it would not make much of a dent on an authoritarian follower’s mind, which is quite capable of believing white is black when his authority says so.

Authoritarian followers aren’t going to question, they’re going to parrot. After all, in the ethnocentric mind “We are the Good Guys and our opponents are abominations”--which is precisely the thinking of the Islamic authoritarian followers who become suicide bombers in Iraq. And if we turn out not to be such good guys, as news of massacres and the torture and murder of Iraqi prisoners by American soldiers, by the CIA, and by the arms-length “companies” set up to torture prisoners becomes known, authoritarian followers simply don’t want to know. It was just a few, lower level “bad apples.” Didn’t the president say he was sickened by the revelations of torture, and all American wrong-doers would be punished?



However the policy came from the top, and the administration scrambled to make sure *it* could not be punished. When the White House said it would veto a bill *because* it prohibited cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment of prisoners, you had to be nearly blind not to realize what was going on. When the White House also insisted, successfully, that Congress pass a bill allowing it to use torture, you had to be completely blind. But high RWAs are quite capable of such blindness.

And while most Americans came to realize what a mistake the war in Iraq has turned out to be, high RWAs lagged far behind. They listen to the news they want to hear. They surround themselves with people who think like they do. They believe the leaders who tell them what they want to be told. They make about as much effort to get both sides of an issue as the Bush administration does to foster different points of view within the White House. And if six high RWAs are sitting in a room talking about the war, and all six now have misgivings, it will still be hard for any of them to say so because the ethic of group solidarity is so strong in the authoritarian mind.

Is there any conceivable evidence or revelation that will lead them to admit the war was a mistake? I suspect some of them will eventually, begrudgingly reach that point, and others will rewrite their personal histories and say they had their doubts from the start.<sup>11</sup> But others, petrified by their dogmatism, will never admit the undeniable. Did they ever about Viet-Nam? No. “We just didn’t use enough force!”-- which is exactly the argument those who proposed the invasion of Iraq are using now as they tried to shift the blame for the failure of their incredibly unsound policy.<sup>12</sup>

*Notes*

<sup>1</sup> Although it pains me deeply I am going to continue my pledge of not choking the narrative of this book with numbers. So when I say “most” of some group did something, I mean at least 51 percent did. When I say “a solid majority,” it means somewhere between 60 and 75 percent. When I say a “great majority” I mean over 75 percent. When I say “virtually everyone” I mean over 90 percent. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>2</sup> For the 99 percent of my readers (“virtually everyone”) who are blissfully younger than I, the quote is from a song in *The Music Man*, in which a traveling salesman whips the good citizens of River City, Iowa into a frenzy because a pool hall has opened in town. I know, I know, I should have found a hip-hop lyric instead. But... [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>3</sup> Why do high RWAs want to censor, for example, a racist when they themselves are prejudiced? Because they don’t know they are, so a racist is a socially condemnable outsider to them. Furthermore, experiments show authoritarian followers are turned off by blatantly racist appeals. A skilled demagogue knows you play the “race card” best by disguising it as something else, like law and order. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> So if you’ve been thinking I’ve been talking about someone else as I described high RWAs, does that mean you are a high? No. Because low and moderate RWAs also think I am talking about someone else--and they are right. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>5</sup> Once someone becomes a leader of the high RWAs’ in-group, he can lie with impunity about the out-groups, himself, whatever, because he knows the followers will seldom check on what he says, nor will they expose themselves to people who set the record straight. Furthermore they will not believe the truth if they somehow get exposed to it, and if the distortions become absolutely undeniable, they will rationalize it away and put it in a box. If the scoundrel’s duplicity and hypocrisy lands him on the front page of every daily in the country, the followers will still forgive him if he just says the right things.

As a consequence, I think, politicians, authors and commentators who lead the authoritarian followers in our society get seduced by how easy it is to just lie about things, from obfuscation to equivocation to prevarication. For a charming example of this, read *They Never Said It* by Paul F. Boller, Jr. and John George (1989, New York: Oxford University Press). As one reads through all the misquotes, distortions and inventions attributed to Washington, Lincoln, Lenin, and so on, one is struck first by how many of these falsehoods originated, predictably, with political extremists. Then one notices that most of the time, they were right-wing extremists, as Boller and George themselves noted (p. x).

Often the quotes get picked up by other, un-checking right-wingers and spread like wild-fire (pp. 15-16 in *They Never Said It*). One can easily find examples of left-wingers doing this too, and I say “a plague on both their houses.” But right-wing leaders appear to do it more, and one reason might be that they know it’s easier for them to get away with it with their devoted readers, listeners, viewers, followers. (Another reason, we shall see two chapters hence, is that the people most likely to become the leaders of right-wing authoritarians simply don’t believe very much in telling the truth.) [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>6</sup>More powerful yet, as we saw in Chapter 2, is the effect on an authoritarian follower of personally knowing a homosexual. And I have found that the few high RWAs who score low in dogmatism *are* influenced by the biological findings. So I don’t mean to say that all high RWAs are so dogmatic that they will *never* change their positions. (If I give you the impression anywhere in this book that I have discovered Absolute Truths, I beg you to flay me with angry condemnation.) But I do believe the evidence to date indicates high RWAs tend to be more dogmatic than most people.

Another thing that I’ll bet would change authoritarian followers’ opinions quite dramatically is a reversal of position by their trusted authorities. Remember when Richard Nixon went to China to normalize the relationship? Suppose Lyndon Johnson, or Jimmy Carter had done it instead. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>7</sup> Very *unauthoritarian* people can also be dogmatic on the same issue--although not as dogmatic as high RWAs. Bruce Hunsberger and I asked a sample of active American atheists the same question, only it was along the lines, “Is there anything conceivable that could happen that would make you believe in the traditional God?” Fifty-one percent of them said no--which is a lot, but not nearly the 91% of the high RWAs in a large sample of Manitoba parents surveyed in 2005 who said nothing conceivable could make them *not* believe in the traditional God. Most (64%) of our active atheists also said they would be uninfluenced by the discovery of a “Roman file on Jesus” that confirmed much of the Gospels, including the resurrection--but 76% of those aforementioned high RWA Manitoba parents said the discovery of the “Attis” scrolls would not lower their belief in the divinity of Jesus. See *Atheists*, by B. Hunsberger and B. Altemeyer, 2006: Prometheus Press, Chapter 4.

Are you surprised that I described a study in which people who are probably quite low RWAs looked bad? I try to develop testing situations that will let both high and low authoritarians show their virtues or their warts, and sometimes the low RWAs look bad too. I always report those findings. But so far they’re pretty rare, especially compared with the high authoritarians’. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>8</sup>See Damon Linker’s, “The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege,” by Doubleday, 2006. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>9</sup> The United States government called off further searches for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq on January 12, 2005, conceding none had been found. A Harris Poll taken the following month found that 36% of the American public believed such weapons *had* been found--a drop of only 2 percent from a pre-concession poll taken in November 2004. By December 2005 the figure had fallen to 26 percent, but that’s still a quarter of the American people. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>10</sup> Dunwoody, Plane, Rice and Rothrock thus found that as late as August 2005 and January 2006 high RWA Pennsylvania college students were likely to have inaccurate perceptions of the war in Iraq in all the areas tested. They believed Iraq had used chemical or biological weapons against American troops, that Iraq's government was highly connected with al-Qaida, that Americans had found evidence in Iraq that Saddam was working closely with al-Qaida, that most people in the world favored the United States' going to war in Iraq, and so did most people in Europe. They also believed that the U.S. had found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but this was only statistically significant at the .09 level. In general the students were better informed than the American public as a whole, but the authoritarian followers among them still carried a lot of demonstrably erroneous beliefs around in their heads.

McWilliams and Keil's nationwide poll of 1000 Americans in 2005 found a correlation of .51 between RWA scores and being satisfied with "the job President Bush and his administration are doing." [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>11</sup> An NBC News/Wall St. Journal poll released on December 12, 2006 found only 23% of Americans still approved of President Bush's policy on Iraq. Support on this issue is boiling down to the bed rock of hard-core right-wing authoritarians, who seem to make up roughly 20-25% of the American public. The same poll, and several others at the same time, found 34% still gave Bush's overall performance positive marks. A month later, on the eve of Bush's address to the nation pushing for a "surge" in troop strength in Iraq, a Gallup poll found his overall approval rating had dropped to 26%. A CBS News Poll on January 22, 2007 put the figure at 28%.

At the end of 2006 an Ipsos Poll of the American public for AP/AOL News found the president was spontaneously named the baddest "bad guy" on the planet more often (25%) than anyone else. But he was also named by others the best "good guy" more (13%) than anyone else. GWB was also spontaneously named the "most admired man" in the annual Gallup Poll at the end of the year--again by 13% of the respondents, more than anyone else.. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>12</sup> When bad news spills out about things that high RWAs support, they *want* to be told it isn't true. So some governments have gotten used to issuing "non-denial denials" and flimsy counter-arguments, because that's all it takes and it's so effortless. If a well-researched paper by a prestigious scientific body concludes that human activity is seriously increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, culprit governments will say "the evidence is incomplete" and they will find *someone, somewhere*, with *some* sort of credentials, who will dismiss a great number of studies with a wave of the hand and give them the sound-bite they want.

When someone responds to evidence with "a wave of the hand" or a bland dismissal like "It's just nonsense," they're usually revealing they can't say anything more specific because they're whopped. But the government's supporters will be reassured. For them, one sound bite cancels the other, and there really is no difference between a widely-confirmed fact and a speculation, between fifty studies and one.

To take a non-political example of walking extra miles for authorities, when people first began to reveal they had been sexually assaulted as children by priests and ministers, bishops often issued statements saying they had thoroughly investigated the charge and found it had no merit. That was good enough for the authoritarian followers. If the evidence nevertheless grew against Father X, church authorities asked the public, "Whom are you going to believe, this obviously disturbed person who claims to have been assaulted, or the Church?" That too was an easy one for the high RWAs.

If it eventually became known that the bishops' own inquiries had discovered that Father X was indeed a pedophile, but the bishops still denied he was and sometimes even quietly transferred Father X to another parish, where he sexually assaulted still more children, do you think the high RWAs learned anything from this? How many "disconnects" do you think they have at hand to avoid realizing *they allowed themselves* to be deceived?

I fear you will wait a long time before authoritarian followers wise up to their chosen leaders, and to themselves--and their leaders know it. When the Watergate revelations were sinking his ratings in the polls, Richard Nixon pointed out to his chief of staff, H. R. Haldemann, "I think there's still a hell of a lot of people out there...[who] want to believe. That's the point, isn't it?" "Why sure," Haldemann replied. "Want to and do." (Conversation of April 25, 1973 recorded on the "Watergate tapes," reported by the *New York Times* on November 22, 1974, p. 20.)

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## Chapter Four

### Authoritarian Followers and Religious Fundamentalism <sup>1</sup>

Care to try your hand at another scale? Answer the one below, responding to each item with anything from a -4 to a +4.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. God has given humanity a complete, unfailing guide to happiness and salvation, which must be totally followed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. No single book of religious teachings contains all the intrinsic, fundamental truths about life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The basic cause of evil in this world is Satan, who is still constantly and ferociously fighting against God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. It is more important to be a good person than to believe in God and the right religion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. There is a particular set of religious teachings in this world that are so true, you can't go any "deeper" because they are the basic, bedrock message that God has given humanity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When you get right down to it, there are basically only two kinds of people in the world: the Righteous, who will be rewarded by God, and the rest, who will not.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Scriptures may contain general truths, but they should NOT be considered completely, literally true from beginning to end.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. To lead the best, most meaningful life, one must belong to the one, fundamentally true religion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. "Satan" is just the name people give to their own bad impulses. There really is *no such thing* as a diabolical "Prince of Darkness" who tempts us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Whenever science and sacred scripture conflict, *science* is probably right.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The fundamentals of God's religion should never be tampered with, or compromised with others' beliefs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. *All* of the religions in the world have flaws and wrong teachings. There is *no* perfectly true, right religion.



Here are the same instructions for scoring your responses that you encountered in Chapter 1 when you answered the RWA scale. For items 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 11:

If you wrote down a “-4” that’s scored as a 1.

If you wrote down a “-3” that’s scored as a 2.

If you wrote down a “-2” that’s scored as a 3.

If you wrote down a “-1” that’s scored as a 4.

If you wrote down a “0” or left the item unanswered, that’s scored a 5.

If you wrote down a “+1” that’s scored as a 6.

If you wrote down a “+2” that’s scored as a 7.

If you wrote down a “+3” that’s scored as an 8.

If you wrote down a “+4” that’s scored as a 9.

For Items 2, 4, 7, 9, 10 and 12:

If you wrote down a “-4” that’s scored as a 9.

If you wrote down a “-3” that’s scored as an 8.

If you wrote down a “-2” that’s scored as a 7.

If you wrote down a “-1” that’s scored as a 6.

If you wrote down a “0” or left the item unanswered, that’s scored a 5.

If you wrote down a “+1” that’s scored as a 4.

If you wrote down a “+2” that’s scored as a 3.

If you wrote down a “+3” that’s scored as a 2.

If you wrote down a “+4” that’s scored as a 1.

Add up your twelve scores. Unless I have the all-time *worst* score on the SAT-Math test, you can’t score lower than 12, or higher than 108, no matter how you try. Intro psychology students at my Canadian university average about 50, while their

parents usually land a few points higher. A nationwide sample of some 300 members of an unnamed fundamentalist Protestant church in the United States, gathered by Ted Witzig, thumped out a 93.1--the highest group score I have yet seen.<sup>2</sup>

Your famous intuition probably led you to suspect this scale has something to do with religious conservatism (especially if you read the title of this chapter). So you were wised up and should not view your score with much faith (or hope, or charity).

Bruce Hunsberger and I called this the Religious Fundamentalism scale when we developed it some years ago. We did *not* mean by “fundamentalism” a particular set of religious beliefs, a creed. It was clear that the mind-set of fundamentalism could be found in many faiths. Instead we tried to measure a person’s *attitudes toward* whatever beliefs she had, trying to identify the common underlying psychological elements in the thinking of people who were commonly called Christian fundamentalists, Hindu fundamentalists, Jewish fundamentalists, and Muslim fundamentalists.

We thought a fundamentalist in any of these major faiths would feel that her religious beliefs contained the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, inerrant truth about humanity and the Divine--fundamentally speaking. She would also believe this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil that must be vigorously fought, and that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past. Finally, those who follow these fundamental beliefs would have a special relationship with the deity.<sup>3</sup>

Research has confirmed that the Religious Fundamentalism scale has validity in all the religions named. You can find some high scorers in all of them who fit the description just given. More to the point, the scale may give us a way to study the psychology of the “Religious Right” in America today.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Plan for This Chapter*

So here's the trip map for another seven-stop chapter. First we'll square up the terms "fundamentalists" and "evangelicals." Then we'll bring the discussion into the context of this book, authoritarianism. We'll analyze the ethnocentrism you often find in fundamentalists. We'll see how some of the mental missteps we covered in the last chapter appear in them. We'll appreciate the positive things people get from being fundamentalists. Then we'll come up against the intriguing fact that, despite these benefits, so many people raised in Christian fundamentalist homes leave the religion. We'll close our discussion with some data on shortfalls in fundamentalists' behavior, including a surprising fact or two about their practices and beliefs. By the time we have ended, we'll have learned many disturbing things about these people who believe, to the contrary, that they are the very best among us.

#### *1. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals in America*

"Fundamentalism" has a particular meaning in the United States. It refers to a movement that grew within Protestantism nearly a century ago in reaction to developments in the then modern world, most particularly to scholarly analyses of the Bible that cast strong doubt on its supposed divine origins. To refute these analyses a series of pamphlets called "The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth" was widely distributed. At first they dealt mainly with scriptural issues, rebutting the charges that the Bible was man-made, rewritten as time passed, and laced with myths, biases and inaccurate history. Instead, the pamphlets claimed, the Bible has no error in it whatsoever; it is the original word of God, exactly as God wanted things put.<sup>5</sup> But the focus shifted by the end of the series, and essays came out against "The Decadence of Darwinism," "Romanism," Christian Science, Mormonism, and socialism. A Baptist editor in 1920 termed those who stood ready "to do battle royal for The Fundamentals" the "fundamentalists," and the label stuck.

Protestant fundamentalism suffered so much public ridicule after the famous “Scopes Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925 that its influence waned for many years. In the late 1940s it reappeared as (or was transformed into) the evangelical movement, with the Rev. Billy Graham its most famous leader.<sup>6</sup> Evangelicals had a different “take” on the role of religion in society in some respects. In particular, they believed they had a responsibility not just to defend Christianity, but to evangelize, to preach the Gospel to others. The following seven items were developed by George Barna, an admirable evangelical pollster who closely follows religious development in the United States, to identify evangelicals.

Do you believe Jesus Christ lived a sinless life?

Do you believe eternal salvation is possible only through grace, not works?

Do you believe Christians have a personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs about Christ with non-Christians?

Is your faith very important to your life today?

Do you believe Satan is a real, living entity?

Do you believe God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, perfect deity who created the universe and still rules it today?

Do you believe the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches?

If you say yes to *all* seven of these questions, you would be an evangelical by Barna’s definition.

The word “fundamentalists” has gotten a lot of bad press lately, so conservative Protestants today tend to say they are evangelicals. But evangelicals score highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale you just answered. In a 2005 survey I conducted of over six hundred *parents* of students at my university, which I shall refer to frequently in this chapter,<sup>7</sup> 85 percent of the one hundred and thirty-nine parents who answered yes to all of George Barna’s seven questions were High fundamentalists (i.e. they landed in the top 25 percent of the scores on the Religious Fundamentalism

scale). They racked up an average score of 86.6 on the measure--discernibly lower but still in the same ballpark as the American fundamentalists' 93.1 in Witzig's study.

Looked at the other way, 72 percent of the Christians who scored highly on the fundamentalism measure qualified as "Barna evangelicals."<sup>8</sup> So call them what you will, most evangelicals are fundamentalists according to our measure, and most Christian fundamentalists are evangelicals.<sup>9</sup> Whether you are talking about evangelicals or talking about Christian fundamentalists, you are largely talking about the same people.

Some high religious fundamentalists turn up in all the faiths represented in my samples, including Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Within Christianity, I always find some Catholics scoring highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale, a few Anglicans post big numbers, some Lutherans ring the bell, and so on. But in study after study the high scores pile up far more often in the conservative Protestant denominations than anywhere else, among Baptists, Mennonites, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Alliance Church, and so on. It bears repeating that this is a generalization, and some Baptists, etcetera score quite low in fundamentalism. But if you want to make a safe wager, see what odds you can get betting that these conservative sects will score higher on the Religious Fundamentalism scale than the other major Christian groups.

## *2. Fundamentalism and Right-Wing Authoritarianism*

The first thing you need to know about religious fundamentalists, in case you haven't inferred it already, is that they usually score very highly on the RWA scale.<sup>10, 11</sup> A solid majority of them are authoritarian followers. The two traits, authoritarianism and fundamentalism, go together so well that nearly everything I have said about high RWAs in the previous chapters also applies to high Religious Fundamentalists.

Since authoritarianism can *produce* fundamentalism if one grows up submissively in a religiously conservative family, and (conversely), fundamentalism can *promote* authoritarianism with its emphases on submission to religious authority, dislike of out-groups, sticking to the straight and narrow, and so on, one immediately wonders which is the chicken and which is the egg.

The evidence indicates authoritarianism is more basic. The RWA scale correlates *better* than the Religious Fundamentalism scale does with acceptance of government injustices, hostility toward homosexuals, willingness to persecute whomever the government targets, and most other things. (The big exception naturally comes when one raises distinctly religious issues.) So the problem's not so much that some people are fundamentalists, but that fundamentalists so definitely tend to be authoritarian followers. But as I just said, religious fundamentalism *does* promote authoritarianism in some ways. And you can certainly see the influence of right-wing authoritarianism in many things that religious fundamentalists do.

### *3. Fundamentalism as a Template for Prejudice*

Let me ask you a personal question: Who are you? What makes up your identity? How would you describe yourself?

You would probably list your gender fairly quickly, your age, your nationality, marital status and your job--unless you are a student, in which case you'd say you're poor and going deeply into debt. Would you mention a religious affiliation? You almost certainly would if you are a high fundamentalist. Furthermore, except for converts, this has probably been true of fundamentalists for all of their lives. They report that their parents placed a lot of emphasis on their religious identification as they were growing up. For example, "You are a Baptist," or "We belong to the Assembly of God." It would have become one of the main ways they thought of themselves. By comparison, they say their gender and race were stressed much less.

What's the effect of *emphasizing* the family's religious affiliation to a child? Well, by creating this category of what the family *is*, you instantly create the category of people who are *not* that, who are different. You're laying down an in-group versus out-group distinction. Even if you never say a nasty word about other religions, the enormous human tendency to think in ethnocentric terms will create a preference for "people like me." Throw in some gratuitous nasty words about Jews, Muslims, Methodists, atheists, and so on, and you've likely sown the seeds of religious prejudice in a four-year old. Perhaps more importantly in the long run, you've given your child early training in the wonderful world of "Us versus Them"--training that may make it easier for him to acquire racial, sexual, and ethnic prejudices later on.<sup>12</sup>

There can be little doubt that, as adults, Christian fundamentalists harbor a pointed dislike of other religions. Here are some items from my Religious Ethnocentrism scale that fundamentalists tend to agree with.

Our country should always be a Christian country, and other beliefs should be ignored in our public institutions.

Nonchristian religions have a lot of weird beliefs and pagan ways that Christians should avoid having any contact with.

All people may be entitled to their own religious beliefs, but I don't want to associate with people whose views are quite different from my own.

At the same time, fundamentalists tend to *disagree* with:

If there is a heaven, good people will go to it no matter what religion they belong to, if any.

You can trust members of all religions equally; no one religion produces better people than any other does.

People who belong to different religions are probably just as nice and moral as those who belong to mine.

Yep, it's Us versus Them. Religious prejudice does not draw as much attention or produce as much hatred in North America as it does in (say) the Middle East and southern Asia, but it's still dynamite looking for a place to explode because it's so often accompanied by the self-righteousness that releases aggression. And it runs deep in Christian fundamentalists because religion is so important to them.

News that they score relatively high on *racial* prejudice scales often stuns white fundamentalists. They will usually reply, "You must be mistaken. We're not prejudiced. Why, we accept black people in our church." And indeed, if you ask a white fundamentalist if he'd rather spend an evening with a black member of his church or a white atheist, he will almost certainly choose the former.

But fundamentalists still hold more racial prejudices than most people--a fact known to social scientists for over fifty years. White churches were open to just white folks for generations in America, and many pastors found justification in the Bible for both slavery and the segregation that followed the demise of slavery. Vestiges of this remain in fundamentalist religions. Bill McCartney, the founder of the evangelical men's movement called Promise Keepers, tells the story of what happened on a nation-wide speaking tour when he finished up his stock speech with a call for racial reconciliation:

"There was no response--nothing...In city after city, in church after church, it was the same story--wild enthusiasm while I was being introduced, followed by a morgue-like chill as I stepped away from the microphone."<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, most fundamentalists *say* they believe in "the brotherhood of all mankind." "We are all God's children." "Jesus loves you"--whoever you are. It says so in their mental boxes. But they still like best, by a long shot, the people who are most exactly like themselves. Where did this crushing rejection of others come from? Its earliest roots appear buried in the person's religious training.<sup>14</sup>



#### 4. *The Mental Life of Fundamentalists*

Mark Noll, an evangelical history professor at evangelical Wheaton College, begins his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, with a pithy thought: “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” Noll observes that “American evangelicals are not exemplary for their thinking, and they have not been so for several generations.” He points out that evangelicals support dozens of theological seminaries, scores of colleges, and hundreds of radio stations, but not a single research university. “In the United States he writes, it is simply impossible to be, with integrity, both evangelical and intellectual.” “Modern American evangelicals have failed notably in sustaining serious intellectual life.”<sup>15</sup>

I have found nothing in my research that disagrees with this assessment. Indeed almost all of the findings in the last chapter about the authoritarian follower’s penchants for illogical thinking, compartmentalized minds, double standards, hypocrisy and dogmatism apply to religious fundamentalists as well. For example, David Winter at the University of Michigan recently found that fundamentalist students, when evaluating the war in Iraq, *rejected* a series of statements that were based on the Sermon on the Mount--which is arguably the core of Jesus’ teachings. Fundamentalists may believe they follow Jesus more than anyone else does, but it turns out to depend a lot on where Jesus said we should go. And we can augment such findings by considering the thinking behind three of the fundamentalist’s favorite issues: school prayer, opposition to evolution, and the infallibility of the Bible.

*A. School Prayer: Majority Rights, Unless...* Suppose a law were passed requiring the strenuous teaching of religion in public schools. Beginning in kindergarten, all children would be taught to believe in God, pray together in school several times each day, memorize the Ten Commandments and other parts of the Bible, learn the principles of Christian morality, and eventually be encouraged to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. How would you react to such a law?

The great majority of people in my samples who answered this question, including most of the Christians, said this would be a bad law. But most fundamentalists liked the idea, for this is exactly the kind of education they would like to see public schools give to everyone's children. When I asked fundamentalists about the morality of imposing this learning on the children of Hindus, Jews, atheists, etcetera, they responded along the lines of, "This is a Christian country, and the majority rules. If others don't like it, they can pay for private education or leave." (As I said, most people do *not* favor this proposal, but since the days of the "Moral Majority" fundamentalists have tended to overestimate their numbers in society.)

What do you think happened when I asked people to respond to this parallel scenario?

Suppose you were living in a modern Arab democracy, whose constitution stated there could be NO state religion--even though the vast majority of the people were Muslims. Then a fundamentalist Islamic movement was elected to power, and passed a law requiring the strenuous teaching of religion in public schools. Beginning in kindergarten, all children would be taught to believe in Allah, pray together facing Mecca several times each day, memorize important parts of the Koran, learn the principles of Islamic morality, and eventually be encouraged to declare their allegiance to Muhammad and become a Muslim. How would you react to such a law?

Again, a great majority of my samples thought this would be quite wrong, but this time so did a solid majority of Christian fundamentalists. When you asked them why, they said that obviously this would be unfair to people who help pay for public schools but who want their children raised in some other religion. If you ask them if the majority in an Arab country has a right to have its religion taught in public schools, they say no, that the minority has rights too that must be respected. Nobody's kids should have another religion forced upon them in the classroom, they say.

So do fundamentalists believe in majority rights or minority rights? The answer is, apparently, neither. They'll pull whichever argument suits them out of its file when necessary, but basically they are *unprincipled* on the issue of school prayer. They have a big double standard that basically says, "Whatever I want is right." The rest is rationalization, and as flexible and multi-directional as a reed blowing in the wind.

My two contrasting scenarios slide fundamentalists under the microscope, but they do not put others to similar scrutiny, do they? What about those on the opposite extreme of the religious belief continuum, atheists? They always oppose school prayer, but wouldn't they like to have atheism taught if they could? I thus have asked atheists to respond to the following proposal:

Suppose a law were passed requiring strenuous teaching in public schools *against* belief in God and religion. Beginning in kindergarten, all children would be taught that belief in God is unsupported by logic and science, and that traditional religions are based on unreliable scriptures and outdated principles. All children would eventually be encouraged to become atheists or agnostics. How would you react to such a law?

This would seem to be "right down the atheists' alley," and you frequently hear fundamentalists say this is precisely what nonbelievers are ultimately trying to accomplish in their court challenges to school prayer. But 100% of a sample of Manitoba parents who were atheists said this would be a bad law; so did 70% of a sample of the active American atheists whose organizations often launch those court challenges. Atheists typically hold that religious beliefs/practice have no place in public schools, and that includes their own point of view. No double standard there.

(It would be interesting to know how fundamentalists react to the news that, when put to the test, atheists showed more integrity than fundamentalists did on this matter. They often say morality cannot exist without belief in God, but the atheists seem much more principled than the fundamentalists do on this issue.<sup>16</sup>)

*B. Opposition to Evolution.* If fundamentalists have added one thing to the authoritarian follower's armor of compartmentalized thinking, double standards, rationalization, and so on, it is a preference for selective ignorance. You can see this most clearly in their rejection of evolution.

Instead of learning about one of the major scientific advances of all time, with all its explanatory power and steady flow of amazing discoveries, fundamentalists embrace "creation science" or "intelligent design." As many a court has ruled, these are "science" in name only since they lack a clear statement of propositions, make no predictions, cannot be tested, and are usually just a back-door attempt to teach the Bible as part of the public school curriculum. Still fundamentalists work tirelessly to give creation science or intelligent design "equal time" with evolution in public schools--which would mean cutting in half the time devoted to real science instruction--hoping to accomplish by zeal, clamor and pressure what is unjustified by scientific accomplishment.<sup>17</sup>

How does this connect to "selective ignorance"? If you ask fundamentalists about evolution, it becomes clear that they seldom understand what they are opposing. Instead they seem to be repeating things they have heard from the leaders of their in-groups, such as "Darwin's theory of evolution says that humans descended from monkeys," and "There is a crucial 'missing link' in the fossil evidence that shows humans could not have descended from apes," and "It's just a theory."<sup>18</sup> They will sometimes tell you evolution violates the laws of thermodynamics, but when you ask them what those laws are, the conditions under which the featured Second Law applies, and what it has to do with evolution, they stumble all over themselves.

As well, they will say most scientists today have rejected Darwin's theory, when evolution is probably the most widely accepted explanation of things in the biological, geological, and astronomical sciences. (Debates certainly arise in science about *how* evolution takes place but not, anymore, whether it occurs.) They will tell

you “many famous scientists” don’t believe in evolution at all, but they seldom know any names. They will give you the famous “A watch, therefore a watchmaker” argument-from-design that introductory philosophy students tear to shreds year after year. But when you point out the logical fallacy in this argument it becomes clear they never thought about it, they just stored the argument. They will tell you, mistakenly again, that evolution has never been observed happening. They know well the arguments against evolution that they have heard from their trusted sources, but they know almost nothing about the theory of evolution itself or the overwhelming amount of evidence from all the relevant fields that support it.

As a consequence I have had fundamentalist university students in my classes who had apparently managed to avoid all instruction in genetics in their lives, and who did not know what a gene, or a mutation was. Others, almost as extreme, have heard the human genetic code “can never be broken” and so doubt the value of learning anything about it. Or else that research should be forbidden on DNA because it is the “secret of life” that humanity was not meant to have. Or else everything that science has discovered fits in perfectly with the story of the Great Flood, which is part of the explanation most fundamentalists want everybody to have to learn in school instead of biological science. Adam walked with dinosaurs, they insist.

One *can* believe in a divinity and also believe that life appeared and developed on earth through evolution. It may look like an accident, you can say, but it’s really God’s plan. Many theists take that position, and eventually religious fundamentalists may come around to it. After all, the Catholic Church eventually came to accept the “theory” that the earth goes around the sun. But that might take centuries and in the meantime, as the rest of the world makes ever-increasing advances in knowledge, the anti-evolutionists will be busting a gut to make sure all of America’s children remain as ignorant as theirs. And one can seriously question whether evolution would get even 10% of the relevant instruction time in public schools that fundamentalists control. Remember how much authoritarians love to censor ideas?<sup>19</sup>

*C. The Bible Is Always Right, Unless...* As we saw in Chapter 3, you frequently find dogmatism in religion. Still, I have been amazed at how rigid religious fundamentalists can be--even to the point of dismissing what they say is the cornerstone of their lives, the Bible. I have twice given students who insisted the Bible was both a) divinely inspired and b) free of errors, contradictions and inconsistencies, the four Gospel accounts of Easter morning, laid out side by side. You never see them that way. Most people just hear one account, in church on Easter. Those who set out to read the New Testament go through the Gospels in the order Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and may well have forgotten what Matthew said when they get to Mark's starkly different version. Thus I suspect none of my "true believers" had ever seen the narratives printed alongside one another before. I asked them to read the (literally) Gospel accounts of this, the central, defining event in their religion. Then they read the following summary I had prepared:

"There appear to be many **direct contradictions** in these four descriptions of the tomb scene. Who actually encountered the risen Jesus in the garden? John says it was just Mary Magdalen. Matthew says it was Mary Magdalen and "the other Mary," and according to Mark and Luke, neither Mary Magdalen nor any other person actually saw Jesus in the garden. Did Mary Magdalen recognize Jesus when she encountered him? John says no, but Matthew says yes. Did the women tell anyone what happened in the garden? Mark explicitly says they did *not*; Luke and John explicitly say they told the apostles. Was it light when Mary Magdalen came to the tomb (as Mark, Matthew and Luke say), or dark (as John says)? How many "men in white"/angels were there: one (Mark and Matthew) or two (Luke and John)? Did Jesus let people hold onto him? Matthew says yes, John says no.

"As well there are numerous **inconsistencies**. Who actually went to the tomb? (All four accounts disagree.) Which apostles went to the garden? According to Luke, only Peter went; but John says Peter and the "beloved disciple" both went; and Mark and Matthew make no mention of Peter (or any other apostle) going to the garden. Was there a great earthquake, as Matthew says? How could Mark, Luke and John all ignore "a great earthquake"? Were there Roman guards? Matthew says yes, but the others do not mention them at all."

I then offered each subject space to explain her position on the Bible under various headings. The first possibility was “There are, in fact, no contradictions or inconsistencies in the four accounts.” Other possibilities attributed the contradictions and inconsistencies to human error in translation, etcetera, or to some of the evangelists getting details wrong, or to the whole thing being a myth.

Most of the fundamentalists stuck by their guns and insisted no contradictions or inconsistencies existed in the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, no matter what one might point out. I call that dogmatism. Furthermore a curious analogy kept popping up in their defense of this seemingly indefensible stand. Many of them said the evangelists were like witnesses to an automobile accident, each of whom saw the event from a different place, and therefore gave a slightly different account of what had happened. I’m ready to bet they picked up this “analysis-by-analogy” in Sunday school, or some such place. Like the arguments against evolution, you can tell they just swallowed this “explanation” without thinking because it is, in fact, an admission that contradictions and inconsistencies *do exist*. The “different angles” story just explains how the contradictions got there.

Ultimately the true believers were saying, “I believe so strongly that the Bible is perfect that there’s nothing, *not even the Bible itself*, that can change my mind.” If that seems like an enormous self-contradiction, put it on the list. We are dealing with very compartmentalized minds. They’re not really interested in coming to grips with what’s actually *in* the Bible so much as mounting a defense of what they want to believe *about* the Bible--come Hell or Noah’s high water.<sup>20</sup>

We shouldn’t underestimate the importance of dogmatism to the fundamentalist, even though it sometimes seems to surpass understanding. As noted in the last chapter, it takes no effort to be dogmatic, and you don’t need to know very much to insist you’re right and nothing can possibly change your mind. As well, dogmatism gives the joy and comfort of certainty, which fundamentalists cherish.

*Faith and Science.* You will sometimes hear fundamentalists dismiss science because of its apparent *uncertainty*. They observe that today's scientific explanation of something will sooner or later be replaced by a different one, so why invest anything in it? Their religion already has the Final Word, they say, the perfect explanation of everything.

This view is three players short of a trio. First, it does not grasp that future theories in science will be accepted because they make superior explanations and predictions--which is progress you could not make if you insisted the old theory was perfect. As well, science energetically corrects itself. If a finding is misleading, say due to methodological error, other scientists will discover that and set things straight. Every year a new batch of scientists graduates, and many of them take dead aim--as they were trained to do--on the scientific Establishment. In religion you might get branded a heretic, or worse, for challenging dogma. In science you'll get promoted and gather research grants as ye may if you knock an established explanation off its perch. Orthodoxy has a big bulls-eye painted on it in science. A scientist who can come up with a better account of things than evolution will become immortal.

Dogmatic Christians also slide quietly around the fact that there's no real test that what they believe is right. They simply believe it, on faith. They are the faith-full, just as dogmatic Hindus, dogmatic Jews, and dogmatic Muslims all insist they each have the real deal. Unfortunately there's no way to determine if any of them does, which may be one of the reasons the passionately devoted sometimes resort to the sword, and the car bomb, instead.

Once dogmatism turns out the lights, you might as well close up shop as a civilization and pull up the covers as a sentient life form. You get nowhere with unquestioning certainty. It's thinking with your mind wide shut. But that would not faze most fundamentalists, because they know that their beliefs will get them exactly where they want to go.



### 5. *Happiness, Joy and Comfort*

Fundamentalists get their joy in life much more from standing firm and believing what they stand for than from exploring and discovering. I once asked a large sample of parents how much happiness, joy or comfort they got, in various ways, from science, and how much they got from religion. For most people, religion proved a lot more satisfying than science did. (This ought not knock us off our horses. Pure science is “head stuff,” not intended to satisfy any human want except our desire to understand.)

But the religion-versus-science comparison proved especially striking among fundamentalists. They said religion brought them *enormous* amounts of happiness. It brought them the joy of God’s love. It showed how they could spend all eternity in heaven. It assured them they would rejoin their loved ones in the kingdom of God. It brought them closer to their loved ones on earth. It brought forgiveness of their sins. It made them feel safe in God’s protection. In contrast, they got almost no happiness from science. Notably, they said science did *not* enable them to work out their own beliefs and philosophy of life, it did not bring the joy of discovery, it did not provide the surest path we have to the truth, it did not make them feel safe, it did not show how to live a happy life, and it did not bring the satisfaction of knowing their beliefs were based on objective facts.

We should note that fundamentalists indeed get great joy from their religion. While most people tell pollsters they are happy, highly religious people number among the happiest of us all. You can see why they would. They believe they know the meaning of life on its deepest level. They believe they are in personal touch with the all-good creator of the universe, who loves them and takes a special interest in them. They say they are certain they will enjoy an eternity of happiness after they die. In the meanwhile they have answers at their fingertips to all the problems of life that depress others, such as sickness and personal failure. And they are embraced on all

sides by a supportive community. Why wouldn't they be very happy? The real question ought to be: why do so many people, including some of the fundamentalists' own children, turn their backs on all this happiness?

It's that old Devil, isn't it? We shall take this up shortly.

*Zealotry.* OK, you told me who you are a few pages ago. Now I want to know, in my constantly nosey way, what you believe in. Do you have a *most important outlook* or way of understanding things? Maybe it's a religion, a philosophy, a social perspective like socialism or capitalism. What do *you* use, more than anything else, to make sense out of things, to understand "life"?

\_\_\_ I don't have a basic, most important outlook.

\_\_\_ It's a religious outlook.

\_\_\_ It's a personal outlook all my own that I developed by myself.

\_\_\_ It's a personal outlook that I developed with a few friends.

\_\_\_ It's a capitalist perspective, a capitalist theory on how society should operate.

\_\_\_ It's a socialist perspective, a socialist theory on how society should operate.

\_\_\_ It's a scientific outlook. Science gives me my most basic understanding of things.

\_\_\_ It's the feminist movement; feminism gives me my most basic understanding of things.

\_\_\_ It's the environmental movement; environmentalism gives me my most basic understanding of things.

\_\_\_ It's some other "special cause" movement, such as "animal rights" or "right to die."

All right, if you've decided what makes sense out of the world for you, what you use most to comprehend the hurly-burly of life, then to what extent are the following things true for you?

- \_\_\_ 1. This outlook colors and shapes almost everything I experience in life.
- 0 = Not at all true of me  
1 = Slightly true of me  
2 = Mildly true of me  
3 = Moderately true of me  
4 = Decidedly true of me  
5 = Definitely true of me  
6 = Very definitely true of me
- \_\_\_ 2. I try to explain my outlook to others at every opportunity. (Use the scale above.)
- \_\_\_ 3. I am learning everything I can about this outlook.
- \_\_\_ 4. I think every sensible person should agree with this outlook, once it has been explained.
- \_\_\_ 5. I get excited just thinking about this outlook, and how right it is.
- \_\_\_ 6. It is very important to me to support the leaders of this outlook.
- \_\_\_ 7. Nothing else is as important in my life.
- \_\_\_ 8. It angers me that certain people are trying to oppose this outlook.
- \_\_\_ 9. No other outlook could be as true and valid.
- \_\_\_ 10. It is my mission in life to see that this outlook becomes "No. 1" in our country.
- \_\_\_ 11. This outlook is the solution to all of humanity's problems.
- \_\_\_ 12. I am very committed to making this outlook the strongest influence in the world.

This is called the Zealot scale, for reasons I think you can easily understand, and it's time to add up your numbers. If you are the kind of rather normal person who answers my surveys, your total will be something around 10--20. Which means you don't get terribly worked up about your way of understanding things. But fundamentalists who say their religion provides them with their basic outlook in life score about 40. They are especially likely to say their religion colors and shapes almost everything they experience in life, that it is the solution to all of humanity's problems, that it is very important to them to support the leaders of their religion, that they are learning everything they can about their religion, that nothing else is as important in their life, and no other outlook could be as true and valid.

No other group comes close to being as zealous. Feminists usually come in second in my studies, but way behind the religious fundamentalists, and one finds far, far fewer of them. And if you took all the zealous capitalists and socialists in my last study of over 600 parents and put them in a room to slug it out, not a punch would be thrown. You want to know who's on fire, you want to know who's making a commitment, you want to know who are putting their money, their time and their energy where their beliefs are, you want to know who are constantly "on call" for the cause--and in large numbers--it's the fundamentalists.<sup>21</sup>

*Zealotry and conversion.* Fundamentalists, you may have heard, proselytize. Whether they go door to door, or just gently approach co-workers and neighbors, or pleasantly invite classmates to their youth group, fundamentalists usually believe they have an *obligation* to try to convert others. "Suppose a teenager came to you for advice about religion," I have asked in several studies. "He had been raised in a nonreligious family as an atheist, but now this person is thinking about becoming much more religious, and wants your advice on what to do." Even though fundamentalists often speak of parents' sacred right to raise their children as they see fit, the vast majority of the fundamentalists said they'd tell the teen his parents were wrong. And virtually all said they would try to persuade the teen to join their religion.

One can wonder what fundamentalists would say if one of their children went to an atheist for advice on religion, and the atheist said the parents were wrong and tried to lead their child into atheism. But would such nonbelievers?<sup>22</sup> I have given several groups of atheists the mirror-image scenario in which a teenager who had been raised as a strong and active Christian comes to them for advice because he is now questioning things. Very few Manitoba parent atheists said they would tell this teen that his parents were wrong, nor would they try to get him to become an atheist. Instead they almost all said they'd tell him to continue searching and then decide for himself. A sample of active American atheists was pushier. About two-thirds would have thumped the drum for atheism, loudly or softly, and about half said they would want the teen to become a nonbeliever. But far, far more of the fundamentalists, we saw, would have tried to convert an atheist's child.

I probed this apparent double standard with a large sample of Manitoba students. Half were told a troubled teenager who had been raised in a strong Christian family went to an atheist for advice. "Would it be wrong for the atheist to try to get the teen to abandon his family's teachings?" A solid majority of both low and high RWA students (70 percent in each case) said yes, it would be wrong.

The other half of the sample got the mirror image situation of a troubled teen raised an atheist who went to a Christian for advice. A solid majority (61 percent) of the low RWAs again said it would be wrong for the Christian to try to get the teen to abandon his family's teachings. But only 22 percent of the high RWAs thought proselytizing would be wrong in *this* case. Instead, the great majority of them thought it would be right for a Christian to try to convert the youth. That's a double standard big enough to drive a busload of missionaries through.

Parents of university students have, we can safely surmise, raised some children, so we can inquire how much freedom of choice their kids had regarding religion. A solid majority of my samples said they wanted their children to make up

their own minds about religion. But not the fundamentalist parents, who said they had made a strong effort to pass their beliefs on to their offspring--a response their children confirmed when describing how much emphasis was placed on the family religion while they were growing up. Fundamentalist parents said they did *not* want their children to decide about religion. Instead they wanted their progeny to believe what they believed, to keep the faith, and pass it on to the grandchildren.

### *6. Keeping the Faith, Not*

Does the religious emphasis pay off? Yes, in the sense that if parents pay no attention to religion, the children are likely to become non-practicing Catholics, Presbyterians-in-name-only, “I guess I’m a Prodestent” Christians--or even unaffiliated “Nones.” But placing great emphasis on the family religion does not always produce the desired result, and may even backfire.

I have inquired about the current religious affiliations of *parents* of students at my university for many years. I now have answers from over 6,000 moms and dads. These parents were 48 years old on the average when they served in my studies, and since I also ask what religion they were raised in, we can see if they turned out the way *their* parents (the grandparents) intended.

Generally they did; about two-thirds of those raised in a Christian denomination still followed the path trod by their ancestors (e.g., raised a Lutheran, still a Lutheran)--although they were not necessarily active members. (Instead they were the “Stay Away Saints,” as some evangelical leaders call them.) But that means about a third of them had disconnected themselves from their home religion. Some had converted to another, but most of them had become Nones, (e.g., raised a Lutheran, now not anything), which was the category that grew the most--almost 300%!--in my studies from where it had started.<sup>23</sup>

The only other group besides the Nones that ended up in the black, with more members than it started out with, were the Protestant fundamentalists (Baptists, Pentecostals, etcetera), and they only gained 18%. Furthermore, they did it through conversions, because *almost half* of the parents who had been raised in these denominations had left them by the time they reached middle age. (It was one of the poorer “retention” records among the various religions.)

The “departed” departed in all directions, but mostly they went to more liberal denominations, or (especially) they too ended up Nones. The fundamentalists who remained *had* to proselytize to avoid the fate of all the other denominations: i.e., an appreciable net loss. If they had not won lots of converts, they too would have shrunk, because they had a lot of trouble holding onto their own sons and daughters.

Given all that childhood emphasis on the family religion, and given all the enriching rise-and-shine happiness that comes from being a fundamentalist, how come so many people raised in that environment walk away? Some may walk because active membership in those churches requires a lot of commitment. Protestant fundamentalists go to church way more often than anyone else in Canadian Christendom, they read the Bible more, they tithe more, and so on. Also, being a fundamentalist can require giving up various pleasures and life-styles that others enjoy as a matter of course. So some people may leave these demanding religions precisely because of the demands.

But when Bruce Hunsberger and I interviewed university students who had very religious up-bringsings but then left the family religion, and asked them why they did so, they almost never mentioned these things. Instead they mainly said they left because they just couldn’t make themselves believe their church’s teachings any more.

*Believing the Word.* Christian fundamentalism has three great enemies in the struggle to retain its children, judging by the stories its apostates tell: weaknesses in its own teachings, science, and hypocrisy. As for the first, many a fallen-away fundamentalist told us that the Bible simply proved unbelievable on its own merits. It was inconceivable to them that, if an almighty creator of the universe had wanted to give humanity a set of teachings for guidance across the millennia, it would be the material found in the Bible. The Bible was, they said, too often inconsistent, petty, boring, appalling, self-serving, or unbelievable.

Secondly, science made too much sense and had pushed traditional beliefs into a tight corner. When their church insisted that its version of creation, the story of Adam and Eve, the sundry miracles and so on had to be taken on faith, the fledgling apostates eventually found that preposterous. Faith for them was not a virtue, although they could see why their religion taught people it was. It meant surrendering rationality. From its earliest days fundamentalism has drawn a line in the sand over scripture versus science, and some of its young people eventually felt they *had* to step over the line, and then they kept right on going.

Still the decision to leave was almost always wrenching, because it could mean becoming an outcast from one's family and community. Also, fundamentalists are frequently taught that no one is lower, and will burn more terribly in hell, than a person who abandons their true religion. What then gnawed away so mercilessly at the apostates that they could no longer overpower doubt with faith?

Their families will say it was Satan. But we thought, after interviewing dozens of "amazing apostates," that (most ironically) their religious training had made them leave. Their church had told them it was God's *true* religion. That's what made it so right, so much better than all the others. It had the truth, it spoke the truth, it *was* The Truth. But that emphasis can create in some people a tremendous valuing of truth per se, especially among highly intelligent youth who have been rewarded all their lives



for getting “the right answer.” So if the religion itself begins making less and less sense, it fails by the very criterion that it set up to show its superiority.

Similarly, pretending to believe the unbelievable violated the integrity that had brought praise to the amazing apostates as children. Their consciences, thoroughly developed by their upbringing, made it hard for them to bear false witness. So again they were essentially trapped by their religious training. It had worked too well for them to stay in the home religion, given the problems they saw with it.<sup>24</sup>

### *7. Shortfalls in Fundamentalists' Behavior: Hypocrisy*

Ronald J. Sider, a theologian at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, recently followed up Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* with *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*. He observed that, despite Jesus' unequivocal stand on the permanence of marriage, evangelical Christians divorce as often as others do. And despite Jesus' great concern for the poor, the political agenda of prominent evangelical political movements rarely includes justice for the impoverished. The number of unmarried couples living together jumped more in the Bible Belt during the 1990s, Sider pointed out, than in the nation as a whole. Of the evangelical youth who took a “True Love Waits” pledge to abstain from intercourse until marriage, 88% broke it, he reported. Evangelicals proved more likely to object to having African-American neighbors than any other religious group. He reminded his readers that many evangelical leaders either opposed the civil rights movement or else said nothing. And “saved” men were reported just as likely to use pornography, and to physically abuse their wives, as “unsaved” men.<sup>25</sup>

You will note that while Sider sometimes upbraids his fellow evangelicals for being worse than others, he mainly points out that they are not better than average, when he thinks they should be. We have seen that fundamentalists do indeed think they are morally superior. But hypocrisy comes easy to compartmentalized minds.

For example, Matthew's Gospel (7:1) has Jesus saying, "Judge not, that ye be not judged," and you will often hear fundamentalists say, "Hate sin, but love the sinner." When I asked a sample of parents if they believed one should do this, virtually all of the fundamentalists said yes. And yet these same parents only two pages later in the survey were advocating rejection of homosexuals and discrimination against them. Some even agreed with the statement, "In many ways the AIDS disease currently killing homosexuals is just what they deserve." Gentle pieties get shoved back into their files all too easily in fundamentalist minds when a chance to unload on some despised group pops up.

The hypocrisy does not escape the notice of others. I once asked parents who had stressed the family religion *less* to their children than it had been stressed to them as they were growing up why they did not "pass it on." Some said they found church too boring to want to keep going. Others said the church seem preoccupied with money. And of course some said the teachings did not make sense, etcetera. But the reason checked off most often was, "As I grew up, I saw a lot of hypocrisy in the people in my religion."

The most common examples involved a) "the holy people" looking down on others in the community, b) the people who acted like Christians only on Sunday, and c) the intolerance and prejudice found among members of the congregation, including the clergy. These things had usually been spotted many years ago, when the parent was but a teenager, but obviously the spotting had a lasting effect because these parents were now nearing 50. The "whited sepulchers" they found in church drove them away from the family religion, which consequently lost nearly all of the next generation reared by these parents as well.

You can find other examples of such a backlash. Attitudes toward homosexuals have become markedly more tolerant and accepting in North America in a very short period of time. When I asked students what had affected their attitudes toward gays

and lesbians, personally knowing a homosexual proved the most positive influence (as I reported in Chapter 2) and the scientific evidence indicating sexual orientation may have biological determinants (as mentioned in chapter 3) finished second. But in third place came, “I have been turned off by anti-homosexual people.”<sup>26</sup> Virulent opposition to homosexual causes may, in the long run, backfire and hurt the opposers and benefit their intended targets, especially when the attackers claim they are acting on moral grounds and actually “love the sinner” they are smiting.

*Cheap Grace.* Unfortunately, fundamentalist Protestantism may directly promote hypocrisy among its members through one of its major theological principles: that if one accepts Jesus as a personal savior and asks for the forgiveness of one’s sins, one will be saved. But a lot depends on what “accepts” means. Is one’s life transformed? Do good works increase? Is the born-again person more like Jesus, holier? That would be all to the good. But because of some evangelist preachers, the interpretation has grown that all “accepts” means is a one-time verbal commitment. You say the magic words and you go to heaven, no matter what kind of life you lead afterwards. Many have thought that a pretty sweet deal. You’ve conned a free pass through the Pearly Gates from the Almighty *and* you can sin and debauch all you want for the rest of your life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the phrase “cheap grace” to denigrate this interpretation of the New Testament,<sup>27</sup> and other writers have lamented the cheap grace that seems to ooze from some evangelists who seem to keep a sharp eye on the donations that follow. Sider (p. 57) summarizes the analysis of another professor of theology, John G. Stackhouse Jr., as follows: “Many evangelicals lie, cheat, and otherwise sin against others in an ‘already-forgiven bliss’ with an attitude of ‘I’m-cool-’cause-Jesus-loves-me-and-so-I-don’t-owe-you-a-thing.’”

Do only good little girls and boys go to heaven? Or does goodness, as the film star Mae West said many years ago, have nothing to do with it? I asked a large sample

of parents to respond to the following proposition: “If we have faith in Jesus, accepting him as our personal savior and asking forgiveness of our sins, *we will be saved*, no matter what kind of life we live afterwards.” Forty-two percent of the Christian high fundamentalists agreed with that statement. If that indicates the attitude of fundamentalists in general, a huge number of people are swilling in cheap grace. They fully expect that when the saints go marching in, they’re gonna be in that number because they once uttered a magic spell.<sup>28</sup> The lives they’ve lived since are irrelevant, they believe.

*Life Without Guilt.* That helps explain the hypocrisy many people find among “the saved.” But it doesn’t really account for the self-righteousness. After all, you still knows you’ve sinned--even if you have a “Get Out of Hell Free” card tucked up your sleeve. So why do fundamentalists think they sin so much *less* than everyone else? The answer may involve how they have learned to handle guilt, thanks again to their religious instruction.

What do you do when you have done something morally wrong? What are you most likely to do to get over the guilt, to feel forgiven, to be at peace with yourself? Here are some possibilities.

- I ask God for forgiveness, by prayer, going to Confession, or some other religious act.
- I go out and do something nice for someone else, a “third party” not involved in what I did.
- I rationalize the bad act. I tell myself it was not so bad, that I had no choice, etc.
- I talk to someone close, such as a good friend or relative, about what I did.
- I get very busy with some chore, assignment, or job to take my mind off what I did.
- I discuss what I did with those who may have suffered, and make it up to them.
- Nothing; I just forget it.

OK, whatever you typically do, how well does this work? How completely forgiven do you feel after you have done this?

0 = Not at all; I still feel just as guilty as before.

1 = A little less guilty

2 = Somewhat less guilty

3 = Moderately less guilty

4 = Appreciably less guilty

5 = Much less guilty

6 = Completely free of guilt

Most Christian fundamentalists who have answered these questions in my studies said they ask God for forgiveness. And you know what, that makes them feel remarkably cleansed. Their average response on the “How completely forgiven?” question was nearly a 5. Again, it’s just a verbal thing. No admission of wrong-doing to injured parties is required, no restitution, and no change in behavior. But it works really well: Instant Guilt-Be-Gone; just add a little prayer. And why wouldn’t you sin again, since it’s so easy to erase the transgression with your Easy-off, Easy-on religious practice?

Fundamentalists therefore might feel little after-effect of their wrong-doings twitching away in their psyches. They have been to the River Jordan and had all their sins washed away, often on a weekly basis just like doing the laundry. But this very likely contributes to self-righteousness, and let’s remember that self-righteousness appears to be the major releaser of authoritarian aggression. So it could come down to this: “Hello Satan!” Yum, sin! “Get thee behind me, Satan!” Whack-whack-whack!<sup>29</sup>

The non-fundamentalists in my samples did not have it so good. Their major ways of handling guilt were to discuss the immoral act with those who may have

suffered and make it up to them (which they were twice as likely to do as fundamentalist were), or to talk with a friend about what they had done. Whatever they tried, it did not remove most of the guilt; their responses to the “How completely forgiven?” question averaged less than 3. But the residual guilt may help them avoid doing the same thing again, and when someone asks them how moral they are compared to other people, the unresolved, festering guilt may remind them that they are not as moral as they’d like to be.

*A Few Surprising Findings about Fundamentalists.* Since fundamentalists insist the Bible is the revealed word of God and without error, you would think they’d have read it. But you’d often be wrong. I gave a listing of the sixty-six books in the King James Bible to a large sample of parents and asked them, “How many of these have you read, *from beginning to end*? (Example, if you have read *parts* of the Book of Genesis, but not *all* of it, that does not count.)” Nineteen percent of the Christian High fundamentalists said they had never read *any* of the books from beginning to end, which was neatly counterbalanced by twenty percent (but *only* twenty percent) who said they had read all sixty-six. (I tip my hat to anyone who put her head down and plowed through the first nine chapters of Chronicles I. Look it up.)

On the average, the high fundamentalists said they had read about twenty of the books in the Bible--*about a third* of what’s there. So they may insist that the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches, but most of them have never read a lot of what they’re so sure of. They are likely, again, merely repeating something they were told while growing up, or accepted when they “got religion.” Most of them literally don’t know all that they’re talking about. (But they are Biblical scholars compared to others: Most of the *non*-fundamentalist parents had not read even one chapter.)

This explains the results of a multiple-choice “Bible Quiz” I gave university students once. It was a very easy test in which I just asked which book in the Bible contains a famous story or quote. It was so easy because most of the possible answers

I served up would be ridiculous to anyone who knew the Bible even superficially.

For example, where in the Bible would one find the passage, “In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then the angel of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified...to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord”? The Gospel of Luke, The Book of Jeremiah, the Psalms, or Genesis? Since the last three are found in the Old Testament, and almost everyone who goes to a Christian church on Christmas hears this passage during the reading from the Gospels, the answer is pretty obvious, isn’t it?

How about this one: Is the story of Sampson and Delilah in Exodus, the Gospel of Matthew, the Acts of the Apostles, or Judges? (Most students thought Sampson was writ up in Acts, maybe because he was an action-hero.) The other questions involved the location of, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life,” and who said, “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal...If I have all faith as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing...And now faith, hope and love abide, these three: and the greatest of these is love.”

The sample as a whole barely scored above chance on my four-question quiz, which makes sense when you recall that most of their parents had not even read one book in the Bible. But what surprised me no end was how poorly the *fundamentalist* students did: overall they got only a 60%. They did best on that much-advertised quotation from John 3:16--which three-fourths of the fundamentalists got right. But all of the questions were so easy, why didn’t they get an A+ instead of a D or an F?

The answer appears to be that, while they may tell everyone the Bible contains God’s revealed truth to humanity, so everyone should read the Good Book, in truth

they--like an awful lot of their parents--don't know what's in it because they haven't read much of it either.

I've also asked parents who do read the Bible how they decide what to read. Most fundamentalists said they read selected passages, which often were selected *for* them by their church, a Bible study group, the editor of a book of devotional readings, and so on. Very few bother to read all the infallible truth they say God has revealed. If you only get into heaven if you've been devoted enough to read the whole Bible, there'll apparently be no line-up before St. Peter. <sup>30</sup>

*The Most Amazing Discovery of All (to me, anyway).* Isn't there something profoundly strange about the fact that so many fundamentalists have apparently skipped over so much of the Bible? Wouldn't you read the Bible, cover to cover, over and over, until the end of your days, if you *really* thought this was the revealed word of God? Let's remember who that is: **GOD**, damn it all, the almighty, eternal, omnipresent--not to mention all-knowing--creator of the universe. What else could you read that would be as important as God's message, if you believed that's what the Bible is? What could be one-zillionth as important? What on earth is going on? Don't the fundamentalists themselves believe what they preach to everyone else?

Maybe not. When I cover the topic of hypnosis in my introductory psychology course I often describe a series of experiments done with the "Hidden Observer" technique. In a typical study people are hypnotized and then they put their arm in some ice-water. The hypnotist tells them their arm feels fine, and they obligingly report it feels just peachy. But then the hypnotist appeals to a "Hidden Observer" he says is inside the person. If this observer knows that actually the arm is hurting like all blazes, it's to make a certain sign confirming that. A lot of Hidden Observers spill the beans and admit the arm truly does hurt, even though the "public" subject still insists it does not.



I have then, at a later date, asked my students to let their Hidden Observers answer a question about the existence of God. “Does this person (that is, you) have doubts that (s)he was created by an Almighty God who will judge each person and take some into heaven for eternity while casting others into hell forever?” A *third* of the high RWA students checked off an alternative that read, “Yes, (s)he has secret doubts which (s)he has kept strictly to herself/himself that this is really true.” Another twenty percent said they had such doubts, but at least one other person knew about them. That adds up to *most* of the highly authoritarian students.

I don’t think I was actually communicating with tiny Munchkins inside the students’ heads. I suspect the Hidden Observer angle just gives people a chance to admit something without taking full responsibility for admitting it--sort of like, “The devil made me do it.” But I think we see in these numbers a continuing subterranean after-shock from that one-sided search about the existence of God that (we saw in Chapter 3) high RWAs typically engage in. The “search” was so one-sided it didn’t really resolve the question to the searcher’s satisfaction, all verbal assertions notwithstanding. The doubts remain, but are enormously covered up.

This means the whole edifice of belief, Bible and bustle is built on an unresolved fundamental issue in many fundamentalists. Indeed, it’s *the* fundamental issue, isn’t it? But what speaks loudest to me is how secret these doubts are in so many cases. NO ONE knows, for very good reason, and the secret doubters will probably never “come out” of the choir. Instead their faithful presence in church will reassure all the others, including the other secret doubters, that “everyone in our group really believes this.” And they may well carry their secret to the grave.<sup>31</sup>

*Summary: So What Does All This Amount To?*

This chapter has presented my main research findings on religious fundamentalists. The first thing I want to emphasize, in light of the rest of this book,

is that they are highly likely to be authoritarian followers. They are highly submissive to established authority, aggressive in the name of that authority, and conventional to the point of insisting everyone should behave as their authorities decide. They are fearful and self-righteous and have a lot of hostility in them that they readily direct toward various out-groups. They are easily incited, easily led, rather un-inclined to think for themselves, largely impervious to facts and reason, and rely instead on social support to maintain their beliefs. They bring strong loyalty to their in-groups, have thick-walled, highly compartmentalized minds, use a lot of double standards in their judgments, are surprisingly unprincipled at times, and are often hypocrites.

But they are also Teflon-coated when it comes to guilt. They are blind to themselves, ethnocentric and prejudiced, and as closed-minded as they are narrow-minded. They can be woefully uninformed about things they oppose, but they prefer ignorance and want to make others become as ignorant as they. They are also surprisingly uninformed about the things they say they believe in, and deep, deep, deep down inside many of them have secret doubts about their core belief. But they are very happy, highly giving, and quite zealous. In fact, they are about the only zealous people around nowadays in North America, which explains a lot of their success in their endless (and necessary) pursuit of converts.

I want to emphasize also that all of the above is based on studies in which, if the opposite were true instead, that would have been shown. This is not just “somebody’s opinion.” It’s what the fundamentalists themselves said and did. And it adds up to a truly depressing bottom line. Read the two paragraphs above again and consider how much of it would also apply to the people who filled the stadium at the Nuremberg Rallies. I know this comparison will strike some as outrageous, and I’m NOT saying religion turns people into Nazis. But does anybody believe the ardent Nazi followers in Germany, or Mussolini’s faithful in Italy, or Franco’s legions in Spain were a bunch of atheists? Being “religious” does not automatically build a firewall against accepting totalitarianism, and when fundamentalist religions *teach* authoritarian submission,

authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism, they help create the problem. Can we not see how easily religious fundamentalists would lift a would-be dictator aloft as part of a “great movement,” and give it their all?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Because religion is such an opinion-based topic, I had better lay my own cards on the table. I was raised a Catholic and was a strong believer until age 21. After searching other religions I became a “None,” and then an agnostic--believing one cannot say at this point whether the universe had a creator, and if so what that creator’s qualities might be (beyond the all-time highest score on the SAT-Math test). I have enough familiarity with religion that I can pass as a scholar among people who know nothing about the subject. Similarly, I know enough of the Bible to seem well-informed in a room of people who have never opened the book. I don’t think any of this has affected the answers people have given to my surveys, which is what this chapter is about. But as always, you will be the judge of that. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>2</sup> See Witzig, T.F., Jr. (2005) Obsessional beliefs, religious beliefs, and scrupulosity among fundamental Protestant Christians. Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences & Engineering, Vol. 65 (7-B), 3735. US: University Microfilms International. Witzig used the original 20-item version of the Religious Fundamentalism scale, whose scores could range from 20 to 180. Converting the 141.2 mean that he obtained to an equivalent score on the twelve-item revision you answered involves two steps. First one graphically maps the 141.2 (on a 20--180 dimension) onto the equivalent place on a 12-108 dimension (see note 3 of chapter 1). This gives you an 84.7. Second, because the two scales have different sets of items, when the same people take both tests the average item score on the revised version is about 10 percent higher than that on the original version. Multiplying 84.7 by 1.10 gives you an equivalent score of 93.1 on the revised scale.

Howard Crowson of the University of Oklahoma informed me in January, 2007 that a sample of 137 residents of Norman Oklahoma had averaged 60.7 on the Religious Fundamentalism scale (in terms of a -4 to +4 response scale). The sample was recruited by students in his graduate statistics class, and was predictably young (mean = 37.5 years) and well-educated (most had earned at least bachelor's degrees). Fundamentalism correlated .62 with my DOGmatism scale, .47 with Dangerous World scores, and .61 with self-placement on a "Liberal--Conservatism" scale.

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<sup>3</sup> If I had it to do over again, I would have emphasized "militancy" more in the construct of the religious fundamentalist. A militant item made it onto the original 20-item version of the Religious Fundamentalism scale: "God's true followers must remember that he requires them to *constantly* fight Satan and Satan's allies on this earth." But it was not sufficiently connected to the rest of the scale, in our Canadian samples, to make the more cohesive 12-item version I use now. Similarly, "If you really believe in God's true religion, you will use all your might to make it the strongest force in our nation" and the contrait, "When it comes to religion, 'Live and let live' is the best motto. No one religion should dominate in our country" almost connect with the rest of the Religious Fundamentalism scale strongly enough in Canadian samples to be included in the measure--but still fall short. It would be interesting to see if they make a stronger showing in American samples.

Which raises the question of how much Christian fundamentalists in Canada differ from American fundamentalists. As Mark A. Knoll points out in *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans, pages 246-250), one can find both similarities and differences in the history of religion in the two countries. For example, both modern nations were founded by Christian immigrants from Western Europe. But Protestants settled almost all of the thirteen original colonies, whereas in Canada *two* Christianities took root from the start, Catholicism and Protestantism. Some Christian fundamentalists came

directly to Canada from Europe, as in the later migration of the Anabaptist Mennonites and Hutterites. But a lot also came up from the United States, and the biggest difference between fundamentalists in the two countries today may not involve theology or brand names, but strength. A much greater percentage of Americans than Canadians could be called Christian fundamentalists. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> Fundamentalists have been successful, to some extent, at appropriating the label “religious” for only themselves, just as *some* political conservatives have unfairly pilfered “patriot.” Many fundamentalists claim that if one does not believe what they believe and act as they say you should, one is not really religious (e.g. “not a true Christian”). This chapter is about religious fundamentalists, and I do not wish to imply that all religious people are fundamentalists. Most persons in my sample who consider themselves affiliated with an organized religion do not score highly on the Religious Fundamentalism scale, and there are many ways of being religious without even belonging to a religion. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>5</sup> It may be true that the Bible is without error, but the issue is certainly confused by the fact that Christians do not have *a* Bible. Over 7000 different editions of the Bible have been published (Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, 1992, P. 402). Care to argue which one is closest to an “original” version no one can find anymore? As well, the Catholic Bible has about a dozen books in it, the Apocrypha, that you won’t find in a Protestant Bible. And even if there were only one (English) Bible, believers have a never-ending capacity for *interpreting* it in different ways. Consider all the different sects that have balkanized Christianity over the interpretation of one particular, often obscure, passage or another.

Probably the best known “distinctly different” interpretation of seemingly minor Biblical texts is presented by Jehovah’s Witnesses who believe certain verses prohibit blood transfusions--a procedure not even known in Biblical times. Most of these passages however involve prohibitions against *eating* blood, and nobody eats blood during a transfusion any more than someone “eats” a flu shot. Genesis 9:4 for

example goes, “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.” Leviticus 17:11-14 talks about pouring out the blood of an animal before eating it. In Acts 15:20 and 29 the apostle James combines, somewhat mysteriously, idols, fornication, animals that have been strangled, and blood as things one should avoid. Because of the way these passages have been interpreted, hundreds of Jehovah’s Witnesses have died because they (or their parents) refused a blood transfusion.

Probably the most nonrepresentative of all the splinter groups would be the Church of Jesus Christ--Christian (a.k.a the Aryan Nations). This white supremacist group thinks the most significant passage in the Bible, also involving blood, is Genesis 9:5, in which God says to Noah, “And surely your blood of your lives will I require...” Why is this so significant? Because followers believe this means God only loves white people, who show their blood in their faces when they blush. (No, I’m not inventing this; see *Blood in the Face* by James Ridgeway.) (By the way, folks who aren’t white also blush, but it sometimes takes a little sensitivity to notice it, and sensitivity does not appear to be the strong suit of the Aryan Nations.)

To take a slightly less splintered, but still striking example, does Mark 16:18 [“They (Christ’s followers) shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them”] mean--as some Appalachian Christian sects insist--that disciples of Jesus won’t be hurt if they handle poisonous snakes? Most Christians seem to interpret this in some other way, which seems very sensible. But the meaning of the words themselves appears clear as a bell, and the Appalachian rattlesnake-handlers could well claim that other Christians are not following the Bible. (One notes however that even the “true believers” here limit themselves to picking up poisonous snakes, not drinking lethal amounts of cyanide or strychnine. And inevitably many of them die of snake bites, the latest being 48-year old Linda Long who died of a bite received during services on November 5, 2006 at the East London Holiness Church in London, Kentucky. See Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Peter C. Hill, and W. Paul Williamson, *The Psychology of Religious Fundamentalism*, 2005, New York: The Guilford Press, Chapter 5.)

Want an ironic wrinkle? Because the best and oldest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark end with Chapter 16, verse 8, most New Testament scholars agree the concluding verses 9--20 that you will surely find in your Bible were tacked on by a scribe early in the second century. Defenders of your Bible say these verses must have been lost for a while by the early church, and then discovered and put back in their original place. But there's no evidence that such a slip-up occurred, and stylistic differences and syntactical jerks make it pretty clear the added verses were not recovered from an earlier manuscript, but were instead added on by "someone else."

Without the additional verses, the account of the Resurrection found in Mark is pretty unconvincing--no one sees Jesus--whereas verses 9--20 bring "Mark's" Gospel (the first one compiled) closer to the later Gospels of Luke and John. But the part in the add-on about handling serpents and drinking poison (Mark 16:18) comes straight out of left field, in terms of the other Gospels (although Acts 28: 3-7 says that Paul was unharmed by a venomous snake bite). So in all probability, those rattlesnakes have been handled, and a lot of people have died, because of a dishonest scriptural editor nineteen hundred years ago. (Let all editors beware!)

Of course, the vast majority of Christians have very ordinary, straightforward interpretations of Biblical texts. These can nevertheless give rise to considerable disagreement. What precisely did Jesus mean when he said "Thou are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)? The Pope had one opinion; Henry VIII another. But have you ever heard two Freudians argue over the interpretation of a dream? And how many kookie theories of psychotherapy do you suppose there are?

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<sup>6</sup> One could date evangelicalism in America back to early 19<sup>th</sup> century revivalism, or even earlier. See George M. Marsden's *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*, 1991, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>7</sup> This is a good place to describe my parent studies for those who join me in caring about methodological issues. Let's focus on the big study of religion I did in October, 2005 that provides much of the data in this chapter. I made a long, eight page (i.e. sixteen printed sides) booklet available to students in my own introductory psychology class and two other classes. The students were told they could take a booklet (and two answer sheets) home to their parents, if they wished. If both parents (or one parent and another "old" relative) filled out the anonymous survey within a month, the student would receive credits worth 4% of his grade in the course. All 500 of the booklets I had printed were claimed, and most of the parents came through for their kids. Seven hundred and fifty-six of the one thousand answer sheets were returned (which is a little lower than usual in these studies, but the booklet was the longest I ever sent home, and took about two hours to complete). The vast majority of the answers came from the students' mother and father.

Some of the answer sheets had to be discarded immediately because the parent had not replied to most of the questions, or had given stereotypical answers (e.g., all "neutrals"), or the responses came from a sibling rather than a member of the older generation. Altogether I pitched thirty-one bubble sheets from the stack for these reasons. I then screened each remaining answer sheet looking for careless answering, which you can judge by seeing how often the respondent contradicted earlier responses on the same scale. A lot of contradiction usually means the parent just blackened bubbles at random to make it look as though they had answered the survey. As well (and this was my fault for asking so many questions) some of the parents clearly lost their way on the bubble sheet, especially toward the end of the booklet. You can tell this by the frequency with which they put down an answer that wasn't possible, given the question (e.g. a "Yes or No" question to be answered with a 1 or 0, but the "8-bubble" was blackened). When the rest of the answer sheet made sense, I tried to figure out where the respondent had gone off the track and slide the misplaced answers up or down a notch. But sometimes that was impossible, so I chucked the answer sheet from the study. Altogether I pitched another fifty-seven



sheets for these reasons, which is more than usual in these studies and again attributable to the lengthy booklet. This was all done “blindly,” before any of the sheets had been read by the optical scanner.

By now I was down to 668 respondents. Setting aside surveys from parents who said they were Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etcetera, the sample size became 638. The top 25% of the Religious Fundamentalism distribution scored over 71 on that scale (N = 160, 89 of whom were women). I call these parents “high fundamentalists” in the narrative.

How representative is the 638-person sample of any larger group? Well they certainly don’t accurately represent the Canadian public, nor that in my province. They are 48.5 years old on the average and went to school for an average of 13.9 years. [The 160 high fundamentalists averaged slightly lower in age (47.7 years) and education (13.7).] But the overall sample probably provides a reasonably good cross-section of the parents whose children attend the large public university in my province. I never have found a self-selection bias for RWA, for example, in these parent studies, and while I worry that some students may fill out the questionnaires themselves, my past inquiries about this in a super-anonymous setting have revealed only about 2% do so. If you think parents of university students are reasonably normal folks, then this is probably a reasonably representative draw of a rather normal population.

Of course a Canadian sample is not an American sample. But one would expect the RWA Scale and Religious Fundamentalism *relationships* found within Canadian samples to appear within American ones. They almost always have before, and usually are a little larger in the USA because of the greater range in scores provided by more fundamentalists. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>8</sup> Why the difference between 85 percent and 72 percent? For one thing, there are fewer evangelicals (139) by Barna’s criterion than high fundamentalists (160) in the

sample, so at most only (139/160=) 87 percent of the high fundamentalists could possibly be evangelicals. Beyond that, a certain number of high scorers on the Religious Fundamentalism scale achieved only near-perfect scores on the seven items used to identify evangelicals, instead of the “7 out of 7” required. The item most frequently “missed” was the one dealing with salvation and grace, about which evangelicals disagree, as we shall see. Put that aside, and the 72 percent becomes 80 percent. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>9</sup> Being “born again” did *not* match up with being an evangelical or a fundamentalist. I used the two items Barna has developed to identify born-again Christians, viz., “Have you made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today,” and “Do you believe that when you die you will go to heaven because you have confessed your sins and accepted Jesus Christ as your savior?” *Most* (54%) of the parents answered yes to both questions. Lots of people are “born again,” but many of them would not qualify as evangelicals nor do they usually pile up big scores on the fundamentalism scale. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>10</sup> “Well of course they do,” you might be saying. “Both scales have a lot of religious stuff on them.” Good point. But (to repeat material from note 7 of Chapter 1) several lines of evidence indicate that the religious items on the RWA scale got onto the scale because, more than anything else, they tapped sentiments of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionalism. That is, religion turns up on a measure of right-wing authoritarianism in North America because that’s one of the aspects of life in which authoritarianism is now quite prevalent. If this were not the case, the correlation between these items and the rest of the scale would be much lower and they would not have “made the cut” for getting onto the RWA scale.

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<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the point about generalizations always having exceptions, one can think of some very unauthoritarian Baptists, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and ex-president Jimmy Carter. The first socialist premier in Canada, who pioneered

medicare and other programs in Canada's social "safety net," was the Baptist minister Tommy Douglas. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>12</sup> See Bob Altemeyer, "Why Do Religious Fundamentalists Tend to be Prejudiced?" *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2003, 13, 17-28.

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<sup>13</sup> The Promise Keepers quote is from Bill McCartney with David Halbrook, *Sold Out: Becoming Man Enough to Make a Difference*, 1997, Nashville: Word Publishers, and was given by Donald J. Sider in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, 2005, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, on pages 25-26. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>14</sup> Want some numbers to get an idea how strong these generalizations are? In that 2005 study of 638 parents of university students I described in note 7, Religious Fundamentalism correlated .74 with Right-Wing Authoritarianism (an "almost unheard of" strong relationship), .89 with Barna's measure of being an evangelical (an even bigger "almost unheard of" relationship), .72 with scores on the Religious Ethnocentrism scale (yet another almost unheard of relationship), and (THUD!) .19 with scores on the Manitoba Ethnocentrism scale that measures racial and ethnic prejudice (a weak relationship). (See note 12 of Chapter 1 to see where these labels came from.) The size of the last correlation is hardly alarming, but the question I have tried to answer is, why is there a *positive* correlation between being a religious fundamentalist and being racially prejudiced--as there has been in study after study? Why are "holy people" *more* prejudiced than "unholy people"? Shouldn't holy people be less prejudiced than most?

Recently Gary Leak and Darrel Moreland at Creighton University in Omaha tested my hunch that *religious* ethnocentrism plays a pivotal role in the appearance of non-religious prejudices in fundamentalists. Using a mediated hierarchical regression analysis of Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Ethnocentrism scores from nearly 300 students to predict general racial prejudice, hostility toward homosexuals and prejudice toward African-Americans, they found religious ethnocentrism

mediated fundamentalists' other hostilities so powerfully that controlling for it always appreciably reduced the fundamentalist-prejudice relationship. In all cases, religious ethnocentrism proved to be the mediator in the relationship, not fundamentalism. After I learned of their study I performed their analysis on my sample of 638 parents' answers to the Manitoba Ethnocentrism scale and the Attitudes toward Homosexuals scale, and found the same thing. A considerable amount of fundamentalists' non-religious prejudices thus are attributable to their strong religious prejudices. Learning to dislike people on religious grounds seemingly has powerful consequences for how we react to people who are different in other ways. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>15</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 1994, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., pages ix, 3. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>16</sup> I recently looked to see if Christian fundamentalists had a double standard about Mormons proselytizing door-to-door. They did *not*. Most of them (52%) said no restraints should be placed on such activity, and only a very few (6%) said it should be forbidden. So it is *not* true that fundamentalists use double standards in every judgment they make.

One is always tempted to make such over-generalizations when a string of findings all come out pointing in the same direction. Exceptions exist, in my own studies and possibly in others', to most of the conclusions I am drawing here. Fundamentalists/authoritarians do not *always* think illogically, think everything is our greatest problem, hold starkly contradictory ideas, act without integrity, respond dogmatically, and so on. But it is easy to find situations in which they do, compared with others, so with the bulk of the data on one side, I draw the conclusions I do. Thus in this case, I have often found that fundamentalists/authoritarians use double standards in their judgments. I have moreover tried several times to see if their opposites do the same thing when given the chance, and it is much harder to find evidence that they do. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>17</sup> For a clear explanation of the ways in which creation science and intelligent design run afoul of accumulated evidence and fail to make the grade as sciences, see Francis Collins' *The Language of God*, 2006, New York: Free Press. Dr. Collins, an evangelical Christian, heads the Human Genome Project in Washington D. C., and along with many other scientists has no difficulty reconciling his deeply held religious beliefs with a total acceptance of the theory of evolution. David G. Myers of Hope College, a man of strong faith and the author of the textbook I assign my introductory psychology students, would be another example. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>18</sup> For the record, Darwin never said humans evolved from *monkeys*, even though many other people besides fundamentalists think he did. Even with the limited knowledge available to him 150 years ago, Darwin realized that humanity's ancestors had long separated from the evolutionary path that led to monkeys. Instead, he correctly inferred that the "anthropomorphous apes" (chimpanzees, gibbons, gorillas, orangutans, and ourselves) had descended from an ancient anthropomorphous forerunner (Charles Darwin, *The Origin of the Species and the Descent of Man*, New York: The Modern Library, p. 518-519.)

Our "grandma" and "grandpa" were not monkeys or chimps but australopithecines, whose fossil record now goes back several million years. It is one thing to look at a rhesus monkey and say, "We could never have come from that." It is another thing to look at "Lucy" and say the same thing--and fundamentalists would go much farther out on a limb and deny the relevance of even *Homo erectus*. But of course most fundamentalists probably have no knowledge of such discoveries which--while they have an endless capacity for igniting controversy among paleoanthropologists--long ago supplied many possible "missing links" between humans and our "recent" predecessors. The problem is not, "*Where* is the link?" but "*Which one* was it at this point in time?" That said, the total primate fossil record is by no means complete; fossils only form under certain rare conditions, and exploration for them is still going on.

As for evolution being “just a theory,” people who say this are using “theory” in the sense of a theory being an untested hypothesis, a hunch. When scientists talk about the theory of evolution, they mean “theory” in the sense of a set of testable propositions that have been shown to explain and predict a lot of things. Thus you have Newton’s theory of gravity (and on a broader scale, Einstein’s). Does anybody think gravity is unproven because there is a theory of gravity? If so, I hope they don’t try stepping off a tall building.

In just the same way, virtually every scientist working in a relevant field believes evolution occurred and is still occurring. Evolution itself is not a hypothesis, not a hunch. Evolution is as accepted as a fact in science as the belief that if you lift a pencil now and let go, it will fall. (Go ahead, try this, even at home.) And if you want a demonstration that evolution still occurs, get yourself infected by one of the treatment-resistant bacteria that have evolved and spread since the introduction of antibiotics. (No, don’t try this, anywhere.) [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>19</sup> Hence I was not surprised to read on December 3, 2006 that Bishop Adoyo, the head of the Pentecostal Church in Kenya, wants the National Museum in Nairobi to place its priceless collection of hominid fossils in a back room where the public cannot see them. He explained that these fossils support the theory of evolution, which his religion opposes. The bishop threatened to organize protests to force the museum to comply if it did not agree to his request. The bishop’s message seems crystal clear: We don’t believe this, so we don’t want the public to see the evidence that we are wrong. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>20</sup> You may understandably be wondering where I get off putting students’ religious beliefs to such a test as part of a psychology experiment, so let me tell you more about the study. The students knew when they signed up for the experiment that it involved “interpreting certain passages from the Bible.” They also knew the study happened in two phases held one week apart. In the first part they read the four Gospel accounts,

the confrontational summary, and gave their reaction. Then they were given a copy of the Gospel accounts used, the confrontation, and the survey they had just answered to take home. I asked the students to discuss the matter with whomever they wished (parents, friends, ministers or priests were specifically mentioned), reconsider their answers, respond to the survey once more, and turn in their “second opinion.”

I did this to make sure the experimental procedure did not have undue influence over them, and to give their trusted sources of information the last word. The students were also given the phone numbers of several on-campus counseling services and the university chaplains in case they found the experiment upsetting. The precautions proved unnecessary, as opinions almost never changed from Phase 1 to Phase 2. I did the experiment, not to try to convert gullible university students to a life of agnostic debauchery--which I thought from the outset extremely unlikely to happen--but to see if my DOG scale could predict who would modify their beliefs about the Bible and who would not. (It did.) See Bob Altemeyer, “Dogmatic Behavior among Students: Testing a New Measure of Dogmatism,” 2002, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 142, 713-721.

Mike Friedman and his colleagues at Texas A&M University recently used the resurrection accounts and the confronting paragraph as part of a study of fundamentalists’ reactions to threat. All of the high fundamentalist students in this condition of the experiment stated on the pretest that the Bible was free of inconsistency or contradiction, and 31% of them still insisted it was after reading the confrontation. The rest admitted inconsistencies existed, saying they were due to translation errors (44%) or else were unimportant to the main point (25%). The investigators did not collect data on personal dogmatism, so we do not know if the unyielding believers were more dogmatic than the believers who budged, which they had been in my study. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>21</sup> Religious fundamentalists do not just open their pocketbooks to the causes and politicians of their choice. Several studies have found that religious people give more



money and time to charities than nonreligious people do. The most charitable region in Canada, according to studies of tax returns, is the heavily Mennonite section of my province, Manitoba. Wondering if this might reflect tithing to support their own churches, I asked a big sample of parents what percentage of their income they gave to charity, excluding any support of their church, missionaries, religious schools, and so on. The fundamentalist average equaled 3.2 percent, while the rest of the sample gave only about half as much, 1.7 percent. If you think the fundamentalists were exaggerating so as to look good, how did they know what the rest of the sample would answer? [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>22</sup> Bruce Hunsberger and I found in our study of active American atheists that the few members of that sample who said they had “advertised” their atheism through such things as bumper stickers found that it attracted a lot of parking tickets and vandalism.

Some highly religious people are outraged that atheists would publicly declare their lack of faith. Accordingly many of the people who belong to atheist associations hide their beliefs from most others, knowing from experience it could affect their employment, membership in other clubs, and social connections. It reminds me of the reaction of many high RWAs when homosexuals began to come out: “Don’t these people know they’re supposed to be ashamed of what they are?” That in turn reminded me of the reaction of many White supremacists to the civil rights movement: “Don’t these n----- know they’re inferior and should never be treated as our equals?” Fortunately, eventually, minorities can overcome these reactions. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>23</sup> This is just one example of how organized religion is slowly dying in the Western world. In Europe, polls reveal, hardly anyone goes to church every week any more. The United States, with about 32% of its adult population regularly attending weekly services, is one of the most “religious” countries in the West. See Bob Altemeyer, “The Decline of Organized Religion in Western Civilization,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 2004, 14, 77-89. [Back to Chapter](#)



<sup>24</sup> Another factor may play a considerable role in creating amazing apostates in fundamentalist sects. Their religion may have tried very hard to “put the fear of the Lord” into them. But the apostates may not have been as fearful as their brothers and sisters and peers who stayed. They may have been more willing to take the risk of going it alone. Certainly it would take considerable courage to cut all those ties, throw away the sure ticket to Heaven, and start over from scratch facing the emptiness alone.

Speaking of fear, Bruce Hunsberger and I also interviewed university students who had come from *nonreligious* backgrounds but were now “amazing believers.” They had, it seemed, usually become religious for emotional reasons as a way of dealing with fear of death, despair, and personal failure, and been “brought to Christ” by religious friends and youth groups. These conversions seldom happened for intellectual reasons. Frequently, in fact, the amazing believers were given the Bible after making their commitment to Jesus so they could “find out what you now believe.” See Bob Altemeyer and Bruce Hunsberger, *Amazing Conversions: Why Some Turn to Faith and Others Abandon Religion*, 1997, Amherst, N.Y., Prometheus Books.

For a conversion from atheism to evangelical Christianity brought about by intellectual reasons, see *The Language of God* by the amazing believer, Francis Collins. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>25</sup> Donald J. Sider, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Conscience*, 2005, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, Chapter 1. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>26</sup> See Bob Altemeyer, “Changes in Attitudes toward Homosexuals,” 2001, *Journal of Homosexuals*, 42, 63-75. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>27</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Protestant theologian who joined an underground anti-Nazi movement as Hitler marched Germany to war. He was arrested and eventually executed in 1945 shortly before Allied forces liberated the camp in

which he had been held. His analysis of cheap grace appeared in his 1937 book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, which was translated into English in 1959 by SCM Press of New York. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>28</sup> Being sensitive to direction-of-wording effects, I also posed the question in a “negative” form, where belief in cheap grace would require *disagreement*: “If we are born again but *continue* to sin, we are NOT saved. God will not accept sinful persons, no matter what they have faith in.” A third of the Christian high fundamentalists disagreed with this. So what was the real level of belief in cheap grace in this sample? Somewhere between 33 and 42 percent. But either way, tis a good-sized crowd.

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<sup>29</sup> A political columnist for a Winnipeg newspaper, Frances Russell, wrote an article in 2005 on the religious right in which she said the movement seemed intolerant, dogmatic, and a threat to democracy. She expected a negative reaction from fundamentalists, but she was quite unprepared for the tooth-and-claw hostility that erupted. Besides sending the inevitable messages to Ms. Russell hoping/promising that she would roast in hell forever, fundamentalists organized letter-writing and telephone campaigns (something they do very well) to the paper’s editor and publisher demanding she be fired. Since there is a wee chance some fundamentalists will be upset by what I have reported about them here, they probably want to know whom to contact to get me fired. But they’ve missed their chance, since I now stand on the very brink of retirement. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>30</sup> George W. Bush is reported to have read the Bible in its entirety twice. So he might do very well on the following pop quiz which is based--not on Habakkuk, Haggai, Nahum and other books in the Bible that most people never heard of, but on the New Testament and the books from the Old Testament that people are more likely to read.

1. Which Gospel was originally Part I of a two-part account of the origins of Christianity? (Look up “Acts” to get the answer.)

2. After God finally convinced Moses to go back to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh release the Jews, who met Moses at an inn and tried to kill him?
3. If a “cubit” was--as is commonly inferred--the distance from a man’s elbow to the end of his longest finger, or about eighteen inches, about how big was Solomon’s magnificent temple? (A) A duplex apartment building, (B) A medium-size circus tent, (C) An indoor football stadium, or (D) An ocean liner.)
4. What prayer did Jesus instruct his disciples *not* to say in public but “enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matthew 6:6)?
5. How many “Of every clean beast...the male and his female” did God command Noah to take into the ark? (See Genesis 7:2 and Genesis 7:8, 9; see also Genesis 8:20.)
6. Where does God tell the Hebrews, “Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord God, the God of Israel,” and “The first of the first fruits of thy land thou shalt bring unto the house of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not see the a kid in his mother’s milk”? (A) The ceremonial and dietary laws in Deuteronomy, (B) The Epistle to the Hebrews, (C) They are two of the commandments God gave Moses, who wrote them down on stone tablets, (D) The admonitions of the prophet Amos, (E) The epistle of Andy.
7. From which tree in the Garden of Eden were Adam and Eve forbidden to eat? (A) The Tree of Life, (B) The big apple tree in the middle, (C) The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, (D) It’s not named, but it’s whatever tree the snake was in). (See Genesis 2:17.)
8. Which of the following epistles did the Apostle Paul *not* write: (A) Romans, (B) II Corinthians, (C) I, Claudius, (D) Galatians, (E) It’s a trick question; most scholars of the New Testament agree Paul wrote all of these.
9. Which of these is specifically stated in the Bible regarding God’s “anointed one” (“the Mesiha” in Arameic) whose right hand God would hold, who would

subdue nations before him? (A) That his name would be Yeshua {"Jesus" in translation}, (B) That he was King Cyrus of Persia, (C) That he would come from Galilee, or (D) The name of his mother would be "Miriam").

10. When Jesus said in Luke 24:46, just before he ascended to heaven, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day," which passage in the Hebrew scriptures was Jesus referring to that prophesied he would suffer, die, and rise from the dead on the third day?

And since you're such a good reader, even of long endnotes, I'll give you an Extra Credit question.

11. It says in Leviticus 20:13 that (male) homosexuals should be put to death. What other activity does the Bible indicate should be punished by death (by stoning) in Numbers 15: 32-36?

[Look in Exodus 4:24 for the very surprising answer to the question of who tried to kill Moses before he could get back to Egypt. The answer to Question 3 is "A;" Solomon's temple was about as big as a duplex. (See 1 Kings 6:2.) Look in Exodus 34 for the amazing answer to Question 6. The answer to Question 8 should be easy for anyone who's read the New Testament; there is no Epistle to Claudius. Look in Isaiah 45:1 for the interesting answer to Question 9. The answer to the Extra Credit question: picking up sticks on the Sabbath would get you well and truly stoned, once and for all, if authorities took the Bible literally.]

If you know the answer to Question 10, a lot of people who have never been able to find that prophecy will be stupendously grateful. Various long-shots have been cited, such as Jonah 1:17 ("Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.") But that's hardly a prediction of what happened to Jesus, and you'll have trouble getting three days and three nights squeezed into the approximate 40 hours between a Friday

afternoon and a Sunday morning. Other, even longer shots have been offered up: Psalm 30:3; 41:10; 68:20; 118:17, and Hosea 6:2. Look them up and see what you think.

(How does one explain the fact--if the Gospels are true--that *Jesus* thought his death and resurrection fulfilled a prophecy that in fact did not exist?)

All the quotes here, by the way, are from the King James version of the Bible, which scholars tend to think is inaccurate in many respects, but which conservative Protestants prefer. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>31</sup>The fact that so many authoritarians appear to have Top Secret doubts about the very existence of God brings all their other loudly professed beliefs into question. For example do they really believe, down to the soles of their feet and the bottom of their souls, that they are going to continue living after death, and indeed go to heaven for all eternity? I know they say they absolutely and positively, 110 percent believe this, but these are people much given to fear and they may secretly be just as terrified of death as others are--maybe more so.

Do you remember when the televangelist Oral Roberts told the world God had revealed that he would “call Oral home” if the faithful did not contribute \$8 million dollars to Oral’s operations in Tulsa? The point is, Oral did *not* want to die. That’s why he kept asking people to send him more dough. Well think about it. If you believe Oral believed that God had threatened him with an eternity of utter happiness if he did not raise the \$8 million, why didn’t Oral just keep God’s ultimatum to himself and hold the Almighty to his word?

Roberts raised \$9.1 million by God’s deadline--and one does mean “deadline” apparently--and sure enough God has not called him home yet. He (Oral) did break his hip in March, 2006. He was a faith healer in the early days of his ministry, but he hied himself bimby fast to a hospital to get his hip fixed. [Back to Chapter](#)

## Chapter Five

### Authoritarian Leaders

Suppose you were applying for a leadership position in a right-wing religious/political movement--a movement hell-bent on gaining total power so it could impose its beliefs and rules of conduct on everyone forever. (I realize this may not be your No. 1 career choice, but work with me a bit here.) As part of your application you're asked to take an aptitude test. Indicate whether you dislike, or favor, the sentiments below on a -4 to +4 basis.

This country would be better off if we cared less about how equal all people are.

Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others.

Some people are just more worthy than others.

These items are from the Social Dominance Orientation scale, and if you want the job of Dictator For Life you'll agree with them, coming out foursquare *against* equality. In turn, you will *disagree* with:

If people were treated more equally, we would have fewer problems in this country.

We should try to treat one another as equals as much as possible.

Increased social equality.

Felicia Pratto of the University of Connecticut and Jim Sidanius at UCLA presented the test in 1994 as a measure of belief in social *inequality*.<sup>1</sup> Whereupon Sam McFarland at the University of Western Kentucky used their scale and twenty-one others in a magnificent "pitting experiment" aimed at finding the best predictors of *prejudice*. He discovered that only two of the 22 tests he threw "into the pit" to fight it out could predict prejudice at all well: the Social Dominance Orientation scale, and the RWA scale.

I repeated McFarland's experiment and got the same results. Generally, the Social Dominance scale predicted such unfairness better than the RWA scale did, and so gets the silver medal in the Prejudice Olympics over the bronze medal I awarded the RWA scale in chapter 1. Furthermore I found that these two scales could, between them, explain *most* of the prejudice my subjects revealed against racial minorities, women, homosexuals, and so on. Furthermore furthermore, social dominance scores and RWA scale scores correlated only weakly with each other--about .20. This "Lite" correlation has a ton of significance that we shall deal with later. But in the first instance it meant persons who scored highly on the social dominance test were seldom high RWAs, and high RWAs were almost never social dominators.

That's why the two tests could predict so much *together*: each was identifying a different clump of prejudiced persons--sort of like, "You round up the folks in the white sheets over there, and I'll get the pious bigots over here." So it looks like most really prejudiced people come in just two flavors: social dominators and high RWAs. Since dominators long to control others and be authoritarian dictators, and high RWAs yearn to follow such leaders, most social prejudice was therefore connected to authoritarianism.<sup>2</sup> It was one of those discoveries, thanks to Sam McFarland, that happen now and then in science when a great deal of This, That and the Next Thing suddenly boils down to something very simple. Most social prejudice is linked to authoritarianism; it's found in one kind of authoritarian, or its counterpart.

You don't have to be a genius to grasp why someone would want to lead armies of people dedicated to doing whatever he wants. So as I said in the Introduction, social scientists have concentrated on understanding authoritarian followers, because the followers constitute the bigger problem in the long run and present the bigger mystery. But after Pratto and Sidanius developed a measure that could identify dominating personalities, and as we came to understand the followers better and better, attention naturally shifted to figuring out the leaders, and especially how the two meshed together. This chapter will tell you what we know so far.

*Similarities and Differences Between Social Dominators and Authoritarian Followers*

Social dominators and high RWAs have several other things in common besides prejudice. They both tend to have conservative economic philosophies--although this happens much more often among the dominators than it does among the “social conservatives”--and they both favor right-wing political parties. If a dominator and a follower meet for the first time in a coffee shop and chat about African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, Jews, Arabs, homosexuals, women’s rights, free enterprise, unions leaders, government waste, rampant socialism, the United Nations, and which political party to support in the next election, they are apt to find themselves in pleasant, virtual non-stop agreement.

This agreement will probably convince the follower, ever scanning for a kindred spirit who will confirm her beliefs, that she and the dominator lie side by side in the same pod of peas. But huge differences exist between these two parts of an authoritarian system in (1) their desire for power, (2) their religiousness, (3) the roots of their aggression, and (4) their thinking processes--which we shall now explore. Then we’ll talk about how people become social dominators, and after that come back to that “highly significant” little correlation between RWA and social dominance. Along the way we’ll consider several experiments that show how nasty things get when the two kinds of authoritarian personalities get their acts together.

*Desire for power.* Imagine that you are a student taking introductory psychology. (Some of you may be overcome with bliss at the thought--especially the part about being 18 again: “My knees work!” Others have recoiled with horror at memories of things past from intro psych, such as “proactive interference.”--speaking of memories of things past.) (That’s a joke for psychologists.) (You’re not missing much; it’s not very funny.) (In fact it positively smells.) While serving in a survey experiment you come across the following question: “How much *power, ability to make adults do what you want*, do you want to have when you are 40 years old?”



- 0 = It does not matter at all to me. If I have *no power* over adults when I am 40, I will not care.
- 1 = I would be content having *a small amount of power* over others, say over a few people at work.
- 2 = I would like to have *a moderate amount of power* over others, such as running a department of 40 people.
- 3 = I would like to have *a large amount of power* over others, such as controlling a good-sized company.
- 4 = I want to have *a great deal of power* in life, making decisions that affect thousands and thousands of lives.
- 5 = My goal is to have *a very great deal of power*, being one of the real “movers and shakers” in our country.

So, how much power do you want? Social dominators in each of two studies I ran wanted to have much more than most people did. Authoritarian followers did *not*.

Now people can want power for different reasons. If you wanted to save the planet from the destructiveness of its dominant species, you would need to make (for example) oil companies do some things they definitely do not want to do. Power as a means to a laudable end is not a bad thing--although we have to acknowledge that almost everyone thinks he's the good guy, and if you take your stand on the slope of Mount Righteous Cause, it has proven as slippery as greased glass.

But social dominators will run to take their chances on that slippery slope. They thrill to power in and of itself. They want to control others, period. (Make that, “exclamation mark!”) Their name says it all. And they come bundled with a shock of nasty attitudes that completes the package. The following items are from a Personal Power, Meanness, and Dominance Scale I have developed, to which high social dominators respond in very predictable ways, compared with most other people. Look over this “Power Mad” scale to get an idea of what goes on in dominators’ minds.

### The Personal Power, Meanness and Dominance Scale

It's a mistake to interfere with the "law of the jungle." Some people were meant to dominate others. (Agree)

Would you like to be a kind and helpful person to those in need? (Disagree)

"Winning is not the first thing; it's the *only* thing." (Agree)

The best way to lead a group under your supervision is to show them kindness, consideration, and treat them as fellow workers, not as inferiors. (Disagree)

If you have power in a situation, you should use it however you have to, to get your way. (Agree)

Would you be cold-blooded and vengeful, if that's what it took to reach your goals? (Agree)

Life is NOT governed by the "survival of the fittest." We should let compassion and moral laws be our guide. (Disagree)

Do money, wealth, and luxuries mean a lot to you? (Agree)

It is much better to be loved than to be feared. (Disagree)

Do you enjoy having the power to hurt people when they anger or disappoint you? (Agree)

It is much more important in life to have integrity in your dealings with others than to have money & power. (Disagree)

It's a dog-eat-dog world where you have to be ruthless at times. (Agree)

Charity (i.e. giving somebody something for nothing) is admirable, *not* stupid. (Disagree)

Would you like to be known as a gentle and forgiving person? (Disagree)

Do you enjoy taking charge of things and making people do things your way? (Agree)

Would it bother you if other people thought you were mean and pitiless? (Disagree)

Do you like other people to be afraid of you? (Agree)

Do you hate to play practical jokes that can sometimes really hurt people? (Disagree)

It would bother me if I intimidated people, and they worried about what I might do next. (Disagree)

I will do my best to destroy anyone who deliberately blocks my plans and goals. (Agree)

Social dominance scores correlate very strongly<sup>3</sup> with these answers to the Power Mad scale. High scorers are inclined to be intimidating, ruthless, and vengeful. They scorn such noble acts as helping others, and being kind, charitable, and forgiving. Instead they would rather be feared than loved, and be viewed as mean, pitiless, and vengeful. They love power, including the power to hurt in their drive to the top. Authoritarian followers do not feel this way because they seldom have such a drive to start with.

So, are you lucky enough to know some social dominators personally? It's uncharitable to describe them in these terms. But this is how they describe themselves, compared to others, when answering the Power Mad scale anonymously.

In a similar vein, remember those "group cohesiveness" items in chapter 3, such as, "For any group to succeed, all its members have to give it their complete loyalty." We saw that authoritarian followers endorse such sentiments. But social dominators do not. Oh sure, they want *their followers* to be super loyal to the group they lead. But they themselves are not really in it so much for the group or its cause, but more for themselves. It's all about them, not about a higher purpose. If trouble arises, don't be surprised if they start playing "Every man for himself" and even sell out the group to save their own skin.<sup>4</sup>

*Empathy.* Here's an easy one. How empathetic, how compassionate do you think dominators are? Not very, right? You got it, for they agree with statements such as "I don't spend a lot of time feeling sorry for people less fortunate than me," and "I have a 'tough' attitude toward people having difficulty: 'That's their problem, not mine.'" And they *disagree* with, "I feel very sorry for people who are treated unfairly" and "I have a lot of compassion for people who have gotten the bad breaks in life." For high social dominators "sympathy" indeed falls, as the saying goes, between "ship" and "syphilis" in the dictionary. (Well, maybe that's not the exact saying, but this is a family web-site.)

*Religion.* High RWAs, we know, strongly tend to be religious fundamentalists. Social dominators do not. In fact, like most people in my samples, most dominators only go to church for marrying and burying. This would be “Three strikes and ye’re out” as far as the religiously ethnocentric high RWAs are concerned except for one thing. Dominators can easily *pretend* to be religious, saying the right words and claiming a deep personal belief and, as we saw in Chapter 3, gullible right-wing authoritarians will go out on almost any limb, walk almost any plank to believe them.

So some non-religious dominators, as part of the act, *do* go to church regularly, for manipulative reasons. This amounts to lying, but I hope you don’t think social dominators would never, ever, ever, tell a lie. Here are the items from another measure I’ve concocted, called the Exploitive Manipulative Amoral Dishonesty (“Exploitive-MAD”) scale. Again, high social dominators’ responses, compared with others, really open your eyes.

#### The Exploitive Manipulative Amoral Dishonesty Scale

You know that most people are out to “screw” you, so you have to get them first when you get the chance. (Agree)

All in all, it is better to be humble and honest than important and dishonest. (Disagree)

There is really no such thing as “right” and “wrong.” It all boils down to what you can get away with. (Agree)

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and never do anything unfair to someone else. (Disagree)

One of the most useful skills a person should develop is how to look someone straight in the eye and lie convincingly. (Agree)

It gains a person nothing if he uses deceit and treachery to get power and riches. (Disagree)

Basically, people are objects to be quietly and coolly manipulated for your own benefit. (Agree)

Deceit and cheating are justified when they get you what you really want. (Agree)

One should give others the benefit of the doubt. Most people are trustworthy if you have faith in them. (Disagree)

The best skill one can have is knowing the “right move at the right time”: when to “soft-sell” someone, when to be tough, when to flatter, when to threaten, when to bribe, etc. (Agree)

Honesty is the best policy in all cases. (Disagree)

The best reason for belonging to a church is to project a good image and have contact with some of the important people in your community. (Agree)

No one should do evil acts, even when they can “get away with them” and make lots of money. (Disagree)

There’s a sucker born every minute, and smart people learn how to take advantage of them. (Agree)

The end does NOT justify the means. If you can only get something by unfairness, lying, or hurting others, then give up trying. (Disagree)

Our lives should be governed by high ethical principles and religious morals, not by power and greed. (Disagree)

It is more important to create a good image of yourself in the minds of others than to actually be the person others think you are. (Agree)

There’s no excuse for lying to someone else. (Disagree)

One of the best ways to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear. (Agree)

The truly smart person knows that honesty is the best policy, not manipulation and deceit. (Disagree)

Social dominance scores correlate strongly <sup>5</sup> with the responses to these statements. RWA answers again do not correlate at all. Social dominators thus admit, anonymously, to striving to manipulate others, and to being dishonest, two-faced, treacherous, and amoral. It’s as if someone took the Scout Law (“A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, ...”) and turned it completely upside down: “A ‘winner’ is deceitful, manipulative, unfair, base, conniving, ...” Furthermore, while the

followers may feel admiration bordering on adoration of their leaders, we should not be surprised if the leaders feel a certain contempt for their followers. They are the suckers, the “marks,” the fools social dominators find so easy to manipulate.

*Roots of hostility.* Another difference between authoritarian leaders and followers comes into view when you untangle the roots of their hostility. Social dominators show greater prejudice against minorities and women than high RWAs do, but the followers are much more hostile toward homosexuals. Why should this be the case?

As we saw in Chapter 2, high RWAs are especially likely to aggress when they feel established authority approves of the aggression, when they are afraid, and because they are self-righteous. Since the Bible condemns homosexuality in several places, and “giving” rights to homosexuals seems to right-wing authoritarians yet another nail in the coffin of moral society, aggression against homosexuals is aroused and blessed. Similarly high RWAs are more likely than social dominators to impose stiff sentences in the Trials situation, and more likely to help the government persecute radicals when it’s time to round up a “posse.”

However when it comes to racial and ethnic minorities, right-wing authoritarians will still aggress--overtly or sneakily, physically or verbally--but such attacks are less clearly supported by religious and civic authorities than they used to be. So their prejudice in these cases has dropped some. But not that of social dominators.

Why are social dominators hostile? Well unlike high RWAs who fear an explosion of lawlessness, they already live in the jungle that authoritarian followers fear is coming, and they’re going to do the eating. They do not ask themselves, when they meet someone, “Is there any reason why I should try to control this person?” so much as they ask, “Is there any reason why I should *not* try to gain the upper hand

with him right now?” Dominance is the first order of business with them in a relationship, like dogs encountering each other in a school yard, and vulnerable minorities provide easy targets for exerting power, for being mean, for domination. It’s an open question whether the aggression mainly serves a desire to dominate, or if the domination mainly serves a desire to hurt others. But either way in the dog-eat-dog world of the social dominator, they’re out to claw their way to the top.

If this analysis is correct, then social dominators should *not* score highly on the measures that predict authoritarian aggression among the followers: fear of a dangerous world and self-righteousness. And most of them don’t. Dominators aren’t usually afraid that civilization might collapse and lawlessness ensue. Laws, they think, are not something you should necessarily obey in the first place, so much as things you should not get caught *disobeying*. And as for self-righteousness, it’s pretty irrelevant to people as amoral as most social dominators tend to be. They may speak of the righteousness of their cause, but that’s usually just to assure and motivate their followers. *Might* makes right for social dominators.

By the same token, as noted earlier, most high RWAs do not score highly on the Power-MAD and Exploitive-MAD scales that reveal “what makes the dominator tick.” Their image of themselves as *the* good people leaves no room for believing they are cold-blooded, ruthless, immoral manipulators after power at almost any cost. So social dominators might incite authoritarian followers to commit a hate crime, but the dominators and followers probably launch the attack for different reasons: the dominator out of meanness, as an act of intimidation and control; the follower out of fear and self-righteousness in the name of authority.

*The mental life of the social dominator.* Persons who score highly on the Social Dominance scale do not usually have all the nooks and crannies, contradictions and lost files in their mental life that we find in high RWAs. Most of them do not show weak reasoning abilities, highly compartmentalized thinking, and certainly not a

tendency to trust people who tell them what they want to hear. They've got their head together. Nor are most of them dogmatic or particularly zealous about any cause or philosophy. You have to believe in something to be dogmatic and zealous, and what social dominators apparently believe in most is not some creed or cause, but gaining power by any means fair or foul.

The "soundness" of their thinking hardly means you can believe them, however. They are quite capable of saying whatever will get them ahead. After all, they hold that there's no such thing as "right" and "wrong." It all boils down to what you can get away with. And one of the most useful skills a person *should* develop, they say, is how to look someone straight in the eye and lie convincingly.<sup>6</sup> So like high RWAs, social dominators are quite capable of hypocrisy--the difference being that the RWAs probably don't realize the hypocrisy because their thinking is so compartmentalized, whereas the dominators do but don't care. I found evidence of this duplicity when I asked various samples for their opinions about equality--the thing the Social Dominance scale is all about, the underlying democratic value that high social dominators do *not* believe in.

What reasons do dominators give for giving equality short-shrift? Well, they say, ultimately complete equality is a pipe dream. Natural forces inevitably govern the worth of the individual. And people should have to earn their places in society, not get any free rides. All that society is obliged to do, if fairness is an issue, is provide a level playing field. The poor can pull themselves up by their bootstraps if they really want to. Lots of people have, haven't they?

You have probably heard these arguments before, and some of them make a certain amount of sense. But I don't trust the social dominator when he says them because I know how he reacts to other statements about equality. Namely:



People have no right to economic equality. All of us should get as much as we can, and if some don't get enough, that's their problem. (Agree)

Everyone should have an equal opportunity for economic success. Those born into poor circumstances should be given extra help to make the "playing field" level for them. (Disagree)

If the natural forces of supply and demand and power make a few people immensely wealthy and millions of others poor, so be it. (Agree)

"Access programs" to higher education, which give people from poor backgrounds extra financial support and counseling while in university, are a good idea. (Disagree)

Nobody should get extra help improving his place in society. Everyone should start off with what his family gives him, and go from there. (Agree)

There is nothing wrong with the fact that powerful people get better treatment by the law than poor people do. (Agree)

Since so many members of minority groups end up in our jails, we should take strong steps to make sure prejudice plays no role in their treatment in the legal system. (Disagree)

If powerful people can get away with illegal acts because they can afford the best lawyers, and because they have "friends in high places," so what? It's just natural. (Agree)

The "one-person-one-vote" idea is dumb. People who make bigger contributions to our society should get a lot more votes than those who do nothing. (Agree)

Equality is one of the fundamental principles of democracy, so we should work hard to increase it. (Disagree)

"Equality" is one of those nice-sounding names for suckers. Actually only fools believe in it. (Agree)

No racial group is naturally inferior to any other. If a group does poorly, it is usually because of discrimination. (Disagree)

If everyone really were treated equally, I would get less and I would not like that. (Agree)

Given all of this, do you really believe the social dominator who says people should have to earn their success in life? He's quite willing to let the children of the rich get rich merely through inheritance. Do you trust him when he says he's in favor

of a level playing field? He's against programs that would give the disadvantaged a better chance. Does he really believe the poor can pull themselves up by their bootstraps, or is he content to let them face an uphill struggle that very few can overcome? It doesn't bother the social dominator that masses of people are poor. That's their tough luck. And some racial groups are just naturally inferior to others, he says. Justice should *not* be applied equally to all. The rich and powerful should have advantages in court, even if that completely violates the concept of justice. Who cares if prejudice plays a role in the justice system? He certainly doesn't. The "right people" should have more votes than everybody else in elections. And so on.

If you stare deeply into the souls of social dominators, they believe "equality" is a sucker word. Only fools believe in it, they say. And if people took equality seriously, if society did try to provide equal opportunity for all, and if the playing field really were made level so that bootstraps *could* be pulled up and multitudes of lives bettered, the social dominator knows he would get less. And he very much dislikes that notion. He says so.

### *Personal Origins of the Social Domination Orientation*

We think we understand how people become authoritarian followers (chapter 2). So where do social dominators come from? Right now, it's hard to say. Attempts to find shaping experiences have uncovered a few "beginnings." High social dominators among university students say it has been their *experience* that:

Deceit and cheating were good tactics because it led to what they wanted.

Taking advantage of "suckers" felt great.

They've enjoyed having power and having people afraid of them.

"Losers" deserved what happened to them.

It's smart to use whatever power you have in a situation to get what you want.

Life boils down to what you can get away with.

People who suffer misfortunes deserve them because they are lazy or dumb or made bad moves.

Their lives have taught them that “Life is a jungle.”

These experiences indicate that the future dominator was rewarded earlier in life when he cheated, took advantage of others, made people afraid of him, overpowered others, got away with doing something wrong, or beat somebody to the punch. All of these actions may in turn have been predicated by a “tooth and claw” outlook that he learned from (say) his parents. Or that outlook may just serve as a rationalization for being amoral, unsympathetic, and exploitive because acting this way often pays off. Psychologists talk about the “Law of Effect,” which says you learn to do what works. Being unscrupulous works for social dominators.

Students’ social dominance scores correlate only weakly with their parents’ scores (about .25), so it seems unlikely they learned “Life is a jungle” the same way some high RWA students learned “You are a Baptist” as they grew up. Whatever the parental influence might be, it’s usually strongest between fathers and sons--implicating the Y chromosome, or a lot of cultural shaping on the roles of males.

As I said when we were wondering where authoritarian followers come from, we’d be foolish to dismiss the genetic possibilities here. In most animal species social dominance determines who will reproduce and who will not, (i.e., whose genes will be passed on and whose won’t). So some people may just be born with a greater tendency to try to intimidate and dominate others. If these attempts pay off, these “natural bullies” will be on their way. Others may have the genes but not the “muscle” or the smarts to carry it off. Others may become social dominators strictly through their experiences. Research someday will say, I suspect.

*An Experiment Combining Social Dominators and Right-Wing Authoritarians*

What happens when social dominators and authoritarian followers meet and begin interacting, not in a coffee shop, but in some sort of structured activity? Imagine you are the General Manager in the Chemical Division of a large multi-national corporation. Your division makes a product called “It’s So Clean” in a plant in France. Unfortunately, manufacturing “It’s So Clean” produces an “it’s so dirty” toxic by-product which you have been storing in cheap containers that, again unfortunately, degrade rather quickly. Your corporation has thus been contaminating the ground water with a poisonous chemical, and various ministries of the French government are suing your pants off because--and this is most, most unfortunate--the cheap containers you have been using turn out to be illegal in France. In fact they are illegal in all of the industrialized world because, duh, they quickly spring a leak!

Your division can get better, legal containers that would add 44% to the waste management costs of making “It’s So Clean,” or it can move to Argentina. Why Argentina? Because, you are told in this exercise, the government there will let you use your leaking containers, and will give you tax breaks as well if you re-locate. Also, your labor costs will go down because wages are low in Argentina and the workers don’t expect benefits or pensions. So what are you going to do?

You don’t make this decision by yourself. There’s another manager from your division, an Operations Officer who is lower on the totem pole than you, and you two are going to talk over the situation. And you yourself, the person who is amazingly reading a book on a computer monitor, don’t have to make any decision at all because you’re just reading a book, right? But many pairs of female students at the Universities of Waterloo and Guelph in Ontario had to hash out this problem as part of a psychology experiment, and decide where “It’s So Clean” should be manufactured.

Some of the women were chosen for this experiment and maneuvered into being the higher-up General Manager because they had scored rather *highly* (for women) on the Social Dominance Orientation scale. For comparative purposes, other women were recruited and put in the General Manager position because they had scored pretty *low* in dominance. No matter what, the part of the lower-ranking Operations Officer was played by a confederate who basically did the “Smithers thing” and went along with whatever the boss wanted. And you know what? High social dominators were about three times as likely as low social dominators to move the operation--lock, stock, and leaking barrels--to Argentina where they would poison the groundwater and take advantage of the tax breaks and cheap labor. (Heck, they weren’t going to have to drink the water.)

Given what we know about social dominators, that figures, doesn’t it? All right, let’s do the experiment in a different way. This time the confederate plays the role of the superior General Manager, and she’s “Montgomery Burns” and wants to move the operation to Argentina. Real subjects get to be the underling this time, and they can go along with the boss or try to get the boss to do, in my opinion, the right thing. Some of the real subjects scored highly on the RWA scale. They are thus, we believe almost to the point of dogmatism, authoritarian followers as a group. Other real subjects were recruited because they cranked out low RWA scores; we don’t expect them to be very submissive to authority.

And guess what. The high RWAs went along with the unethical decision a lot more than the low RWAs did. In fact they *liked* it, they said in private afterwards, it was the *right* thing to do, and they gave their boss a high rating. The less authoritarian students did not like the boss’s decision and said so, and they did not like the boss either. The confederate who played the role of boss, who never knew whether an underling was a high or low RWA, rated each subject on how compliant the subject had been. High RWAs were judged significantly more compliant than the low RWAs were.

Well that figures too, right? But maybe all we've found is another example of how high RWAs put dollars ahead of the environment. So let's do the experiment one more time, only we won't use confederates at all. Instead we'll pair up two female students, both real subjects, one of whom is a *high social dominator*, while the other is a *high RWA*--our two kinds of authoritarians. Half the time we'll arrange things so that the social dominator is the boss, and the authoritarian follower is the underling. But in the other pairs of subjects, we'll declare the high RWA the boss, and the social dominator has to be the underling. Now, where is that plant going to go? The pairs were much more likely to reach an *unethical* decision and head Down Argentina Way when a social dominator was boss and the high RWA was the underling.

This is now called the "lethal union" in this field of research.<sup>7</sup> When social dominators are in the driver's seat, and right-wing authoritarians stand at their beck and call, unethical things appear much more likely to happen. True, sufficiently skilled social dominators served by dedicated followers can make the trains run on time. But you have to worry about what the trains may be hauling when dominators call the shots and high RWAs do the shooting. The trains may be loaded with people crammed into boxcars heading for death camps.

And of course this lethal union is *likely* to develop in the real world. Authoritarian followers don't usually try to become leaders. Instead they happily play subservient roles, and can be expected to especially enjoy working for social dominators, who will (you can bet your bottom dollar) take firm control of things, and who share many of the followers' values and attitudes. The "connection" connects between these two opposites because they attract each other like the north and south poles of two magnets. The two can then become locked in a cyclonic death spiral that can take a whole nation down with them.

### *Double Highs: The Dominating Authoritarian Personality*

In the “It’s So Clean” experiment just described, the high social dominators were *not also* high RWAs. They were just ordinary social dominators, the sort we’ve been talking about so far in this chapter, who we know seldom score highly on the RWA scale because there’s just a small correlation between RWA and Social Dominance scores. But you’ll recall that at the beginning of this chapter I said this small relationship is stuffed with significance. It’s time for me to put up or shut up.

The small correlation exists because 5 to 10 percent of my samples score highly on *both* tests. I call these folks “Double Highs,” and while you only find them by the handful, they are a fascinating group to study.<sup>8</sup> For starters, *they* win the gold medal in the Prejudice Olympics, whether you’re talking about prejudice against racial and ethnic minorities, hostility toward homosexuals, or men-who-hate-women-who-want-to-control-their-own-lives. They also score higher than anyone else on a “Militia” scale I developed after the Oklahoma City bombing which measures belief that a Jewish-led conspiracy is plotting to take over the United States through such dastardly devices as gun control laws and the United Nations.

So Double Highs have stronger prejudices than do commonplace social dominators (i.e., the ones who *don’t* score highly in right-wing authoritarianism, the silver medal winners). And they are more prejudiced than ordinary high RWAs (i.e., the ones who *don’t* score highly in social dominance, the ones who get the bronze). They seem to have piled the prejudice of the high RWA atop the prejudice of the social dominator and reached new depths.

But if you are the careful, critical reasoner we earlier agreed you are, the following thought is zinging around in your brain now: “How can somebody score highly on both tests? One measures an inclination to submit to authority and the other measures a drive to dominate. How can one be a submissive dominator?”

Very well put. You *are* good. The vast majority of people who score highly on the RWA scale can be called submissive followers, champing at the bit for their champion. But aspiring dictators can sometimes score highly on the RWA scale too. Consider the first item on the measure: “Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.” Couldn’t an authoritarian follower and an authoritarian leader both agree with this? The follower would say, “Yes, yes. Oh please let him appear,” and the wannabe leader would say, “Yes, yes. Behold, here I am.” And it’s clear that *Double Highs want to dominate*, not submit. They score as high on both the “How much power would you like to have at age 40?” question and the “Power-Mad” scale as the rest of the social dominators do--which is much higher than ordinary high RWAs do.

So who are these Double Highs? Simply put, they are “religious” social dominators. They usually had much more religious upbringings than social dominators typically had, or they may have “got religion” as adults. As a group their fervor does not quite reach the levels found among ordinary right-wing authoritarians. But they go to church much more than most people in my samples do. Ditto for being religious fundamentalists. Ditto for being religiously ethnocentric. They thus respond to the religious content on the RWA scale, which ordinary social dominators do not, and that helps make them Double Highs.

But how are they going to answer the Exploitive-MAD scale? It would seem difficult for a religious person who goes to church fairly regularly to rack up a high score on this measure, wouldn’t it? Indeed, ordinary high RWAs score rather low on this test. But not the Double Highs, who score way way up there when it comes to exploitation, manipulation, and so on. Their (anonymous) answers to two items in particular wave a huge red flag:



“The best reason for belonging to a church is to project a good image and have contact with some of the important people in your community.” And,

“It is more important to create a good image of yourself in the minds of others than to actually be the person others think you are.”

Double Highs tend to say yes to these items much more than garden-variety authoritarian followers do. Why would they strike the pose then, to the extent that it is a pose? As one of the Exploitive-MAD items goes, “One of the best ways to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear.” Or, as Abraham Lincoln is supposed to have put it, “You can fool some of the people all of the time.”<sup>9</sup>

*The Worst of the Lot.* One thing has struck me as I’ve studied Double Highs. They’ve usually combined the worst aspects of being a social dominator with the worst aspects of being a high RWA. Thus we saw that when it comes to prejudice, they pack an extra load of hostility toward their many targets. And they’re just as power hungry as the rest of the social dominators are, rather than being *uninterested* in personal power as ordinary RWAs are. But when they land *in between* ordinary dominators and ordinary high RWAs, they usually land closer to the worse outcome.

Thus they *could* have low Exploitive-MAD scores the way most right-wing authoritarians do, but instead they pile up big numbers the way social dominators usually do. And they could have the low religious fundamentalism and low religious ethnocentrism scores of other social dominators, but instead they look much more like the fundamentalist, ethnocentric RWAs. The same goes for dogmatism. They could have low self-righteousness scores as most social dominators do, but instead they are as highly self-righteous as the rest of the high RWAs. They could have the cool, calm, collected responses to the Dangerous World scale that ordinary social dominators have, but instead they see the world as much more dangerous, the way most high RWAs do.

All in all, they exhibit an amalgam of bad traits and inclinations. They're like a child who's got Uncle Harry's splotchy skin and Aunt Mildred's difficult temperament and Grandpa Pete's bow legs and... But don't feel too sorry for them. With their followers' eager help, they're ruining America.

*The Particular Threat Posed by Double Highs.* We likely have lots of *ordinary* social dominators in our midst who want to run their clubs, their workplaces, the PTA, their local government, and so on, as their personal kingdom.<sup>10</sup> They're the people who want to be the sole "deciders" about things. (Don't get ahead of me here.) They're probably the people who keep interrupting others during a discussion. I've long thought, as I've sat fuming, they're most of the people who jump queues in traffic so they can get ahead of others. I'll bet they're the people who get you to do the work while they take the credit. It's hard not to hypothesize that they make up a lot of the Little League coaches who teach kids that winning is everything, no matter how you have to do it. I'll wager they make lots of promises in the moonlight that they never intend to keep. I'm willing to bet they're major purchasers of hard core pornography that shows women being abused. I suspect they're more likely to be rapists than most men. There even seems to be a whiff of the sociopath about the social dominator. Somebody do the studies and see if any of these hunches is right.

Ordinary social dominators may meet with only limited success in life. Their biggest obstacle in an organizational structure, besides the animosity they create for themselves, will predictably be other social dominators reaching for the top, to whom they might lose out and have to play a subordinate role, biding their time. There's only one Big Cheese in most outfits. Just because one wants power doesn't mean one is shrewd enough, attractive enough, well-connected enough, etcetera, to get it. Or they may go too far and get caught in their manipulations, in their lies, in their illegalities--and not be able to squirm their way out of it.

*Double Highs*, however, have a big head start over ordinary social dominators in politics, because they are the consummate leaders of a readily-formed army of zealots longing for a great warrior. Ordinary authoritarian *followers*, we have seen, tend to be highly religious (in a fundamentalist way), and their highly ethnocentric minds probably evaluate people on religious grounds more than any other. Ordinary social dominators, who have little religious background or impulse, will have to fake being super-religious to get these followers' support. They might succeed if they are good actors and clever, especially since RWAs throw the door open to whoever tells them their beliefs are right.

But a Double High has the best chance of attracting this army of yearning and loyal supporters. He comes packaged as "one of our own," one of the in-group. He not only shares their prejudices, their economic philosophy, and their political leanings, he also professes their religious views, and that can mean everything to high RWAs. He too may be faking his religiousness to some extent, but he will have the credentials up front, and the phrase-dropping familiarity with the Bible to pass the test with flying colors. He'll know the code words of the movement. He'll appear to believe everything "all the good people" believe about Satan, being born again, evolution, the role of women, sex, abortion, school prayer, law and order, "perverts," censorship, zealotry, holy wars, America-as-God's-right-hand, and so on. Given this head start, you can expect to find a Double High leading most of the right-wing authoritarian groups in our country.

Ex-president Jimmy Carter, in describing the fundamentalist movements that have taken control of the Republican Party, recently wrote, "Almost invariably, fundamentalist movements are led by authoritarian males who consider themselves to be superior to others and, within religious groups, have an overwhelming commitment to subjugate women and to dominate their fellow believers."<sup>11</sup> They're probably even worse than Carter stated. But basically the data I've collected say he hit the nail, with his Habitat carpenter's skill, smack on the head.

*An Experiment Testing the Interaction of Authoritarian Leaders and Followers*

Remember the Global Change Game from the end of Chapter 1? When I ran that experiment in 1994 comparing a low RWA world with a high RWA one, I had not screened the players for social dominance. (The dominance scale had just been published.) In all likelihood some Double Highs participated in the high RWA simulation that destroyed the world in a nuclear holocaust, and then went to war and hell again when given a second chance. But I had not controlled for that. So in 1998 I ran the game once more on two consecutive nights, only this time high RWAs covered the earth on *both* nights. However on the first night the world had no Double Highs lying in the weeds, whereas on the second there were seven.<sup>12</sup>

At the beginning of the “Pure RWA, No Double Highs” game, it took fifteen long seconds before one of the 53 authoritarian followers present stood up and made himself an Elite. Slowly, reluctantly others rose to their feet, in one case being pushed up by players more reluctant than herself. It took 40 seconds for the process to be completed--about twice as long as usual.

After the Elites got their separate briefing, they interacted very little with one another. Usually the Elites in the simulation travel the world playing Let’s Make a Deal. But on this night there were eight little islands of participants on the map, each island inhabited by its players and its Elite, trying to solve their local economic, social and environmental problems in isolation from the rest of the world. The three female Elites did try to interest the North American Elite in a foreign aid program, but when he refused no joint activity was ever attempted again. When the ozone layer crisis occurred, no meeting of any size resulted. The Elites seemed to shrug and say, “There’s nothing anyone can do about something that big,” and no one did anything. One of the facilitators put it this way: “The Elites went into their groups and never came out.”

The groups, which another facilitator noted sometimes said “Go away” when a “foreigner”(their word) occasionally came over to talk, worked enthusiastically and earnestly shoulder-to-shoulder. But they were singularly unimaginative and took a long time finding solutions to their problems. As was true in the 1994 high RWA game, the authoritarians had enormous trouble controlling population growth. Unyielding on the issue of birth control, the high RWAs took their stand in the corner they painted themselves into. Consequently, India began bursting at the seams while disease and poverty ravaged sub-Saharan Africa.

Europe and North America made charitable contributions to the Third World, but it was not enough to keep the poor regions from going down the tubes. An atmosphere of gloom and despair settled in with a thick mental fog about two-thirds of the way into the simulation. Most of the players, assigned to the over-populated, poor regions of the world, had no idea what they could do to make things better, and glumly sat on the gym floor resigned to failure. They reminded me of my classes when I am lecturing, as only I can, in a way no one can possibly follow. “How much longer is this agony going to last?” The players were overwhelmed by the simulation.

There were no wars on this night, not even a hint of a threat. The basic high RWA attitude seemed to be, “You don’t bother us, we won’t bother you.” Still, most regions kept the armed forces they had inherited at the beginning of the game, even regions facing severe social problems. By the time forty years had passed, 1.9 billion people had died from starvation and disease, which the facilitators thought was close to a record for a non-war run of the game.

*Gently Stir in a Few Double Highs.* On the following night forty-eight ordinary high RWAs and seven Double Highs (all males) took the helm on the earth’s future. I made sure each Double High was “randomly” assigned to a different region. I also made sure at least one other guy was included in each group, so the Double High would not become the Elite just because everybody else was a deferring high RWA

female. When the call for volunteer leaders went out, one of the Double Highs jumped to his feet instantly. All of the regions had their self-appointed Elites within twelve seconds--about half the time it normally takes.

Four of the seven Double Highs (57 percent) had literally leapt at the chance to lead their groups, in contrast to only 8 percent of the far more numerous, but far less self-promoting, ordinary high RWAs. And the Double Highs who did not quickly jump to their feet were not necessarily through. When the simulation began one of them went to the facilitators and gathered information on resource exchanges--a task assigned to his region's Elite. He took this information to his Elite, convinced him of a strategy, and from then on became a co-Elite, never staying home with the other players in his region. (He was called a "Lieutenant" by his Elite, but the other Elites quickly found out he was the one who made the decisions for his region.)

Another Double High who had not jumped to his feet stayed home throughout the game, but eventually led a revolution among his region-mates. They told their official Elite he would have to bring all his negotiated deals to them for approval. The Double High thus became the de facto Elite. (The seventh Double High, off in Latin America, was as quiet as a mouse all during the simulation. But six out of seven ain't bad.)

In unmistakable contrast to the game the night before, this run featured intense interaction among the Elites. A constant "buzz" of negotiations could be heard as the world leaders visited one another, sometimes in groups of two or three, working out the best deals they could get with their resources and combined bargaining leverage. Trading partnerships developed and dissolved. "It was like the stock exchange" a facilitator commented afterwards.

Because of the wheeling and dealing, some regions made headway against their problems as their Elites traded things they did not need for things they did--again unlike the night before when everyone stayed home. But no charity appeared. Nobody

got something for nothing. And no commitment to the planet as a whole ever materialized. When the ozone layer crisis broke out, a global conference was held, but nobody put a farthing into the pot to solve the problem.

Moreover the regions began increasing their military strengths, and the stronger ones started making threats against the weaker ones during economic negotiations. A lot of bullying suddenly appeared. Then the Oceana Elite<sup>13</sup> bought nuclear weapons and declared war on vastly out-gunned India, which tried to get protection from North America. Getting none, India surrendered immediately and paid a tribute. Soon the Oceana Elite was making the same threats against Africa and Latin America. This time North America offered protection, for a price, and the world quickly rushed to one camp or the other and began buying nukes. The facilitators thought an all-out nuclear war was going to break out just as the forty year time limit for the game expired.

Even though no one had died from warfare, lots of resources had been devoted to increasing military power, and many regions lacked the necessities of life. And for the third high RWA game in a row, the “folks back home” had stumbled badly over population control, so the dwindling “social bucks” had to take care of more and more people. Consequently one billion, six hundred million people had died from starvation and disease by the end of the game. This was three hundred million less than the night before, and the improvement was attributable to the Elites’ trading skills. But the Elites also caused the militarization and nuclear confrontation, and if the game had lasted five minutes longer, everybody might well have died.

When he began the arms race, the Oceana Elite was operating entirely on his own hook. No one else in Oceana wanted to buy nuclear weapons or threaten anybody. But although they outnumbered him in their group, they let him do what he wanted. He was their leader. And he knew how to handle them. He simply declared war on India, and told them afterwards. After his bloodless victory, he skillfully won

over a couple of his Oceana colleagues to the slogan, “War is good,” and that provided a base for his further military adventures. But still some of the folks back home remained unhappy with the way their region was driving the world to war, and on post-game surveys they described their Elite as “bad” and “evil.” But they did not have the gumption to stop him. They sat still and sighed and let it happen.

Remembering again that university students are not world leaders, that the Global Change Game is not the real thing, that people do not become world-class Elites simply by rising to their feet, and so on, I still found the experiment instructive --even though it was only a “two-night stand.”

First, the spectacular ethnocentrism of ordinary RWAs takes one’s breath away. Here they were again, as in Doom Night in 1994, in a room filled with people like themselves, and they simply made smaller in-groups. Assigning authoritarian followers to a sub-unit appears to automatically put blinders on them as to what was happening everywhere else. “We’re the (whatever) Team,” they seemed to say, and taking the concept of “team” much more seriously than most people do, they sealed themselves off from the rest of the world. They plopped down on their islands during the first night’s simulation and at best responded with charity now and then to the overwhelming problems they and the other islands were allowing to grow. They were not in the least warlike. But leaderless and rather unimaginative, they accomplished very little during the simulation. Although they started off with a lot of enthusiasm and drive, the disasters that resulted stole all the wind from their sails.

When one injected a few Double Highs into a high-RWA world, almost all of them grabbed power by hook or by crook. Although only a tiny part of the earth’s population, they made a huge difference in how the world developed because authoritarian followers basically just follow. And the world was arguably better than the one created the night before--assuming it would have survived a forty-first year. But everything depends on who leads high RWAs, and when the Double Highs took



over and formed that lethal union, their strong need to dominate led to bullying, military build-ups, and warfare. They showed no signs of being guided by moral principles and they certainly had no interest in charity or in serving the common good of the planet. They thus proved as insular as ordinary RWAs, and their world failed almost as badly. A sample of ordinary high school students usually forges a better future than was shaped on either of these nights by authoritarian university students.

But there was one little wrinkle in this story. (There almost always is, in research.) Remember those private fortunes and “The World’s Richest Man”? I thought for sure that the Double Highs would squirrel away tons of dough in their own personal bank accounts. But almost no one did. In hindsight--always a winning perspective; try to find a race track that will let you place your bets *after* the races are run--the competition was so intense among the Elites that anyone who diverted funds into his own pocket might soon find his region wiped out economically or militarily. So the bucks stayed in the public purse. As I said, the game is not the real world, and if you knew this was going to happen you are smarter than I am and maybe you should stop reading this book and start writing your own.<sup>14, 15</sup> (It’s real easy: you just get yourself a website, ...)

### *Perspective and Application*

Let’s play a game. I’ll describe a well-known American politician, the description being unceremoniously lifted from John Dean’s book, *Conservatives Without Conscience*. See if you can figure out who it is, and whether you can make a diagnosis of his personality, doctor.

“X” became a born-again Christian when he was first elected to Congress. He brought a strong drive for power with him to Washington, and he steadily worked his way to the top of the Republican caucus. Colleagues have described him as amoral. “If it wasn’t illegal to do it, even if it was clearly wrong and unethical, (he did it). And

in some cases if it was illegal, I think he still did it” said another Republican Congressman. “X” is opposed to equality, and *Newsweek* commented that he has never been subtle about his uses of the power of Love and Fear. He kept marble tablets of the Ten Commandments and a half-dozen bull-whips in his office when he was the party whip. He earned the nicknames, “the Hammer,” “the Exterminator,” and the “Meanest Man in Congress.”

When “X” became House majority leader (talk about a big hint!) he imposed a virtual dictatorship on the House of Representatives. He instituted a number of unprecedented changes in House procedures to keep Democrats, and even other Republicans, from having any say in the laws being passed. He drastically revised bills passed by committees and often sent them to the floor from his office for almost immediate votes. He forbade amendments to most of the bills that came to the floor. He excluded Democrats from the House-Senate conference committees formed to iron out differences in bills passed by the two chambers. He allowed special interests to write laws that were passed by the compliant Republican majority. And he allowed unbelievable billions of dollars in pork-barrel GOP projects to be attached to appropriation bills.<sup>16</sup>

Who is “X”? If you said former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay from Texas, you are right. Can you see why he looked like a Double High to John Dean?<sup>17</sup>

But DeLay is the *former* House Leader because early in 2006 he was indicted for money-laundering, which forced him eventually to resign. DeLay illegally used corporate donations, allegedly, to get a Republican majority elected to the Texas legislature in 2002. With “his” Republicans in control, the Texas legislature blatantly redrew the U.S. congressional voting districts in 2003 along outlandishly gerrymandered lines to maximize the number of Republicans sent to Congress. African-American and Hispanic-American neighborhoods were packed into districts so all their votes could only elect one Democrat. Meanwhile Republican after

Republican, running in hand-crafted districts drawn to their advantage, could win with much narrower margins. Thus the GOP could claim substantially more congressional seats than the Democrats. Republican majorities in the Florida, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio legislatures similarly used “packing,” “cracking,” and “pairing” tactics when redrawing district lines in a blatant attempt, it seemed to many, to institute permanent one-party rule in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

The rise and fall of Tom DeLay simply illustrates once again that understanding social dominators--both the “white bread” kind who are not religious and the “holy bread” Double Highs who are, means grasping their passion for power. They want to control things and--compared with most people--they are prepared to be openly unfair, confrontational, intimidating, ruthless, and cold-blooded if they think that will work best. They are also willing to be manipulative, deceitful, treacherous and underhanded if they judge that the easier path. They can stare you in the face and threaten you with naked force, pure and simple, mano-a-mano. Or they can stab you in the back. But the goal remains, in all cases, more power. And power, once obtained, is meant to be used.

Want another example of an apparent Double High in a position of power, who is also being destroyed because he went too far? When George W. Bush was declared the winner of the 2000 presidential election by the five Republican-appointed justices on the Supreme Court, I remember some commentators saying that he had less of a mandate to carry out his policies than any president in American history. But I also thought, because I knew what was turning up in the research on social dominance, “Mandate-schmandate!” I could easily imagine the Bush team saying. “We’ve got the *power* now. Let’s do what we want! Who’s going to stop us?”

With eagerly subservient Republican majorities controlling both houses of Congress, Bush and his vice-president could do anything they wanted. And so they did. Greed ruled, the rich got big, big tax cuts, the environment took one body blow

after another, religious opinions decided scientific issues, the country went to war, and so on. Bush and his allies had the political and military power to impose their will at home and abroad, it seemed, and they most decidedly used it.

A stunning, and widely overlooked example of the arrogance that followed streaked across the sky in 2002 when the administration refused to sign onto the International Criminal Court. This court was established by over a hundred nations, including virtually all of the United States' allies, to prosecute individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, and so on when the country for whom they acted would not or could not do the prosecuting itself. It is a "court of last resort" in the human race's defense against brutality.

Why on earth would the United States, as one of the conveners of the Nuremberg Trials and conceivers of the charge, "crimes against humanity," want nothing to do with this agreement? The motivation did not become clear until later. But not only did America refuse to ratify the treaty, in 2002 Congress passed an act that allowed the United States to punish nations that *did* join in the international effort to prosecute the worst crimes anyone could commit! Talk about throwing your weight around, and in a way that insulted almost every friend you had on the planet.

But the social dominators classically overreached. Using military power in Iraq to "get Saddam" produced, not a shining democracy, but a lot of dead Americans, at least fifty times as many dead Iraqis, and the predicted civil war. The "war on terrorism" backfired considerably, as enraged Muslims around the world, with little or no connection to al Queda, formed their own "home-grown" terrorist cells bent on suicide attacks--especially after news of American atrocities in Iraq raced around the globe. Occupying Iraq tied down most of America's mobile ground forces, preventing their use against the resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan which had supported the 9/11 attacks, and making American troops easy targets in the kind of guerilla warfare that produces revenge-driven massacres within even elite units.

But the president, showing the usual dogmatism of Double Highs, seemingly refused to learn the lesson of his four-year adventure in Iraq, and that of the 2006 election, and moved unilaterally to *increase* troop strength in Bagdad.

The national debt, which was being paid down, will now burden Americans for generations as traditional conservative economic policy has been obliterated. Savaging human rights in the torture chambers Bush set up overseas has cost America its moral leadership in the world, when just a few years ago, after September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, nation after nation, people after people, were its compassionate friends. Laws passed by Congress have been ignored through executive reinterpretation. The Constitution itself has been cast aside. The list goes on and on.

With corruption in Congress adding to their revulsion, independent and moderate voters gullied the Republican Party in the 2006 midterm election. How did the GOP fall so far so fast?

Power, the Holy Grail of social dominators, remains an almost uncontrollable two-headed monster. It *can* be used to destroy the holder's most hated enemies, such as Saddam. But it often destroys the dominator in the process. Lord Acton put it succinctly with his famous statement that "Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely."

When your life is a long power trip, it's hard to get enough because it's hard to get it all. And when a dominator does get power, we can't be surprised if it is badly used. Social dominators do not use a moral compass to plot their plots--which is particularly ironic because in the case of Double Highs such as George W. Bush they seem to be so religious. But as we have seen, hypocrisy is practically their middle name. And the more power they have, the more disastrously they can hurt their country, their party, and themselves. It's remarkable how often they do precisely that.<sup>19</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Pratto, F., J. Sidanius, L. M. Stallworth, and B.F. Malle, 1994. "Social Dominance Orientation: A Personality Variable Predicting Social and Political Attitudes." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67, 741-763.

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<sup>2</sup> See Altemeyer, B., 1998. "The Other 'Authoritarian Personality,'" In M. Zanna (Ed.) *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Volume 30, San Diego: Academic Press.

As far as demographics go, social dominators tend to be males--and I'd be very surprised if you're surprised by that. They do not have more education than is average for my samples, nor do they have higher incomes. (They most certainly would like to have lots more dough, but dreams do not always come true.)

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<sup>3</sup> Usually in the .60s. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> Were you as astonished as I was by how immediately the Republican leadership and its ardent supporters fell upon one another after the mid-term election in 2006? From everybody blaming the Congressional leaders about corruption, to the Congressional leaders blaming the Neocons for Iraq, to the Neocons blaming Donald Rumsfeld for his management of the war, to James Dobson blaming the G.O.P. for abandoning "values voters," to Newt Gingrich blaming Karl Rove for the election strategy, to Karl Rove blaming the candidates for not doing what he wanted them to do, to Rush Limbaugh's saying he was *glad* about the outcome because "I no longer am going to carry the can for people who I think don't deserve having their water carried"--it was hard to find much group cohesiveness after that campaign. Indeed, as the Italian Fascist Galeazzo Ciano wrote in his diary in September, 1942 (which JFK quoted after

the Bay of Pigs debacle) “Victory has a hundred fathers; defeat is an orphan.”

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<sup>5</sup> Around .60. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>6</sup> And lying often pays. One established propaganda technique is called the Big Lie, in which one says something outrageous, completely false, the complete opposite of what is true. Take Holocaust Denial. The Holocaust is one of the best documented and best known events of the twentieth century. Yet I found that today’s university students showed virtually no resistance to a pamphlet written by a S.S. officer who served at Auschwitz which denied it was a death camp. Their belief in the Holocaust tumbled like bowling pins before the flimsiest of arguments. Most surprisingly to me, low RWAs were just as likely to be affected as highs. See Bob Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter*, 1996, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, chapter 10.

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<sup>7</sup> See Authoritarian Dynamics and Unethical Decision Making: High Social Dominance Orientation Leaders and High Right-Wing Authoritarianism Followers. Son Hing, Leanne S.; Bobocel, D. Ramona; & Zanna, Mark P.; *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 92(1), Jan 2007, pp. 67-81. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>8</sup> See Altemeyer, B., 2004. “Highly Dominating, Highly Authoritarian Personalities,” *Journal of Social Psychology*, 144, 421-447. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>9</sup> George W. Bush gave his version of this famous statement at a Gridiron Club Dinner held in March 2001 when he quipped, “You can fool some of the people all of the time, and those are the ones you want to concentrate on.” This annual dinner features jokes and political satire, so the president probably did not mean to be taken seriously. The trouble is, it’s pretty hard to find evidence that he doesn’t truly believe it.

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<sup>10</sup> I'm not saying, incidentally, that everyone who becomes important in society is a social dominator. People without a dominating bone in their bodies can become leaders of movements for greater equality, for example. One thinks of Gandhi. Conversely, a social dominator can become the leader of a movement *for* equality and freedom, but after succeeding become just the next dictator in a string of dictators. One thinks of many. I see no reason why social dominators would not head for left-wing movements, if they see those as the faster route to power. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>11</sup> Carter, J., 2005. *Our endangered values: America's moral crisis*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 34. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>12</sup> See Altemeyer, B., 2003. "What Happens When Authoritarians Inherit the Earth? A Simulation. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 3, 161-169. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>13</sup> Oceana was a reworked "Pacific Rim" from the 1994 simulation. The Global Change Game is updated, and the world re-divided, as some economies improve, environmental problems are dealt with or grow worse, and so on. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>14</sup> I don't think there's any chance the facilitators consciously or unconsciously affected the different outcomes of these two high RWA runs of the Global Change Game. None of them had ever heard of social dominance orientation, and they would have only been confused by the similarity of dress, presence of religious symbols, and so on over the two nights. Furthermore, if the facilitators had been trying to tweak things, they probably would have found a way to let the simulation run five more minutes on the second night when regions were arming their ballistic missiles. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>15</sup> Remember the 1987 NATO-Warsaw Pact experiment from chapter 1, in which five-man teams of high RWAs reacted aggressively to ambiguous moves by the Warsaw Pact and precipitated a crisis? Gerry Sande and I followed up that experiment with a version in which NATO had developed a perfect "Star Wars" defense against nuclear attack. When low RWA teams thought they were unbeatable, they made virtually no



threats against the Warsaw Pact--just as they had made no threats in the first run of the experiment. But when the high RWA teams knew they had the upper hand, they did one of two things. *Some* of the high RWA NATO teams became quite non-belligerent. But just as many became enormously aggressive. Believing that another group of students in the next room was playing the Warsaw Pact part of the simulation, they felt, as one of their members said, "We wanted them to realize we could wipe them out at any time." A member of another very aggressive high RWA group put it more graphically: "We had all the power, and we wanted them to kiss our asses."

We were puzzled at the time, because we thought having ultimate power would relax the high RWAs and make them less aggressive--which it did in half the groups, but not the other half. What caused the difference among the high RWA groups? I'll bet you my chance of getting to heaven--which may be slim anyway after Chapter 4--that the aggressive groups had some Double Highs in them. But this was some years before the Social Dominance Orientation scale was developed, so there's no way of knowing.

We also ran a condition in which *the enemy*, the Warsaw Pact, had perfected a defense against nuclear attack while NATO had none. Incredibly, this produced an *increase* in aggressiveness among the low RWA teams, and an even bigger, record-breaking level of hostility in the high RWA groups. This produced counter-aggressiveness in their superior enemy. Why were the NATO players such idiots? Usually, they said, they wanted to send a signal that they would not be intimidated just because they were at a (hopeless) disadvantage. But they did not wait to see if their enemy would become threatening; they simply made him so in a situation in which they could not possibly win. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>16</sup> Dean, J. *Conservatives without conscience*, 2006, New York: Viking, pp. 123-135. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>17</sup> There's always a problem in fitting an individual to a statistical conglomerate. No one matches the overall model perfectly. It's like the old joke that the average American family had two-and-a-half kids. As well, everyone is so unique that you will surely find *parts* of a trait missing in an individual who seems, *in general*, to possess the trait. Thus people who know Tom DeLay well might observe that he is not at all (let's say) prejudiced against racial minorities or hostile toward women. Be that as it may, so much of his behavior seems to match up with the distinctive attributes of Double Highs that I feel comfortable citing him as an example. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>18</sup> But it doesn't always work out as planned. You have to be careful when shifting your supporters around, because if you get too greedy you might spread yourself too thin, and end up with a net loss should enough of the electorate unexpectedly turn against you. Thus in Pennsylvania the Republicans lost several Congressional seats because they moved too many voters from supposedly safe GOP districts to try to defeat Democrats in other districts.

But the incredible 2003 gerrymandering of Texas, which was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in all but one particular, served the Republicans well. In an election that saw so many GOP incumbents around the nation go down to defeat, the Republican delegation in Texas lost only two of its seats in spite of everything. One of the losses occurred in the 22<sup>nd</sup> District, where Tom DeLay's late resignation forced the Republicans to have to use a write-in campaign for their nominee.

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<sup>19</sup> I am not a Democrat, not even in Will Roger's sense when he famously said, "I'm not a member of any organized political party. I'm a Democrat." I understand the necessity of having political parties in a democracy, but I also believe that when the interests of any party conflict with the interests of the country, the party will almost always butter its own bread first. So I basically don't trust political parties, and consider myself an Independent.

If the Democratic Party had been swarmed by authoritarians the way the Republican Party has been, I would be talking about it now rather than the GOP. I want the Republican Party to be recaptured by its Grand Old Principles and go back to presenting the conservative options to the American people, not imposing the authoritarian one. [Back to Chapter](#)

## Chapter 6

### Authoritarianism and Politics

#### *RWA, Social Dominance, and Political Preferences Among Ordinary People*

After all you've learned about right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance, you'll probably be disappointed to learn that these personality traits connect only moderately to the political preferences of ordinary people.<sup>1</sup> But the modest connections can be easily understood: people, darn it, are more complicated than psychologists want them to be.

First, a lot of people have as much interest in politics as I do in rutabaga--and for the same reason. These political drop-outs compose the bulk of that 40 to 60 percent of the population who do not vote in elections. That's an awful lot of people whose RWA and social dominance scores are not going to correlate with anything political. Then one has the virtuous, heroic, cream-of-the-crop, super- dooper, world class heros, the Independents. (Uh, see note 19 from Chapter 5.) The personalities of these party-poopers also won't correlate with party preference, because they haven't got any party preference.

Then come the members of the electorate who support a party but have very little idea what it stands for. You might call them political nincompoopers, but we have to recognize that political parties often make it hard to find out what they stand for. But some folks--not as keenly interested as one might perhaps wish--support the Democrats because their parents were Democrats, or their union says they should vote Democrat. Or they support the Republicans because "all the right people do," or because they think the Republican candidate looks nice on TV. So with all these non-starters and breakdowns, you can expect personality and party preference to often be strange bedfellows.<sup>2</sup>

If you now have concluded that we could fit all the informed, concerned voters in your community into a phone booth, that's not true. For one thing, very few phone booths exist any more. But for another, pollsters regularly find that a significant number of ordinary citizens appreciate the importance of politics, and may even be involved in the political process. Generally, men are more likely to be interested than women are, well-educated people care more, and the older you get the more you scrutinize the candidates with your weary, wary eyes. Studies show that the more interested people are in politics, the more likely their party preference will correlate with their authoritarianism.

That implies the connection ought to be strongest among the biggest party animals among us, politicians. But how do you give personality tests to politicians? Well if you are willing to settle for studying lots of successful, important politicians, you can send surveys to legislatures and ask for the lawmakers' personal, honest, anonymous answers. So I did. I sent the RWA scale to at least one chamber of forty-two of the state legislatures in the United States (all except Alaska, Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Rhode Island, and West Virginia), mainly between 1990 and 1993. I also sent surveys to most of the legislatures in Canada, including the federal House of Commons. We'll spend the first part of this chapter digging around in those results. Then we'll talk about the biggest development in American politics in the past twenty-five years, the growth of the "Religious Right."

### *Authoritarianism among American State Legislators*

First of all, these studies all happened before the Social Dominance Orientation scale was available. So--because time-travel is strictly forbidden in social science research--I have no answers from legislators to that scale per se. But I do have some data almost as good, and they will tell us a lot when the time comes.

Next, you might rightly be wondering how state lawmakers had time to fill out surveys mailed to them by an obscure Canadian researcher, when they were supposed to be busy with The Public Business. Lawmakers *are* busy, and that's probably one of the reasons I only heard from 1,233 (or 26%) of the 4,741 U.S. legislators I sent surveys to. Such a low return rate immediately raises the question of a self-selection sample bias, right? What would the results have been if everybody had responded, instead of only one-quarter?

Luckily you can estimate this with one of the crafty stratagems in the survey-givers' bag of tricks. Let's say, just to pick a wild possibility, you're interested in whether Republican lawmakers score higher on the RWA scale than Democrats do. You look at the states you barely heard from, and then at the states where you got a much better return. Obviously you're inclined to trust the latter results more. Making this comparison, you find that the higher the return rate was, the more Republicans tended to differ from Democrats. The smaller samples tended to cloud this relationship--which is a major problem with small samples. But it also means that if I had heard back from *everyone*, the difference would likely be substantially *bigger* than what actually turned up.

We'll focus on the results obtained, not what I imagine they might be. But if you are admirably wondering about the response rate--which few readers do, and which few survey-takers even report-- a self-selection sample bias certainly compromises my lawmaker studies. The numbers I obtained are "low balls." Right-wing authoritarianism probably packs a bigger punch in American state legislatures than my data will show. We should keep that in mind. If I had heard from everyone, the bad things would likely be even worse.

Well, what differences did turn up? I sent the thirty-item RWA scale I was using in my research then to fifty legislative chambers, and in every single one except the Louisiana House, the Republicans scored higher overall than the Democrats.

Although the “right-wing” in right-wing authoritarianism refers to a *psychological* trait that endorses submission to established authority (see Chapter 1), not a political ideology, the RWA scale finds different levels of this trait in politicians from the two parties.<sup>3</sup> The Republicans scored almost 40 points higher than the Democrats on the average, on the 30-item scale.

Figure 5.1 shows the average score of each caucus in each of the chambers I approached (viz., eleven senates and thirty-nine lower chambers). (The *numbers* on the scale have been reset in terms of the twenty-item measure we have been talking about since Chapter 1.) Several things may leap out at you. First, the Democrats landed all over the place. The Republicans on the other hand crowd together so much that the person who drew this figure almost went crazy trying to jam all the names into such a small space. Second, as you would expect from the last paragraph, very few Democratic caucuses posted RWA scale scores as high as most of the Republicans did. The Democrats may be all over the place, but they’re mainly all over a less authoritarian place than Republican Country. Third, with the inevitable exceptions, southern legislators posted the highest scores.

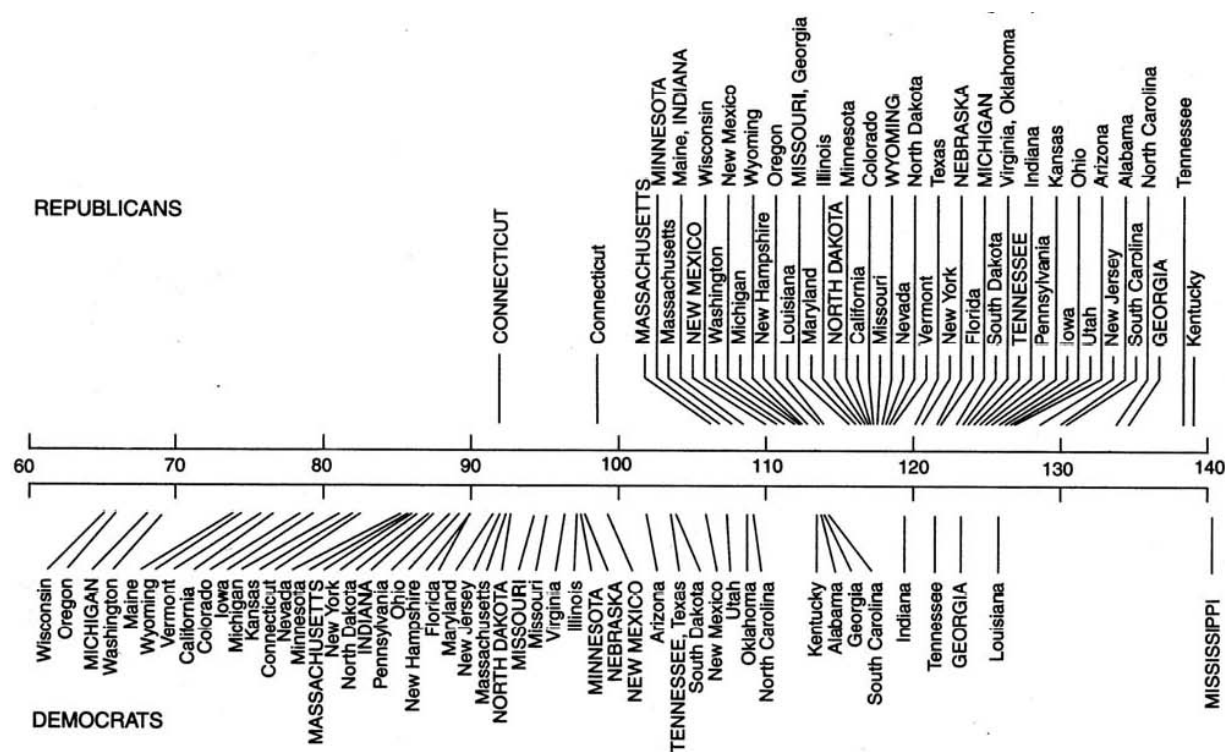
### *Other Issues*

I usually included some other measure besides the RWA scale on the surveys I mailed to the state capitols, and accordingly I found that high RWA lawmakers tended to:

- *not* think wife abuse was a serious issue (a *weak* relationship; see note 12 of Chapter 1)
- have conservative economic philosophies (a moderate relationship)
- score highly on items assessing racial and ethnic prejudice (a moderate relationship)
- reject a law raising the income tax rate for the rich and lowering it for the poor (a moderate relationship)

Figure 5.1

## Average RWA Scale Scores of American State Legislators, by State and Party



Notes: Scores have been re-scaled from a 30-item basis to a 20-item basis. The midpoint of the scale is 100. The sample includes 549 Republican legislators and 682 Democrats. Scores from upper chambers are presented in larger print (e.g. CONNECTICUT versus Connecticut). No Connecticut Democratic senator, and only one Mississippi Republican and one Wyoming Democratic senator answered, and hence no scores are given for those caucuses.



- favor capital punishment (a sturdy relationship)
- oppose gun control laws (a sturdy relationship)
- favor a law prohibiting television broadcasts from a foreign country's capital (such as Baghdad during the Gulf War) when the United States is at war with that country (a sturdy relationship)
- favor a law requiring Christian religious instruction in public schools (a sturdy relationship)
- score high in dogmatism (a sturdy relationship)
- oppose a law requiring affirmative action in state hiring that would give priority to qualified minorities until they "caught up" (a sturdy relationship)
- favor a law giving police much less restrictive wiretap, search-and-seizure, and interrogation rules (a strong relationship)
- favor a law outlawing the Communist Party "and other radical political organizations" (a strong relationship)
- oppose the Equal Rights Amendment (a strong relationship)
- favor placing greater restrictions on abortion than "Roe versus Wade" (a strong relationship)
- favor a law restricting anti-war protests to certain sizes, times, and places--generally away from public view--while American troops are fighting overseas (a very strong relationship)
- have a "We were the good guys, the Soviets were the bad guys" view of the Cold War (a very strong relationship)
- oppose a law extending equal rights to homosexuals in housing and employment (a very strong relationship)

If you have read the preceding chapters, or been paying attention to what's going on in your state capitol lately, none of this will astound you. What surprised me was how strong the relationships usually were. The RWA scale can predict what many lawmakers want to do about a wide variety of important issues.

Because they harbor so many authoritarian sentiments, Republican legislators naturally differed from Democrats overall on the matters above. But the differences were sharpest when you compared high RWA versus low RWA lawmakers, whatever their party affiliation. Many high RWA Democrats, and some low RWA Republicans appeared in these samples. The problem, as I see it, does not arise from Republicans per se but from the right-wing authoritarians on both sides of the aisle. But the data make it quite clear that when you see a bunch of Republican lawmakers huddling, you're probably looking at mainly high RWAs, whereas when (non-southern) Democrats cluster, they're probably a pretty *unauthoritarian* lot overall.

### *Double Highs in the Legislatures?*

I noted in Chapter 3 that designing despots will usually slither over to the political right, not just because their hearts and minds lead them there, but because that's where the "easy sell" high RWAs congregate, wanting to play follow-the-leader. It's the easiest place to pick up a loyal following cheap, especially if you're a Double High. Therefore, were the high RWA state legislators in these studies not just high RWAs, but usually *Double Highs*? Were they social dominators as well?

Nothing would clarify that as quickly as scores on the Social Dominance scale. But, as mentioned earlier, the test had not been invented back then. However I did ask all the state lawmakers in Georgia, Indiana, Massachusetts, and New Mexico to rank nine values, such as Happiness, National Security, and A World at Peace. I included in the list two of the core values of democracy, Freedom and Equality. Almost everyone ranked freedom first, but no such consensus existed about equality. Low RWA lawmakers ranked it third on their list, on the average, while the high RWAs ranked it seventh out of nine. Recalling that we identify social dominators by their disdain for equality, most of the high RWAs in this study thus appear to be high social dominators as well--which makes them Double Highs.

This makes sense, doesn't it? Authoritarian *followers* probably don't run for public office very often. So ordinary high RWAs are not at all likely to become lawmakers, unless they are hand-picked for the role of Unquestioning Party Supporters by powerful leaders to run in safe, "yellow dog" districts. Thus when you find someone in a legislature who scores highly on the RWA scale, it figures that he's probably a *Double High*, as this study indicates.

*Authoritarian Lawmakers and Freedom.* Before moving on, let's consider that top ranking of freedom. You hear authoritarian leaders talk all the time about defending freedom, preserving freedom, exporting freedom and (somebody else) dying for freedom. They wear American flag pins in their lapels and give solemn renditions of the Pledge of Allegiance and the Star Spangled Banner. They may truly believe that they are the real, deep-down, freedom-fighter patriots.

I'm not so sure. Their vision of America seems quite different from that of Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and most of the other framers of the Constitution. Despite their pronouncements about freedom-this and freedom-that, high RWA lawmakers would like to pass laws that restrict freedom of the press, the right to protest, the right to privacy, the right to belong to the political organization of one's choice, and they certainly would trample all over freedom of religion once they made the teaching of Christianity compulsory in public schools.

Such laws would hopefully be struck down as unconstitutional by the courts. But if a Supreme Court was assembled that opened the door to the destruction of the Bill of Rights--which could be just one justice away now--do you think authoritarian lawmakers would feign rushing through it? If so, let me tell you that you just won \$10,000,000 in a lottery you didn't even enter, but there are some administrative expenses you need to pay me first. And I just inherited \$30,000,000 from a rich uncle, and if you just send me \$3,000 to cover my legal fees, I'll give you \$3,000,000 in return! Oh boy!

*Stomp Out the Rot.* One last thing: an item on the RWA scale that I used in these legislator studies goes, “Once our government leaders and the authorities condemn the dangerous elements in our society, it will be the duty of every patriotic citizen to help stomp out the rot that is poisoning our country from within.” It’s a ridiculous statement, isn’t it? People usually laugh when I read it out loud to an audience. It sounds like it came out of some Nazi Cheer Book. And a solid majority of the legislators who wrote the laws in American states when I did these studies rejected it. But 26 percent of the 1,233 lawmakers in my samples *agreed* with this. That’s already half-way to a majority. And in terms of later developments, I’ll point out that these studies were all done before 1994.

### *Canadian Legislators*

The Canadian political system, you’ll be thrilled to learn, is more complicated than the two-party American arrangement. Federally, the “left” is anchored by the socialist-rooted New Democratic Party. It sticks by its guns, gathers its 12 to 20 percent of the votes each election, and dreams of the day when it will hold the balance of power in the House of Commons.

Next you have the Liberals, who too have a guiding principle by which they unflinchingly abide: getting themselves elected. Sometimes they act like liberals but they will also be conservatives if that will get them a majority government. Since they usually succeed, they attract a lot of the wrong sort of people: viz., politicians, and contributors looking to make a million or ten “on the side.”

When the Canadian electorate can’t abide the Liberals any more, they vote in the Conservatives, who have been Canada’s mainstream conservative party since confederation in 1867, when they were called the Conservatives. (Huh? Well you see, they changed their name to “Progressive Conservatives” for a while, but that party no longer exists, at least for the time being.)

Then you have the Far Right Party from Alberta, the province whose Bible belt and oil reserves remind some people of Texas. This party sticks to its guns too, but not its names. It has used a million different titles in the past thirty years as it keeps reinventing itself. Most recently it called itself the Alliance Party and it allied with the Progressive Conservative Party to become the Conservative Party. (Isn't this fun?) At the time of this writing the latest wave of Liberal corruption has enabled the Conservatives to form a minority government in Ottawa.

Finally there is a Quebec separatist party, the Bloc Quebecois, which the cunning voters of Quebec send to Parliament in sufficient numbers each election to scare the hell out of the rest of the country. You don't want to know about all the different provincial parties, believe me. And now the Green Party's in the game too.

In a *two*-party system each party contains various factions. You have right-wing Democrats in the United States and left-wing Democrats, right-wing Republicans and the left-wing Republicans who have not been burned at the stake yet by the right-wing Republicans. However both parties, for all their factions, have to capture the "political middle" to win an election. But in a three-, four-, or five-party system the factions usually form their own parties, so in Canada only the Liberals have any sort of wingspan. That means most of the parties do stand for something distinctly different from each other, at least between elections. And that means you can put the RWA scale to a stiffer test in Canada than you can in the United States, because there's more to predict. Will it reflect the more distinct points of view of Canada's spread-out political parties?

Between 1983 and 1994 I sent the RWA scale to the legislative assemblies of most of Canada's provinces, and to the members of the federal House of Commons who represented the western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. (That was the only region in the country that had any diversity in its elected federal representatives at the time of the study; almost all the other

Anglophone Members of Parliament were Liberals.) Altogether I received completed surveys from fifty-six members of the New Democratic Party, sixty-seven Liberals, and seventy-eight conservatives. The average RWA scores for the left-wing and right-wing caucuses are presented in Figure 5.2, with the wide-ranging Liberals tabulated on the side.

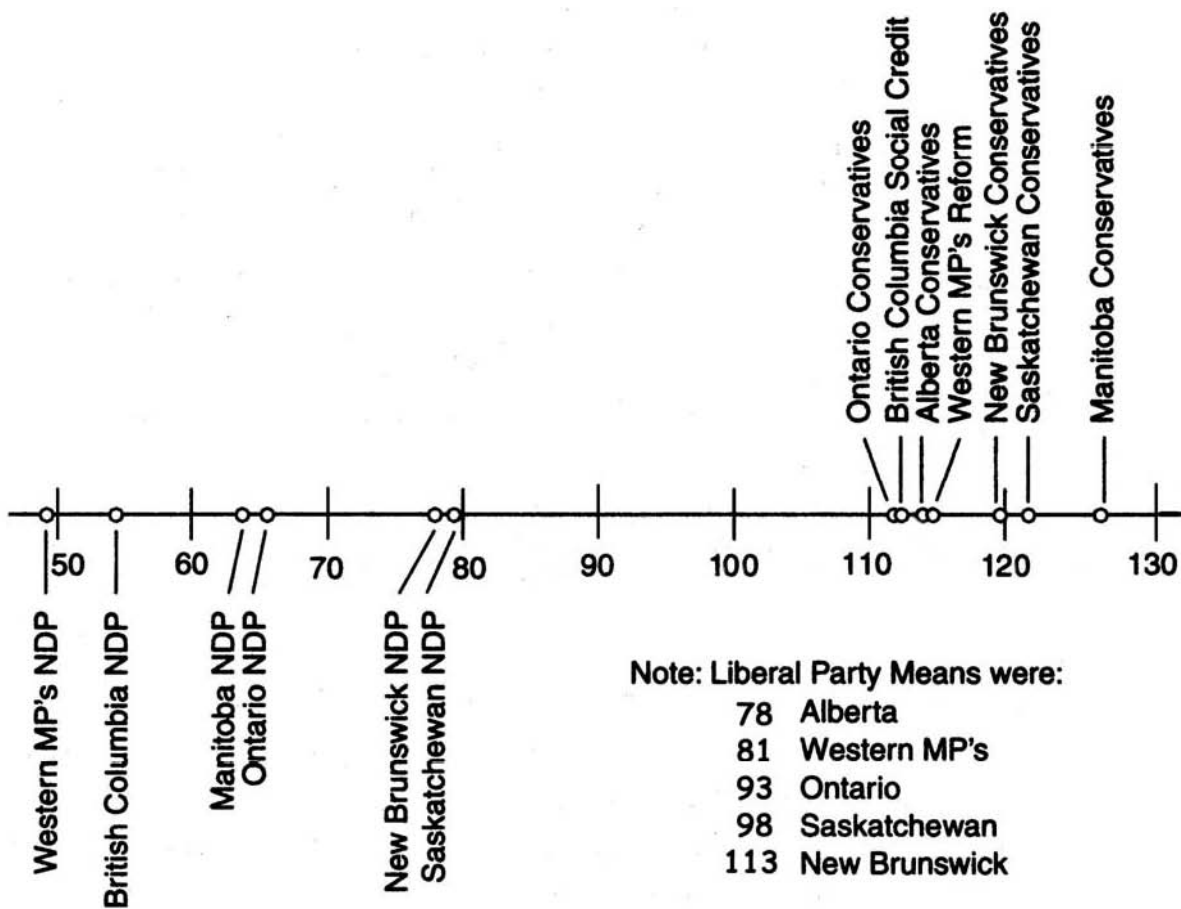
You can see that the conservatives' scores nestle very comfortably into the Republican Country staked out in Figure 5.1. The politicians in the right-wing parties seem to be cut from much the same authoritarian cloth in both countries. But the New Democrats set camp to the left of the American Democrats in Figure 5.1--even to the left of the Democrats' left-wing. A large chasm yawns in Canada between the New Democrats and the conservatives, a gap the Liberals are happy to cover with a wing and a prayer, as you can see, by flying hither and yon.

If you look at just the New Democrats' and the conservatives' scores on the RWA scale, party affiliation correlated .82 on the average with authoritarianism, which is one of the strongest relationships ever found in the social sciences.<sup>4</sup> The RWA scale divides these two groups almost as cleanly as a vote in the legislature would.

Nothing else, so far as I know, correlates so highly with left-wing versus right-wing politics, anywhere. In Canada at least, when you are talking about the "left-to-right" political dimension among politicians, you are talking about the personality trait measured by the RWA scale. At least until something sharper comes along. This might be true in the United States as well, but it doesn't show up nearly as crisply in terms of party affiliation mainly because the Democrats have a lot of high RWAs in some of their caucuses, particularly in the South.

Figure 5.2

## Average RWA Scale Scores of Canadian Legislators



Note: Scores have been re-scaled from a 30-item basis to a 20-item basis.

As was true with the American legislatures, I tacked on some items measuring other things besides right-wing authoritarianism in my last two Canadian studies, done in 1994 with the Alberta Legislature and the Members of Parliament. In Alberta, RWA scale scores had a moderate connection with having a conservative economic philosophy. In the House of Commons, authoritarianism was strongly correlated with racial and ethnic prejudice. As you would predict from the findings above, politicians from right-wing parties had the most conservative economic outlooks, and proved the most prejudiced.

I also was able to include, thanks to Felicia Pratto, some Social Dominance items in the survey I sent to the Alberta legislature and the House of Commons. The average correlation between RWA scores and answers to these items equaled .54 and confirms the presence of a lot of Double Highs in those chambers. Almost all of them belonged to the conservative party in those assemblies. In Canada as well as in the United States then, when you're talking about conservative members of legislatures, the data we have so far indicate you're usually talking about those fine power-hungry, amoral, manipulative, deceitful, highly prejudiced, dogmatic folks we met at the end of Chapter 5, the Double Highs.

### *Religious Conservatives and the Republican Party*

These legislator studies are now more than a decade old, and any politician who did not like the results could argue "Things have changed a lot since then." And things probably have changed. There are probably a lot *more* Double Highs in American legislatures now than there were in the early 1990s. Probably more than 26% of the lawmakers in the United States would agree with that "Nazi Cheer Book" item today. In many states, the Double Highs and their minions appear to have formed the majority, and as we noted in Chapter 5, have sometimes set about reducing the opposition to permanent impotence through unprecedented levels of gerrymandering, not to mention voter fraud.



For much of its history conservative American Christianity stayed out of politics. Politics was seen as corrupting and the abiding principle was to be “in this world, but not of it.” Even the rise of the evangelical movement under Billy Graham, beginning in the 1950s, was nonpolitical. But in 1969 a young political analyst in the Nixon administration with considerable foresight, Kevin Phillips, published *The Emerging Republican Majority* in which he identified various developments in the country that he believed would create a boon for Republican candidates for decades to come.

Phillips said the new GOP coalition would include increased numbers of both Catholic and Protestant conservatives, and he says today, “This troubled me not at all.”<sup>5</sup> It was just part of the coalescing “mix.” Now he is greatly troubled because--as he explains in his 2006 book, *American Theocracy*--religious conservatives have taken control of the Republican Party, turning it into the first religious party in U.S. history and endangering everyone else’s rights, the future of the country, and that of the world.<sup>6</sup> How did this happen?

With astonishing speed. To give just the highlights, in the late 1970s a group of conservative political organizers persuaded Jerry Falwell to lead the Moral Majority, which found Ronald Reagan much more to its liking in 1980 than the Baptist (but moderately liberal) Jimmy Carter. As Reagan’s second term drew to a close in 1988 the highly successful Christian broadcaster, Pat Robertson, marshaled his followers in a bid to become the Republican presidential nominee. But George Bush (the first one) countered by making special appeals to conservative Christians, especially Southern Baptists who did not like Robertson’s Pentecostal practices, and Bush won the nomination.

At the 1988 Republican convention Robertson urged his supporters to work for Bush. But he then used remnants of his campaign apparatus to found the Christian Coalition in 1989, whose purpose was to get conservative Christians of all

denominations involved in a voter mobilization movement. He knew an intense effort could pay big dividends, as he wrote in *The New Millennium* in 1990, “With the apathy that exists today, a small, well-organized minority can influence the selection of (political) candidates to an astonishing degree.” Two years later he wrote in *The New World Order*, “The Christian Coalition is launching an effort in selected states to become acquainted with registered voters in every precinct. This is slow, hard work. But it will build a significant database to use to communicate with those people who are regular voters. When they are mobilized in support of vital issues, elected officials listen.”

The Christian Coalition, composed of thousands of members burning with zeal, began distributing hundreds of thousands of bulletins *in churches* to help elect approved candidates. At the same time conservative Christians began taking control of state Republican organizations, by joining the party and showing up for meetings, from the precinct-level up, so that eventually *they* decided who would run for the state legislature, for governor, and for the Congress. Kevin Phillips noted, “By the end of the 1990s more than half of the fifty Republican state committees had been taken over by the religious right at least once.” <sup>7</sup>

In 1994 the hard-working religious conservatives played a pivotal role in electing a GOP majority in the House of Representatives. By 2000 they were able to make one of their own, George W. Bush, the Republican nominee for president, and the expanding ranks of the Christian Coalition distributed over 70 *million* voter guides in Catholic as well as Protestant churches, and elsewhere across the country. This effort enabled Bush to come close to Al Gore’s popular vote totals, and ultimately to win the electoral college vote after the Supreme Court ruled in the Republican Party’s favor in Florida. Everyone knows Bush would have lost his re-election bid in 2004 without the support of tens of thousands of devoted workers recruited by his chief campaign strategist, Karl Rove, through their churches.

By most estimates the religious right constitutes about 40 percent of Republican supporters nationwide, which means that most of the people who vote Republican do *not* belong to the movement. But that 60 percent has almost no say in what the party does, because the 40 percent constitutes by far the largest *organized* block of voters in the party, and in the country.

How organized are they? After their leaders have decided who will run on the Republican ticket in an election, religious fundamentalists donate money, work the phones for hours on end, canvass night and day, bring the candidate to their social groups, talk to their neighbors, and drop leaflets over and over again to win the race. After all, proselytizing is one of the things they do best, and politics is now directly connected to their religion. In fact political “education” and “guidance” come directly from the pulpit in many churches now.

Authoritarian followers will thus do everything humanly possible to “get out their vote” and send more of “their kind” of people to the school board, state legislature, the statehouse, Congress and the White House. Unfortunately, “their kind” of candidates will usually be Double Highs--about the last people you would want in positions of power in a democracy.

The leadership of the religious right--a mixture of established politicians, prominent religious figures, and behind-the-scenes organizers--can firmly control a legislator it helped elect--even if most of the lawmaker’s votes came from non-fundamentalists. The legislator realizes that if the power brokers pull the plug on him and put someone else up for the next election, he’ll be out of a job.

The religious right can also put a lot of pressure on those it did not help elect. It can bury a “swing-vote” senator or a representative with letters, emails, telegrams and petitions in a flash. As Ted Haggard, the soon-to-be-disgraced president of the National Association of Evangelicals says on Alexandra Pelosi’s documentary film,

*Friends of God*, “We can crash the Capitol switchboard system. That’s power.” Fundamentalist organizers thus will try to carry almost any contentious issue by storm today, if they have to, from whether to keep Terri Schiavo on life support to the next nomination to the Supreme Court. <sup>8,9</sup>

### *The 2006 Mid-Term Election*

But didn’t the Religious Right abandon the Republican party in the November 2006 mid-term election? And didn’t the rest of the country firmly repudiate the Republicans too?

You may have seen headlines to this effect, but some ugly facts say otherwise. In the 2004 federal election, when the Religious Right made an all-out effort to re-elect George Bush and support Republican candidates, the big “exit poll” study done by a consortium of major news organizations found that 74% of white evangelicals voted for the Republican candidate for the House of Representatives in their district. (It was, far and away, the biggest demographic advantage the GOP had in the election.) In the 2006 mid-term election, the figure dropped, but only to 70%, and white evangelicals again provided the Republicans their most solid, unswerving base of support. Despite all the moral scandals and unfulfilled “value” promises, the high RWAs turned out in goodly numbers--especially given that it was a mid-term election--and staunchly voted Republican.

Let’s zoom back and look at the electorate as a whole. As voters went to the polls in November 2006 the war in Iraq was clearly becoming unwinnable, one corruption scandal after another had rocked Republicans in the Congress,<sup>10</sup> the national debt was shooting out of sight, the Bush administrations’ use of domestic spying in violation of the Constitution had been well-documented, as had its systematic program of torturing people it suspected of terrorism, evidence was piling up that the Republicans had stolen the 2004 presidential election through voter fraud

and dirty tricks in Ohio, the economy was slowing down, “Robocall” was hammering away at the phone lines, and the final two nails, named Representative Mark Foley and the Reverend Ted Haggard, had just been nailed into the GOP coffin.

With all that happening, only 40% of the eligible voters sent to the polls, and 45% of them voted Republican. If the war in Iraq had just taken a few more months to become transparently disastrous, or if there had been just one or two fewer scandals in the last weeks of the campaign, America would still have a monolithic federal government controlled by a pack of Double Highs. Maybe you take some comfort from November 7, 2006. I think the bullet just missed us.

As this is being written in April, 2007, the leading GOP presidential candidate, Rudy Giuliani, seems likely to lose support as the public learns more about him. If the leaders of the Religious Right can agree on a candidate, I believe the loyal followers can easily be motivated to make their choice the Republican nominee. And devastation could result, either to the GOP, or to the country.

### *A Bit of Modest Speculation*

One of the easiest mistakes to make when judging a threatening movement is to perceive it as being more unified and monolithic than it really is. So let’s do a little speculating here. Let’s suppose the Religious Right gains long-term control of the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of the federal government and accomplishes its common agenda. Which is, for starters, to outlaw all abortions, outlaw homosexuality, stomp out feminism, make female subjugation to males the law, keep holy wars going, especially in the Middle East, using nuclear weapons as needed, withdraw from the United Nations, smack the hell out of France and any other country that isn’t automatically on America’s side, censor virtually every movie, television program, magazine, newspaper and the internet in any way possible, install the teaching of Christian fundamentalism in public schools, forbid the teaching of evolution, make scientific judgments on the basis of conservative Christian ideology, and so on--complete with the death penalty for various violators, possibly by public stoning. (I hope you don’t think I’m making this all up. Google “Religious Right Agenda,” “Christian Reconstructionists,” and “Dominionists.”)

Would the victors then all clap each other on the back and live happily ever after in Taliban America? Maybe they would. But recalling what we know about the dominance drives and prejudices of Double Highs, wouldn't a subsequent Catholic versus Protestant struggle for control be just as likely? Coalitions last only as long as the common enemy does, and few things provoke animosity the way religious differences do among the very religious. And if the Protestants subdued the Catholics, would that be the end of religious warfare, or the beginning of the next round? After all, Baptists and Pentecostals don't really like each other all that much.

Well of course this is all wild-eyed speculation, isn't it, and we're talking about things that may have occurred elsewhere, but are absolutely unprecedented in American history. So there is little reason to think this would indeed happen. OK, I hear you. Now tell me why all of this will *not* happen.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> But not so in Canada, where about 60 percent of the Manitoba parents in my samples who support the conservative political party are either high RWAs or high social dominators (or both). But the multi-party Canadian political system, we shall see, tends to line people up more by their political ideology than the two-party American system does. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>2</sup> In McWilliams and Keil's 2005 nationwide survey of American adults, mentioned in Chapter 1, the 406 Democrats averaged 76.9 on the RWA scale, and the 393 Republicans, 104.2, following conversion from a -3 to +3 response scale to the -4 to +4 format. An appreciably bigger difference appeared in terms of respondents' self-

classification as liberals or conservatives. The 275 persons who called themselves liberals averaged 61.8, while the 356 self-described conservatives had a mean of 111.1. The Democratic vs. Republican RWA scale correlation was .34. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Democratic vs. Republican RWA scale correlation in the American legislatures was .44. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> This is only the beginning. One of the things a researcher looks at when using a survey such as the RWA scale, as explained in note 3 of Chapter 1, is how well responses to each item go along with the responses to all the other items on the scale. The politicians I studied, both in the United States and Canada, showed an incredible amount of inter-item agreement on the RWA scale. The “alpha coefficient” of internal consistency in these responses was .95 in the United States and .94 in Canada. Most researchers have never seen values that high, anywhere, with anything. The only thing I know that beats it is the internal consistency of a scale Tim Fullerton and I developed based on the Nicene Creed that measures Christian orthodoxy, and there one is measuring an ideology that people were taught and frequently memorized.

But in this case the RWA scale uncovered an ideology almost as strong as a religion among North American legislators--one I am sure no one ever taught them, one they certainly did not have to memorize, but one almost as tightly interconnected as a religious creed. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>5</sup> Phillips, K. *American theocracy*, 2006, New York: Viking, p. xiii. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, K. *American theocracy*, 2006, New York: Viking, p. 188. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>7</sup> If anyone ought to be interested in understanding authoritarianism, it's the mainstream conservatives who used to form and control the Republican Party. They have seen their political party hijacked by the most radical element in their party, and it's anybody's guess whether they can get it back. The takeover has been so complete that many people have forgotten what “conservative” meant before it became

“authoritarian.” I don’t look forward to “conservative” becoming a dirty word the way “liberal” did. Until we find someone who’s always right, democracy needs both traditional and progressive voices to choose from. But the principled conservative options have been badly tarred lately by authoritarianism.

I can’t imagine Senator Barry Goldwater agreeing with, “Our country desperately needs a mighty leader who will do what has to be done to destroy the radical new ways and sinfulness that are ruining us.” As John Dean points out, Goldwater was quite apprehensive about what the “cultural conservatives” would do to the Grand Old Party. “Mark my word,” the former senator said after the 1994 mid-term election, “if and when these preachers get control of the party, and they’re sure trying to do so, it’s going to be a terrible damn problem. Frankly, these people frighten me.” (*Conservatives Without Conscience*, p. xxxiv.) [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>8</sup> Want to play the “Guess Who?” game again. This chapter’s mystery guest sought the Republican nomination for president and told Americans he had been a combat Marine in Korea and been awarded three battle stars there. But those who knew him then, including Republican Congressman Paul McCloskey, Jr., said “X” had done nothing of the kind. Instead “X” had always been stationed far out of harm’s way because his father, a U.S. Senator, pulled some strings. “X” instead was known as the “liquor procurement officer” in his outfit, and he never came within miles of a shot fired in anger. (“X” sued McCloskey for saying this, but then dropped the suit and agreed to pay McCloskey’s court costs.)

After returning from the Far East, “X” got a law degree from Yale but could not pass the bar exam--which must have thrilled his former profs no end. He converted



to the Pentecostal movement at this crossroad in his life and moved into religious broadcasting. He proved to be a shrewd businessman, accumulating a large network of stations around the world and considerable wealth.

Beginning in 1985 “X” claimed God had moved hurricanes away from his neck of the Virginia woods in answer to his particular prayers. He also wrote that, if Americans didn’t watch out, the United Nations would disarm the country, and the rest of the world would take over the United States. Like many fundamentalists he welcomed the Gulf War, viewing it as one of the signs that the “End Days” were nigh and the Kingdom of God was at hand. But the “Rapture” did not occur. Then he said the events of 9/11 were God’s punishment of the United States for its immoral behavior--leaving unexplained why, if this was the point the Almighty wished to make, such a traumatic disaster did not occur during President Clinton’s presidency instead.

“X” has railed against hypocrisy on many occasions. Yet in 1994 when he was making emotional appeals on his television program for donations to fund Operation Blessing, which he said would transport refugees from Rwanda, it turned out the money was mainly used to transport diamond mining equipment for a company he owned in Zaire. Caught owning a race horse, when many evangelicals disapprove of gambling, he explained that he bought it simply because he liked to look at it. Like Oral Roberts, he preached faith healing to others, but got himself to a hospital quickly when he was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2003.

Every few months “X” makes an outrageous statement that he later apologizes for, claims was misinterpreted, or doggedly sticks to with mind-bending elaborations and rationalizations. In August 2005 he opined that the CIA ought to assassinate Venezuela’s president. In January 2006 he suggested God had smote the prime minister of Israel with a stroke because his government had withdrawn its troops from the Gaza Strip. In May 2006 he said that God had told him that storms will hit

America's coastlines, including "possibly" a tsunami in the Pacific northwest. Later in May he announced that, thanks to the "age-defying protein shake" he hawks on his evangelistic TV show, he had leg pressed 2,000 pounds at age 73—about a thousand pounds more than the strongest football players can do in their prime. In January 2007 he told his enormous and faithful television audience that God had warned him that a terrorist attack on the United States would cause a mass killing late in 2007. "Something like a nuclear attack." (If "X" is God's prophet, why doesn't the Almighty give him more specific information so we can see a real honest-to-God prediction confirmed? Why does God play "I know something you don't know" through "X"?)

Because of X's several scandals and many outrageous declarations, some observers think his influence among conservative Christians is waning. But the money keeps pouring in from his devoted followers. [As the scandal-plagued faith-healer Aimee Semple McPherson said decades ago, "If the papers tomorrow morning proved that I had committed eleven murders, (my followers) would still believe me."]

Who is "X"? Oh heck, everybody knows that this, believe it or not, is *the* person most responsible for the formation of the Religious Right. Look to you like a Double High? [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>9</sup> A telling example of how the piper must be paid when it comes to the Religious Right appeared on May 13, 2006 when Senator John McCain accepted an honorary degree and delivered the commencement address at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. During his 2000 campaign to become the Republican nominee for president, McCain had called Jerry Falwell an "agent of intolerance" and said Falwell and Pat Robertson had an "evil influence" in the Republican Party. But McCain is given no chance to become the Republican nominee in 2008 without the support of the Christian Right.

When asked about his appearance at Liberty University the next day on “Meet the Press,” Senator McCain said, “I believe that the ‘Christian Right’ has a major role to play in the Republican Party. One reason is because they’re so active and their followers are. And I believe they have a right to be a part of our party. I don’t have to agree with everything they stand for, nor do I have to agree with everything that’s on the liberal side of the Republican Party.” [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>10</sup> On September 20, 2006 an independent Congressional-watch organization called Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington released its second annual “Most Corrupt Members of Congress Report.” Three senators and seventeen members of the House were named, most of them hold-overs from the first annual report (although the news release noted with some glee that two of the previous winners were already on their way to jail).

I found it instructive to look up the ratings these 20 lawmakers' voting records received from the Family Research Council, the successor to the Christian Coalition as the major lobbying organization for the Religious Right. The average was 80%. Eight of the “most corrupt” had perfect 100% endorsements from the Family Research Council. The lowest score was a 64% posted by the Democratic Representative Alan Mollohan from West Virginia. (Seventeen of the twenty “most corrupt” were Republicans.)

To be sure, many other lawmakers who got high scores from the Family Research Council did not get named as most corrupt. But I think I read somewhere that there’s this interesting connection between being a lying, dishonest, amoral manipulator and becoming a leader of right-wing religious movements.

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## Chapter 7

### What's To Be Done?<sup>1</sup>

If you are a reasonably critical person, by now you've got to be wondering if you're being buried by a big snow job. Almost without exception, the findings about authoritarians in the previous chapters have been negative. You wouldn't want your daughter to marry one, would you? But maybe this presentation has been one-sided. Maybe it has been unfair. Maybe things have been biased.<sup>2</sup>

It *is* one-sided if we conclude that authoritarians have no good qualities whatsoever, for they do. High RWAs are earnest, hard-working, happy, charitable, undoubtedly supportive of people in their in-group, good friends, and so on. Social dominators are ambitious and competitive--cardinal virtues in American society. It's as big a mistake, I have to keep telling myself, to see people as all-bad as it is to see them as all-good.

But the downside remains, and I want to emphasize that it's really there. The presentation of the research in this book has *not* passed through *any* kind of theoretical or ideological filter. In almost every experiment, low RWAs and low Social Dominators had as much a chance to look bad as their counterparts on the high end. But they seldom did. I have not stole past any praiseworthy findings about authoritarians; I have always reported any bad news that turned up about lows. I know it seems very one-sided, but that's the way the data tumbled. While authoritarian followers and authoritarian leaders have their good side, their bad side is pretty broad and hard to miss.

### *Self-Righteousness Begins at Home*

Having said this, I'd like to start this last chapter with some observations about any self-righteous s.o.b.'s who are reading it. Let's start with me.

When I was an undergraduate I often attended a weekly film series held in one of the big lecture halls. There I saw many of the black-and-white classics that came out before I started going to the movies, such as “All’s Quiet on the Western Front” and “King Kong.” What I did not realize, as I listened to actors moaning and screaming on the screen before me was that a lot of moaning and screaming was going on, night after night, just under my feet in the basement of this building. For that’s where Stanley Milgram did most of his famous studies of obedience.

We’re going to talk about those studies now, then consider other evidence of what ordinary men are capable of doing, and then decide what to do about all this.

### *Milgram’s Experiments on Obedience*

At one time these studies were well known in North America, but fewer and fewer people heard of them as time passed. So I’m going to summarize Milgram’s basic experiment here and hope that, when you don’t believe me, you’ll look it up and see for yourself. Then I’m going to connect it to The Basic Finding of Social Psychology (now you can genuflect) and make a truly fundamental point about authoritarianism to help control the self-righteousness simmering in all our beings. For you see, if Stanley Milgram had tapped me on the shoulder one night as I left the film series and asked me to serve in his experiment, I would probably have done the most hideous, unforgivable thing in my life then.

Milgram never would have tapped a student, though. He studied mainly men recruited through newspaper ads in the greater New Haven, Connecticut area for a “study of memory.” When you arrived at the Yale University building to keep your appointment, you might have encountered a pleasant, middle-aged, white gentleman who was looking for the same room you were. After a little exploring the two of you locate it and are met by the Experimenter. He explains that his study is designed to explore the effects of punishment on learning. One of you is going to be a Teacher,

and the other subject a Learner. The two of you draw lots, and (I promise you) you become the Teacher. Lucky you.

If you have been gazing around the room during this spiel you have noticed a large metal box on a table where the Teacher is going to sit. It's an electric shock generator, and there's a long row of thirty up-down toggle switches running across the face of it. The first switch says it gives a 15 volt shock, the second, 30 volts, and so on. A few switches more and you're at 120 volts, which is approximately the voltage of the electricity that comes out of the wall sockets in your house.

On and on the switches go, until finally they end at 450 volts. The last two are simply labeled "XXX." The Experimenter gives you, the Teacher, a sample shock of 45 volts so you'll get an idea what it feels like. When a switch is thrown you hear something thunk inside the box, a buzzer sounds, various lights go on, the needle lurches on a voltmeter, and the man in the adjacent room may scream.

The man in the adjacent room is the other subject, who got the job of Learner. He has been given an obviously impossible task of memorizing a long list of word-pairs after just one run-through. You've seen him get strapped into a heavy chair and you've seen a shock plate fastened onto his arm. Your job is quite simple. As the Teacher, you ask the Learner a question through an intercom. If he gets it right, you ask him the next one. When he gets it wrong, which anyone would do quite often, you give him a shock. However, here's the joker: you have to throw the *next* switch each time, which means each shock is 15 volts stronger than the last, and as the Learner makes the inevitable mistakes, you're moving closer and closer to an electrocution.

At 75 volts the Learner grunts, "Ugh!" You can hear him through the wall separating him from you. Let's say you turn to the Experimenter, who is sitting behind you, and say "He just said something." The Experimenter says, "Please continue," and so you do. More grunting occurs at 90 and 105 volts. You again ask for guidance, and

the Experimenter says, “The experiment requires that you continue.” At 120 volts the Learner grunts and then shouts, “Hey, *this* really hurts!” You relay this to the Experimenter, who says, “It is absolutely essential that you continue.” Two shocks later, at 150 volts, the Learner shouts, “Experimenter! Get me out of here. I won’t be in the experiment any more. I refuse to go on.”

You are now clearly standing at a fork in the road, because the Learner has demanded to be set free. He didn’t address his demand to you, but it’s crystal clear that he doesn’t want to be in the study any longer. You would be inflicting pain on him against his will if you throw the next switch. He HAS the right to quit the experiment, hasn’t he? There, but for the luck of the draw, sits you strapped in the Learner’s seat receiving obviously painful electric shocks. And all your experience tells you the shocks are getting more and more dangerous with every mistake.

So you turn to the Experimenter expecting him to call it quits. But instead he says, “Please continue.” You point out the Learner is demanding to be set free. The Experimenter says, “Whether the Learner likes it or not, you must go on until he has learned all the word pairs correctly. So please go on.” If you say the shocks are dangerous now, the Experimenter says, “Although the shocks may be painful, there is no permanent tissue damage, so please go on.” If you still refuse, the Experimenter tells you sternly, “You have no other choice. You must go on.” If your knees buckle and you say, “But who’s going to be responsible for what happens to that man in there?” the Experimenter ignores you. If you say it again, the Experimenter says, “I’ll be responsible. Now please continue.” What are you going to do? Defy a psychologist in his own laboratory? Would anyone dare?

Assuming you can’t find it in yourself to defy this tin-pot authority figure--and you have every right to be insulted by this assumption--more shouting and demanding to be set free occur until you get to 270 volts. Then you hear an agonized scream followed by an hysterical, “Let me out of here. Let me out of here. Let me out of here.

Let me out. Do you hear? Let me out of here.” Four screams later the Learner stops responding in any way. If you give him the next shock (345 volts) there is no sound. The Learner is either unconscious or dead.

Still the Experimenter insists on continuing the procedure until the (dying or dead) Learner “gets all the word pairs right.” If you go onward, likely with trembling hand if you do, to 450 volts, you might think this insanity will end there because you’ve run out of switches. But no, “Dr. Frankenstein” tells you to keep using the last switch over and over again until the Learner you-know-what. When you use the 450 volt switch for the third time, the experiment *does* end.

Stanley Milgram then comes into the room (the role of Experimenter was played by a hired hand), and slowly debriefs the Teacher, who soon finds out that no electricity ever reached the Learner. The Learner (another hired hand) appears, all alive, friendly and forgiving. This is very good news to you because while many people who hear about the experiment suspect the Teacher must have seen through the ruse at some point, all the evidence in the world says the Teachers did not. If they had gone all the way, where I am sure I would have gone in 1962, they were usually basket cases by the time the experiment ended.<sup>3</sup>

Well, how many people *would* go all the way to 450 volts in that situation? Milgram asked 39 psychiatrists and they all said NO ONE would. If you ask ordinary people the same question, they say only a pathological fringe element, perhaps one or two percent of the population, would go all the way. Certainly people know they themselves WOULD NOT, COULD NOT, EVER, NEVER do such a thing. So if you *know* that *you* would not, could not, that’s what almost everyone says.

Milgram ran 40 men, one at a time, in the situation I just described. All 40 shocked the Learner after he started grunting; all 40 gave the “household voltage” 120 volt shock. Thirty-four went past the 150 volt mark where the Learner demanded to



be set free, which means 85% of the Teachers paid less attention to the Learner's undeniable rights than they did to the Experimenter's insistence that the study continue. Thereafter a few more people dropped out, one here and one there. Altogether fifteen men got up the gumption to eventually tell the Experimenter, "No, I won't." But the other twenty-five men went to 450 volts and threw the switch over and over until the Experimenter told them to stop.

That's not NONE of them. That's 62%. It's not all of them, but it is MOST of them!<sup>4</sup>

I can't tell you how many times I've been called a liar or a fool by people who had never heard of Milgram's experiment before I told them. The results just stagger one, don't they? But they seem to be true and general. Milgram's basic finding that most adults would inflict severe pain upon and even risk the death of an innocent victim in a psychology-experiment-gone-mad has been found numerous times since, elsewhere in the United States, and in Germany, Italy, Spain, Austria and Jordan. University students as well as persons recruited from the general population have served as subjects, and obeyed just as much.

Subjects believe the shocks are real. Virtually no Teacher is willing to become the Learner and start the experiment over. The Teachers are *greatly* relieved when they discover the Learner was actually unharmed. Yet most of them would surely have killed the Learner if electricity had actually flowed from the shock box.<sup>5</sup>

Why do people do it? The Experimenter makes no threat against the Teachers whatsoever. The Teachers were only paid \$4.50 for participating in the study (a penny a volt, it turns out) so they weren't brutalizing someone for riches beyond belief. Absolutely nothing *outside* the Teachers prevented them from saying "Go to hell!" and setting the Learner free and walking out of the joint. But instead most of them sat there, smoking, squirming, sweating, shaking, mumbling, biting their lips, protesting--and then throwing the next switch.

*Why, then?*

Partly they did it, I am sure, because people think they lose their independence and right to act freely when they become part of a psychology experiment (whereas the researcher usually wants them to act exactly as they feel like acting).<sup>6</sup> But the bigger reason has to be that the vast majority of us have had practically no training in our lifetimes in openly defying authority. The authorities who brought us up mysteriously forgot to teach that. We may desperately want to say no, but that turns out to be a huge step that most people find impossibly huge--even when the authority is only a psychologist you never heard of running an insane experiment. From our earliest days we are told disobedience is a sin, and obedience is a virtue, the “right” thing to do.

I saw this myself when I ran a very mild “fake electric shock memory experiment” four times in 1971 and 1972. In my study the Teacher *chose* the level of shock after each mistake. The shock machine only sported five switches, running from “Slight Shock” to “Very Strong Shock” and the Teacher could repeatedly use the lowest shock if s/he wished. Most subjects used a variety of shocks, and (as I reported in chapter 1) it turned out authoritarians gave stronger shocks on the average to the Learner, whom they could see in the next room through a one-way mirror, than most people did.

There was, however, a second shock device sitting on the table before the Teacher which had a single large red button on it, and the ominous label: “Danger: Very Severe Shock. Do not push this button unless you are instructed to do so.” When the learning trials had ended the Experimenter told the Teacher to push this button because he thought the Learner had not tried hard enough during the memory test. It was a punishment, pure and simple, a very severe one, and it had nothing to do with the data being collected because the data had all been collected.

In my four studies (two of which used people recruited through newspaper ads, and the other two introductory psychology students) 89%, 86%, 88% and 91% of the subjects pushed the button that said it would deliver a dangerous shock. It took these compliant subjects, on the average, about four seconds to do so. Teachers typically asked, “You mean this one?” before proceeding, but once that was verified they pushed “Big Red.” The few subjects who refused usually thought *they* were going to get the shock if they did so. (Nothing happened when the dangerous button was pushed; the Experimenter “discovered” a high voltage connection had come loose.)<sup>7</sup>

In this study the subjects had about twenty minutes to anticipate what they would do if they were told to give a dangerous, very severe shock, and still most of them did so almost immediately. The possibility of saying “no” seems not to have occurred to them.

*Milgram’s Variations on His Theme.* Once he overcame his own astonishment at what he had found, Stanley Milgram ran numerous variations on his experiment to see what factors affected obedience. For example, he seated the Learner right next to the Teacher. This understandably made it more difficult to hurt the victim, but still 40 percent of a new sample of forty men went all the way to 450 volts. So Milgram then made another batch of Teachers hold the Learner’s hand down on a shock plate through an insulating sheet, while throwing switches with their other hand. This especially gruesome condition further reduced compliance, but still 30 percent of 40 men totally obeyed.

If you assume the samples were reasonably representative of the general population, it means someone who wished you dead would have to try three or four complete strangers in this experimental setup before he found someone who would hold you down and kill you with electric shocks rather than say no to a psychology experimenter. If that doesn’t give you the heebie-jeebies, nothing will.

But, you might well argue, these experiments were run at a big famous university, and Teachers in conflict over whether to throw the next switch might have reasoned, “Yale wouldn’t run an experiment that endangered someone’s life.”

Milgram appreciated this too, so he moved his set-up to Bridgeport, Connecticut and distributed a mail circular soliciting men to serve in a memory experiment for the fictitious “Research Associates of Bridgeport.” Subjects reported to a sparsely equipped office in a rather run-down building in downtown Bridgeport. If they asked who was doing the study, they were told the Associates was a private firm doing studies for industry. No connection to Yale or any other prestigious institution was stated or implied. Rather the opposite seemed to be the case; the whole arrangement had a somewhat “seedy,” fly-by-night appearance, and total compliance dropped--but only from 62 percent to 48 percent. Clearly the connection to Yale was not the primary reason Milgram had found such stunning and destructive obedience.<sup>8</sup>

### *The “Teaching Team” Conditions and Social Psychology’s Great Discovery*

Let me tell you about Milgram’s two “Teaching Team” experiments, and then I’ll make my big point. Back in New Haven, real subjects were combined with (supposedly) other subjects to form a teaching team that quizzed the Learner and administered the shocks. The other Teachers, like the Experimenter and the Learner, were confederates playing scripted roles. In one version of the Teaching Team experiment, two (confederate) Teachers who were seated next to the real subject refused, by 210 volts, to participate any further. The Experimenter then tried to get the real subject, who had been serving in a subsidiary role, to take over shocking the Learner. Do you think the 40 men serving in this condition would do so? Not a chance. Only 10 percent of them went all the way to 450 volts; the other 90 percent followed their peers in open rebellion.

But what did another 40 men do when a (confederate) fellow teacher did the shocking without complaint while they did essential but subsidiary tasks? In this “Adolf Eichmann” condition, 92 percent of the real subjects went all the way to 450 volts with scarcely a murmur of protest.

So did it matter who the *individuals* were who served in these Teaching Team conditions? Do you think that the people who defied the Experimenter in the first situation would similarly have quit if they had been randomly assigned to the “Adolf Eichmann” condition instead? Isn’t it obvious that virtually everyone simply did what the people around him did? If the other teachers defied the Experimenter, so did thirty-six of the forty real subjects. If the other teacher went merrily on his obedient way shocking the Learner, nary a word was heard from thirty-seven of those forty real subjects. Obedience of authority is one of the “strong forces” in life, but so also is conformity to one’s peers. How people acted depended very little on what kind of people they were, and very greatly on the situation they were in--particularly on what their peers did.<sup>9</sup>

That is the Great Discovery of social psychology. Experiment after experiment demonstrates that we are powerfully affected by the social circumstances encasing us. And very few of us realize how much. So if we are tempted by all the earlier findings in this book to think that right-wing authoritarians and social dominators are the guys in the black hats while we fight on the side of the angels, we are not only falling into the ethnocentric trap, we are not only buttering ourselves up one side and down the other with self-righteousness, we are probably deluding ourselves as well. Milgram has shown us how hard it is to say no to malevolent authority, how easy it is to follow the crowd, and how very difficult it is to resist when the crowd is doing the bidding of malevolent authority. It’s not that there’s some part of “No” we don’t understand. It’s that situational pressures, often quite unnoticed, temporarily strike the word from our vocabulary.

So the RWA scale and the Social Dominance scale do not “tell us how authoritarian we are.” They only suggest how authoritarian we are inclined to be. *Our behavior* says how authoritarian we are. “Hello, my name is Bob. I can be an authoritarian.”

*Say what?* In case you’re wondering, I’m not taking back all the things I said in the first six chapters of this book. Our levels of authoritarianism do matter in most of life. Milgram’s Teachers were in a very unfamiliar environment among complete strangers who were scripted to act in certain ways no matter what the Teachers did. Trying to change them would have been as futile as my trying to change the outcome of the movies I was watching one floor above.

Usually, however, we are in familiar situations interacting with others who are well known to us, whom we can affect by how we act. So it matters who we are and what we do. And research shows it takes more pressure to get low RWAs to behave shamefully in situations like the Milgram experiment than it takes for highs. But the difference between low and high authoritarians is one of degree, I repeat, not kind. To put a coda on this section: with enough direct pressure from above and subtle pressure from around us, Milgram has shown, most of us cave in.

Not very reassuring, huh. But it makes crystal clear, if it wasn’t before, why we have to keep malevolent leaders out of power.

### *Ordinary Men*

If you’re thinking that the man on the street might somehow be manipulated into administering possibly lethal shocks to someone in a psychology experiment, but he certainly could not be induced to murder innocent victim after innocent victim in real life, let me ask you: Who did the killing in the Holocaust? Answer: Mostly members of Himmler’s Schutzstaffel, the “S.S.” They followed along behind the

German army as it advanced through Poland and the Soviet Union, killing hundreds of thousands of Jews who now found themselves in Nazi-occupied territory. And they operated the death camps, including the greatest murder factory of them all, Auschwitz-Birkenau. To be a member of the S.S. you had to be a fanatical Nazi. They usually believed Jews were sub-human racial enemies and had to be destroyed. By all accounts they destroyed with sadistic enthusiasm.

But they did not do all the systematic murdering of the Jews. Some of it was done by quite ordinary men who were not consumed with anti-Semitism, and who were only marginally members of the German armed forces. Reserve Police Battalion 101 provides an example.<sup>10</sup> It was a part of the “Order Police” formed in Germany to maintain control in occupied countries.

Battalion 101 had eleven officers and nearly 500 men--nearly all of them from Hamburg. Their commander, Major Wilhelm Trapp, was a World War I veteran who had risen in the police service after that war. He was not a member of the S.S., but two of his company commanders were, and the third was a “Nazi by conviction.” The rank and file were about 40 years old on the average, too old to be drafted into the Wehrmacht. They had worked on the docks, driven trucks, and moved things around warehouses for the most part prior to being drafted. Although a quarter of them were members of the Nazi Party, they had grown up before Hitler came to power. They were given basic military training and in June 1942, sent to Poland.

At first the battalion rounded up Jews in various locations and send them off to camps and eventual death. The men did this with about as much hesitation as Milgram’s subjects showed in the “Eichmann condition.” But on July 11, 1942 Major Trapp received orders to move his battalion to the town of Jozefow --which was probably a village much like Anatevka in *Fiddler on the Roof*--and after sending the fit Jewish males off to labor camps, to kill the 1800 Jewish women, children, infirm and elderly who remained.

Trapp was quite distressed by this assignment, and as the order passed down the chain of command within the battalion of policemen, one of the junior officers announced he would not take part in the killings. His platoon was therefore put in charge of moving the Jewish men to the labor camp.

As the day of execution dawned Trapp assembled his battalion, told them of their assignment, and then made an extraordinary offer: any of the older policemen who did not feel up to the task would be excused. One man stepped forward and was immediately berated by his company commander. But Major Trapp cut his officer off and took the soldier under his wing. Seeing this, ten to twelve other men stepped forward. But the rest of the battalion stayed in their ranks, and were soon moved out to perform the executions. Major Trapp excused himself from any direct participation, and the three company commanders organized the massacre.

The policemen blocked off the Jewish section of the village and set to work herding the residents to the town square. The old and infirm were shot in their homes. Infants and small children were sometimes shot on the spot, but usually were moved with everyone else to the square. One company of the battalion was pulled aside and given a quick lesson in how to shoot someone in the back of the head with a rifle. It then moved to a nearby wooded area and awaited the victims to be brought to them in trucks.

When the trucks were unloaded the executioners were paired off, face to face, with their individual victims. They marched the Jews further into the woods, made them kneel down, and shot them. The killings continued all day without interruption, but the pace was slow so Major Trapp ordered a second company into the woods to speed up the murders. The leader of one of the platoons in this company gave all his men the opportunity to do something else, without penalty, but no one took up his offer.



A number of the policemen however found various ways to avoid becoming executioners. They hid in the village, or gave themselves extra “searching” duties. Some of the shooters asked to be given other assignments, especially after being given a woman or child to kill, and generally they were excused. Some of the policemen deliberately missed their target from point-blank range, while others just “disappeared” into the woods for the rest of the day. But these were the exceptions. At least 80 percent of those called upon to murder helpless civilians did so and continued to do so until all the Jews from Jozefow had been killed.

Afterwards Major Trapp instructed his men not to talk among themselves about what they had done. But great resentment and bitterness roiled in the battalion. The physical act of shooting someone had proved quite gruesome, with many of the shooters becoming covered with the blood and brains of their victims. Some of the policemen had killed people they had known earlier in Hamburg or elsewhere. Almost everyone was angry about having to kill children.

How could they do it, especially since many of them never individually *had* to? For one thing, while the policemen were not usually Nazis, they had little regard for Jews in general, so that made it easier. For another, their company commanders made it clear that, whatever Major Trapp had said and whomever he had protected, they expected their men to do the job assigned to them.

But judicial interrogations of some 125 of the men conducted in the 1960s indicated that, while no one had to participate, and about a dozen men demonstrated this by stepping forward, and others later dropped out in various ways, the great majority stayed in ranks and later killed whoever was brought to them out of loyalty to those ranks, and to maintain their standing in their units. “The act of stepping out that morning in Jazefow meant leaving one’s comrades and admitting that one was too weak or cowardly.” “Who would have dared,” declared one of the policemen, “to lose face before the assembled troops?”<sup>11</sup>

Thus the men chose to become murderers rather than look bad in the eyes of the other men. It was a hideous, barbarous, supremely evil thing to do for mere acceptance, but as I said, researchers find the need to belong and conform, to be liked and “not make waves” powerfully affect the behavior of ordinary men. And the mass murderers in Reserve Police Battalion 101 were rather ordinary men.

Over time, as the battalion participated in more and more mass murders, it became much more relaxed and efficient in its deadly operations. These ordinary men got used to killing thousands of people at close range as part of their day’s work. By the time their part of the “Final Solution” was completed in Poland, the battalion had shot at least 38,000 Jews to death.

*So What’s Your Point?*

Good question. I’m not saying you and I are homicidal maniacs, or that the Christian fundamentalist down the street is ready to shoot all his out-groups at the drop of a hat. I’m not saying that America in the twenty-first century is the Third Reich in the 1940s. I’m not saying that the Republican Party today is the born-again Nazi Party. But I am saying that we as individuals are poorly prepared for a confrontation with evil authority, and some people are especially inclined to submit to such authority and attack in its name.

Authoritarian followers, who have always been there but were usually uninterested and unorganized, are now mightily active and highly organized in American politics. They claim to be the “real Americans,” but the America they yearn to create seems quite antithetical to the nation envisioned by the founding fathers. Far from seeing the wisdom of separating church and state, for example, they want a particular religious point of view to control government, and be spread and enforced by the government. Furthermore, if research on abolishing the Bill of Rights and tolerance for government injustices is to be believed, authoritarian followers frankly don’t give a damn about democratic freedoms.

If being prejudiced makes it easier to commit atrocities, high RWAs rank among the most prejudiced people in the country. If obedience to malevolent authority makes one more likely to persecute others--hey, authoritarian followers can chant "We're Number One, We're Number One!" If wanting to belong, and loyalty to your group, and a tendency to conform play a role in attacks on others, high RWAs lead the league in those things too. If inclination to persecute any group the government selects counts for something, we know from the "posse" studies that right-wing authoritarians head up that line as well.

If illogical thinking, highly compartmentalized ideas, double standards, and hypocrisy help one to be brutally unfair to others, high RWAs have extra helpings in all those respects. If being fearful makes one likely to aggress in the name of authority, high RWAs are scared up one side and down the other. If being self-righteous permits one to think that attacks against helpless victims are justified, authoritarian followers have their self-righteousness super-sized, thank you. If being able to forgive oneself and forget the evil one has done make it easier to attack over and over again in the future, right-wing authoritarians know all about that kind of forgiving and forgetting. If being defensive, blind to oneself and highly dogmatic make it unlikely one will ever come to grips with one's failings, authoritarian followers get voted "Least Likely to Change."

Add it all up and tell yourself there's nothing to worry about.

Our worries more than double because the Religious Right has helped elect to high public office a lot of the power-mad, manipulative, amoral deceivers to whom these followers are so vulnerable. Lots of unauthoritarian people voted for George W. Bush, for example, because people vote for candidates for many different reasons. But what the country got was a government infested with social dominators and Double Highs. True, some of them got caught, or were recently voted out of office. But most of them haven't moved an inch. They're still sitting in Congress or running the show

from the White House. Calculate how thin the margins were, realize how good the cheaters are at cheating, and tell yourself again that things are fine, there's nothing to worry about.

### *What's To Be Done?*

Question: Is it the duty of every patriotic citizen to help stomp out this rot that is poisoning our country from within? No, I hope it's obvious that that's no solution at all. It may be just as obvious that social dominators will want to hang onto control until it is pried from their cold, dead fingers in the last ditch. And authoritarian followers will prove extremely resistant to change. The more one learns about the problem, I think, the more one realizes how difficult it will be to change people who are so ferociously aggressive, and fiercely defensive.

You're not likely to get anywhere *arguing* with authoritarians. If you won every round of a 15 round heavyweight debate with a Double High leader over history, logic, scientific evidence, the Constitution, you name it, in an auditorium filled with high RWAs, the audience probably would not change its beliefs one tiny bit. Authoritarian followers might even cling to their beliefs more tightly, the wronger they turned out to be. Trying to change highly dogmatic, evidence-immune, group-gripping people in such a setting is like pissing into the wind.

Still, I don't think the situation is hopeless. Others can do certain things that should, in the long run, lessen the threat authoritarianism poses to democracy. And Americans are going to *have* to do some things in the short run if we're going to have a long run.

*Long-term Reductions in Authoritarianism: Wishing for the Moon*

Let's start with some obvious ways to reduce authoritarianism that are, nevertheless, probably doomed to failure because they require various people to act against their narrower self-interest. (But we can at least say we thought of them.)

*Reducing fear.* Fear ignites authoritarian aggression more than anything else. From the crime-fixated Six O'clock News, to the Bush administration's claim that "We fight 'em there or else we fight 'em here," to Pat Robertson's recurring predictions of catastrophe the day-after-tomorrow, lots of people have been filling America to the brim with fear. It would undoubtedly help things if the fear-mongers ratcheted down their mongering. But don't hold your breath; they have their reasons for trying to scare the pants off everybody.

*Reducing self-righteousness.* Self-righteousness is the major releaser of authoritarian aggression, and it is often based on theology and teachings that seem to bring out the worst in people, not the best. Couldn't "cheap grace" become so disgraced that it lost all currency? Well, the folks who'd have to do this may be most reluctant to throw away their best draw, even if it does, in fact, lead to *more* sin.

*Nipping the religious roots of ethnocentrism.* Fundamentalist parents could talk to their children about being Christians before talking about being Baptists. They could talk about being God's children before talking about being Christians. They could talk about all being brothers and sisters before that. They could.

*Teaching children not to trust authorities automatically.* Parents in general could teach their older children that sometimes authorities can be bad and should be resisted, the way they try to "street-smart" their kids about strangers offering candy. But somehow that suggestion leads parents to think of Pandora's Box.

*Maybe the solution is right in front of our noses.* How about having authoritarians read this book? I mentioned in chapter 1 that when high RWAs learn about right-wing authoritarianism, and the many undesirable things it correlates with such as prejudice, they frequently wish they were less authoritarian.<sup>12</sup> So isn't the solution to the problem as plain as the thing that's glaring you in the face right now?

Would that it were so. But in that study the high RWAs wished they had moderate scores, not low ones, and they were hardly likely to put that wish on the top of their list the next time they blew out the candles on a birthday cake. Even more daunting, as I mentioned in chapter 3, experiments show that high RWAs are so defensive and so unaware of themselves that when you tell them what high RWAs are like, they almost always think you're talking about somebody else.

So I predict most authoritarian followers would sail right through this book and compartmentalize, misinterpret, rationalize, and dogmatically deny it had anything to do with them personally. If you tried to *force* this self-awareness on them, they would probably run away, run away, as fast as they could. So good luck if you passed on this URL to your fascist Uncle George.

*Help the followers see how they're being played for suckers.* I similarly think you'll likely be wasting your time trying to convince authoritarian followers that they are being systematically misinformed and played for dopes by their leaders. It's too important to them to believe otherwise, and just your raising the question will likely put you into their huge out-group and make them suspicious of you.

### *Long-term Reductions in Authoritarianism: More Practical Solutions*

Like I said, it's not going to be easy. And knowing you as well as I do, I think you'd probably be suspicious yourself of anyone who says he's got a Magic Pill that will cure our spell of authoritarianism. But some approaches have been blessed by

data, and I can give you the “short list” here. (Uh, there is no long list, but future research should add justifiable means to our end.)

*Wanting to be “normal.”* By and large, these approaches are not based on what high RWAs might become, but rather on what they are. For example, we can catch a favoring breeze from the fact that high RWAs want to be normal. Studies show they will moderate their attitudes and beliefs just from finding out that they’re different from most people. They don’t usually realize how extreme they are because they stick so closely with their own kind. They need to get out more.

How can you possibly accomplish that since--like “Hugh”--they love staying in their tight circles? Through common cause, believe it or not. Low RWAs and high RWAs land on the opposite ends of a certain personality test, but they’re not really, totally, from head-to-toe opposites. They disagree about lots, but not about everything. People tend to overemphasize their disagreements and overlook their commonalities. And keep in mind how high RWAs open the door to those who seem to believe what they believe. Find your common grounds, and meet on them.

Many fundamentalists, for example, are becoming concerned about the damage being done to the environment. God gave us dominion over the earth and all its creatures, they believe, and we are doing a pretty crummy job as God’s caretakers. So environmentalists should reach out to them, uniting on local projects that everyone can see need to be done. The “tree-huggers” will be glad they did; fundamentalists work hard for causes they believe in.

High RWAs will be most likely to come to meetings, do some picketing, or clean up a stream when they can come in pairs, threes, and so on--or especially have you join them. Don’t be surprised if they try to convert you while you’re pulling tires out of the creek. I don’t recommend you proselytize back, but it would be important for them to learn, in a non-confrontational way, that people who disagree with their

religious views have reasons for their stand. Dropping the drag net in a can-filled stream and shouting at each other from the opposite shores will not get anybody anywhere. It's not an argument you can win, *especially* if you win. (Couples who live together learn this about certain arguments.)

Instead, you'll be amazed how bonding it is when four people wrestle an old washing machine out of the brown water that none of them could have managed alone. This is called a superordinate goal, and social psychologists can cite many studies that show it really does open doors between groups.

You're not asking the fundamentalists to come through the door to your side. You're not trying to change their religious beliefs. You're just trying to augment their awareness of others, and increase their Christian charity, by simply giving them the chance to see through an open doorway. Meeting different people in a situation where all are joined in common cause, where all have to work together, can open such vistas. (Of course, if you're a disgusting person that no one would enjoy meeting [ask around], take a pass on this.)

For another example, non-fundamentalists churches can extend their hand to fundamentalist faiths. People often think that low RWAs are all atheists and agnostics. They're not. Most (62%) of the low RWAs in my big 2005 parent study said they were members of some religion--typically liberal Protestants or Catholics. A solid majority of moderates are religious too, and often church-goers as well. Overall, people who believe in God and have religious inclinations are *not* high RWAs, and they are well-positioned to broaden those who are.

Fundamentalist congregations in their suburban mega-churches can look like those high RWA students sitting on their islands in the Global Change Game: "We won't bother you if you don't bother us." So, go bother them. Reach out, looking especially for whatever moderates may be in their numbers. Their front rank will



likely be filled with their highest RWAs, as was true on both sides in the USA-USSR study. Reach over them. Suggest joint services. Let the fundamentalists get to know you. Show them people can be different and still be decent human beings with whom they'll agree about lots. They need to see that it's not always cut-and-dried, Us versus Them. Lots of Thems are a lot like Us.

*Visible minorities.* Along this same line, high RWAs misperceive how diverse America is. It's quite natural to think, when you are in the white, Christian, heterosexual, solvent majority that this is a *huge* majority. Minorities should speak out for their rights. If they don't, they are (among other things) helping a lot of the majority remain steeped in ignorance. People can learn, but they won't have a chance if the minorities remain invisible. I know, I know, the high RWAs will howl whatever chorus their leaders dictate when minorities become "uppity". But recall the evidence that nothing improves authoritarians' attitudes toward homosexuals as much as getting to know a homosexual--or learning that they've known one for years.

*Higher Education.* Moving to a broader perspective in this broadening effort, evidence we encountered in Chapter 2 shows that higher education can have a significant beneficial impact upon authoritarian followers that lasts a lifetime. It doesn't usually turn them into anti-matter versions of their former selves. But four years of undergraduate experience knocks their RWA scale scores down about 15-20%. That's a lot when you're talking about very dogmatic people.

So for this, and many other reasons, it makes sense to keep our universities alive, vibrant and accessible.<sup>13</sup> For all their faults, they can be the bastions of democracy they were meant to be. And if you buy my interpretation that it's the experience of interacting with so many different kinds of people that mainly produces the drop in authoritarianism, then we should especially support the institutions of higher learning that create such an environment.

*Children?* I know what you're thinking. We also saw in chapter 2 that becoming parents raises RWA scale scores. Should we therefore stop reproducing? No. That might prove counterproductive. It would bollix up all those theories that say human beings are just a way for our DNA to keep itself going.

*Laws.* We can catch another prevailing wind from the fact that, of all the people in a society, high RWAs are probably the most likely to obey laws they don't like. For example, I once asked a group of students to imagine they were members of a school board and a law had just been passed prohibiting the hiring of homosexual teachers. Virtually all of the low RWAs said they would find such a law repugnant, and only a small minority (19%) of those said they would obey it. (Their modal response was to disobey the law through passive resistance.) Another group of students was presented with the mirror-image situation of a law that ordered school boards *not* to discriminate against homosexuals when hiring teachers. The great majority of high RWAs in that situation said they would disagree with such a law. But most (53%) of them said they would obey it, usually because "the law is the law and must be obeyed."

You often hear that one cannot legislate brotherhood, but I think you sometimes can. Anti-discrimination laws, designed to make sure everyone has the rights she is entitled to, can lead many prejudiced people to equal-footing contact with minorities. It's vital that the authoritarians believe the law will be enforced, but if they think it will be, that contact can help break down stereotypes. Beyond that, such laws give high RWAs an excuse within their in-group for doing the right thing: "OK, I'll break the law if you'll pay my fine."

*Modeling and Leadership.* Milgram's finding that defiant (confederate) Teachers almost always inspired defiance in real subjects fits in nicely with other studies in social psychology that reveal the "power of one." An early demonstration of this took place in a famous conformity experiment run at Harvard in the late 1940s. Subjects

were surrounded by confederates who deliberately gave obviously wrong answers to questions. Usually the subjects went along with the wrong majority at least some of the time. But if, in another condition of the experiment, one other person gave the right answer, real subjects were much more likely to “do the right thing” --even though it meant joining a distinct minority rather than the majority.

Many times people know that something wrong is happening, but they don't do anything *because* they know other people are also aware of the situation. As a result, all can trap themselves into inactivity. A vivid example of this occurred in an experiment in which subjects were answering surveys in a New York City office building, and the room began to fill up with smoke. If a subject was alone, he usually left the room. But if three real subjects were seated together, they usually stayed in their chairs even though the smoke eventually got so thick they couldn't see the surveys anymore. When asked why they hadn't gotten up, their usual answer was, “The other guys didn't get up.”

I don't want to overgeneralize this point. At Jozefow one man stepped forward and about ten others followed when they saw it was safe to do so. But hundreds of others stayed where they stood. “Courageous leaders” can become isolates in a flash. But when things are obviously going wrong and everyone is frozen by everyone else's inactivity, all can perish for exactly the same reason that racing lemmings do.

Often one person can steel another, and another and another, until many are working together. You don't have to form a majority to have an effect. Two or three people speaking out can sometimes get a school board, a church board, a board of aldermen to reconsider authoritarian actions. Lack of any opposition teaches bullies simply to go for more. But it takes one person, an individual, to start the opposition.

*Non-violent protest.* Here's a “Don't.” Don't use violence as a tool to advance your cause. Besides the dubious morality of such acts, they play straight into the hands

of the people whose influence you're trying to reduce. As I mentioned in chapter 2, studies show most people are spring-loaded to become more authoritarian when violence increases in society. (Besides, when a reform movement turns to violence, it paves the way for any social dominators within the movement to come to the fore, and "The Revolution" seeds the next dictatorship.) <sup>14</sup>

*The Short Run Imperative: Speak Out Now or Forever, Perhaps, Be Silenced*

If they work, most of these suggestions will only produce changes in high RWAs in the long run. But we may not have a long run. We have to contain authoritarianism now lest it destroy us. We've got to act now.

I say this with some hesitation. I've been studying authoritarianism since 1966, and I've been publishing my findings since 1981, but you never heard of the results presented in this book before, right? Partly that's because I've always gotten an "F" in self-promotion. <sup>15</sup> And I've always worried that publicity would invalidate my future studies. But I've mainly laid low, sticking to academic outlets, <sup>16</sup> because what I've found *is* alarming, and I know that raising this alarm can horrendously backfire. We do have to fear fear itself. Thus I took pains in my previous writings to present my findings in a concerned voice, but I tried hard not to sound like Paul Revere. Here's how I put it in 1996 at the end of what I intended to be my last book on the subject:

"I am now writing the last page in my last book about authoritarianism. So, for the last time, I do *not* think a fascist dictatorship lies just over our horizon. But I do not think we are well protected against one. And I think our recent history shows the threat is growing...We cannot secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves, and our posterity, if we sit with our oars out of the water. If we drift mindlessly, circumstances can sweep us to disaster. Our societies presently produce millions of highly authoritarian personalities as a matter of course, enough to stage the Nuremberg Rallies over and over and over again. Turning a blind eye to this could someday point

guns at all our heads, and the fingers on the triggers will belong to right-wing authoritarians. We ignore this at our peril.”<sup>17</sup>

Eleven years later, as I am now definitely writing the last pages in my last book on the subject, I believe circumstances such as “9/11” *have* nearly swept us to disaster, the authoritarian threat has grown unabated, and almost all the protections I saw in 1996, such as a “free and vigilant press,” are being eroded or have already been destroyed. The biggest problem we have now, in my view, is authoritarianism. It has placed America at one of those historic cross-roads that will profoundly affect the rest of its history, and the future of our planet. The world deserves a much better America than the one it has seen lately. And so do Americans.

So what’s to be done right now? The social dominators and high RWAs presently marshaling their forces for the next election in your county, state and country, are perfectly entitled to do what they’re doing. They have the right to organize, they have the right to proselytize, they have the right to select and work for candidates they like, they have the right to vote, they have the right to make sure folks who agree with them also vote. Jerry Falwell has already declared, “We absolutely are going to deliver this nation back to God in 2008!” <sup>18, 19</sup>

If the people who are *not* social dominators and right-wing authoritarians want to have those same rights in the future, they, you, had better do those same things too, now. You do have the right to remain silent, but you’ll do so at everyone’s peril. You can’t sit these elections out and say “Politics is dirty; I’ll not be part of it,” or “Nothing can change the way things are done now.” The social dominators want you to be disgusted with politics, they want you to feel hopeless, they want you out of their way. They want democracy to fail, they want your freedoms stricken, they want equality destroyed as a value, they want to control everything and everybody, they want it all. And they have an army of authoritarian followers marching with the militancy of “that old-time religion” on a crusade that will make it happen, *if you let them*.

Research shows most people are not in this army. However Americans have, for the most part, been standing on the sidewalk quietly staring at this authoritarian parade as it marches on. You can watch it tear American democracy apart, bit by bit, bite by bite. Or you can exercise your rights too, while you still have them, and get just as concerned, active, and giving to protect yourself and your country. If you, and other liberals, other moderates, other conservatives with conscience do, then everything can turn out all right. But we have to get going. If you are the only person you know who grasps what's happening, then you've got to take leadership, help inform, and organize others. One person can do so much; you've no idea! And two can do so much more.

But time is running out, fast, and nearly everything is at stake.

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup> My advocacy for various things will startle some readers, since people often think professors should stay in their ivory towers and “be above it all” (or at least “out of it”). But I think, to the contrary, that professors have an obligation to speak what they believe to be the truth, especially when they see important social values such as freedom and equality under attack. This is the big reason for tenure. It pays a free society in the long run to safeguard teachers so they can say whatever they think is true without fear of losing their jobs. It's an implicit part of our role to profess the truth, as best we know it. That's why we're called profess-ors. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>2</sup> So far as I know, only two social scientists have offered basically negative reviews of my research on authoritarianism. The first was John J. Ray, an Australian sociologist whose major critique appeared in *Canadian Psychologist*, 1990, Volume 31, pages 392-393. He will, I am certain, be glad to provide you with copies of his thoughts. But if you can get the original journal (lots of luck!), you'll find my reply immediately following his article.

The second, much lengthier criticism was published by a Rutgers University sociologist, John Martin, in *Political Psychology*, 2001, Volume 22, pages 1-26. I prepared a reply to it but withdrew it from the journal when the editors told me I would not be allowed to respond to any further comments Professor Martin might make. But if you read his article and want to see my response, email me at “robert.altemeyer@umr.umanitoba.ca”.

A couple of other scholars have offered up alternate interpretations of what the RWA scale measures (e.g. a need for group identification), but I don’t think they’d disagree with any of the findings presented in this book, just what the results “really mean” on the deeper theoretical level. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>3</sup> Milgram took a LOT of heat over the ethics of his experiment. Most commentators eventually agreed that his study met the ethical guidelines of the time, but his study also led to a revision of those ethical codes. It would probably be impossible to conduct the Milgram experiment today at a North American university.

Professor Jerry Burger of Santa Clara University ran a partial replication of Milgram’s experiment in July 2006 that was featured in an ABC “Viewpoint” program televised on January 3, 2007. It was, of course, impossible to do the experiment exactly as Milgram had in the early 1960s. Burger’s Teachers went no further than the 150 volt shock, which leads the Learner to demand, for the first time, to be set free. If a Teacher hesitated to continue, the Experimenter tried to get him to ask the next question of the Learner, but once he did the experiment apparently stopped then, before the 165 volt switch would have been thrown.

As often happens when a research project gets reported in the media, the results were not clearly presented. (I apologize for any misrepresentations I make here. I emailed Professor Burger on January 4<sup>th</sup> seeking clarification, but he did not respond. I then emailed this note to him on February 21<sup>st</sup>, but he again did not respond.) As best

I can make out, 12 of 18 men (or 67%) “went past” the 150 volt level. And 16 of 22 female Teachers (73%) continued past 150 volts. This is presented in the program as a replication of Milgram’s finding.

Actually, 82% of Milgram’s subjects in the replicated “weak heart-baseline” condition (which is the one shown in the film, “Obedience”) went past 150 volts. So one might think obedience has dropped since Milgram’s time.

However numerous differences exist between in the original study and the 2006 replication. Some would probably increase compliance. Milgram paid his subjects \$4.50, Burger, \$50. And the victim’s (taped) performance in 2006 struck me as appreciably less frantic and anguished than the one Milgram’s “Mr. Wallace” gave. As well, the Experimenter seemed positively friendly (which could increase or decrease compliance, I guess). But at one point the Experimenter readily agreed that he would be responsible for any lawsuits that might be filed, which could increase obedience.

On the other hand--and I think this is the strongest factor of all--it is very likely that Dr. Burger’s subjects signed an Informed Consent document before the experiment began that explicitly stated they could quit the experiment at any time. (Today’s ethical standards would almost always require this.) One of the subjects seen in the TV program in fact says, “The experiment allows me to walk out at any time, and I will walk out if you want to push this.” Milgram’s subjects did not have any such understanding, an understanding that would very likely lower compliance.

Beyond that, there is the real danger that some of the subjects had heard of the Milgram experiment and/or recognized it once the shocking began. We do not know how the subjects were recruited, and if they were then screened for prior awareness.



Taking all these things into account, what can we conclude besides it's hard to repeat a study 45 years later exactly the way it was run the first time? I think, like Dr. Burger, that the results essentially match what Milgram found. Milgram's subjects are still alive, and living among us. In fact, if you know who Pogo is, .... [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>4</sup> These are the results for the "Voice Feedback" condition of Milgram's experiment, given on p. 35 of his book, *The Obedience Experiments* (see next note). Milgram made the Learner more vulnerable in later conditions by having him say he had a weak heart (but it didn't make any difference). [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>5</sup> The best sources for Milgram's research are his own book, *Obedience to Authority*, 1974, New York: Harper, *The Obedience Experiments* by Arthur G. Miller, 1986, New York: Praeger, and "The Social Psychology of Stanley Milgram," by Thomas Blass, 1992, in M. P. Zanna (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 279-329): San Diego, CA: Academic Press. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>6</sup> Milgram ran a condition in which the Teacher *chose* the shock level after each mistake. The strongest shock given, on average, was 60 volts. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>7</sup> Bob Altemeyer, *Right-wing authoritarianism*, 1981, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, pp. 273-274. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>8</sup> Teachers who completely complied with the Experimenter when the Learner was sitting right beside them scored highly on the early, unidirectionally-worded measure of authoritarianism called the Fascism Scale. So your worst enemy might find your executioner much faster if he only puts authoritarian followers in the Teacher's chair. See Elms, A. C. and Milgram, S. (1966), Personality Characteristics Associated with Obedience and Defiance toward Authoritative Command. *Journal of Experimental Research in Personality*, 1, 282-289. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>9</sup> Professor Burger (see note 3) also ran an undisclosed number of subjects through a “teaching team” condition with one confederate, who quit after the 90 volt shock. Sixty-three percent of the subjects continued on, which appears to sharply contradict Milgram’s results on the face of it. But not much is happening at 90 volts; the Learner will not demand to be set free for four more switches. All but one of Milgram’s 40 subjects in the “Two Peers Rebel” condition continued on after 90 volts. And 80 percent kept going after 150 volts, where the first confederate quit. Of course, the second confederate stayed in the game for a while more, which would have induced the real subject in Milgram’s experiment to keep going after 150. Basically, the set-ups differ in too many ways to draw a clear conclusion.

People often ask how women would have reacted had they been placed in the role of Teacher. Milgram ran one such condition. Sixty-five percent of the 40 women who served in his “baseline” experiment went to 450 volts, virtually the same figure found with men. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>10</sup> Browning, Christopher R., *Ordinary men*, 1992, New York: Harper.  
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<sup>11</sup> Browning, Christopher R., *Ordinary men*, 1992, New York: Harper, p. 72..  
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<sup>12</sup> Telling people their RWA scale scores can be seen as unethical, which is why I keep saying to take your score with a grain of salt. In this experiment, which is described in detail on pages 312-318 of *Enemies of Freedom*, I discreetly gave everyone in a class of introductory psychology students the good news that she had scored highly on the RWA scale. After the students answered some questions about that epiphany I revealed my evil plot, explaining I was trying to see how people react to getting this news. Thus the high RWAs left the room having no more knowledge about their real scores on the test than anyone else did. But I could look at how they reacted when they thought the score was valid. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>13</sup> Every year *Macleans Magazine* ranks the big universities in Canada, and my school usually comes in dead last because we have relatively low entry standards for our incoming freshmen classes. Some students who would be rejected by other institutions get a chance at higher education at my university, and we have a number of access programs that provide extra support for students from devastating backgrounds. (My school also has about the lowest tuition fees and Fees fees of any university in Canada, further increasing its accessibility.)

I was lucky enough to attend an elite university, which I love dearly. I also am proud that the University of Manitoba has the courage of its convictions and swallows its last place standing in the national rankings rather than close the door to a few hundred people who might surprise us--as many do, of course. (Anybody who thinks you can well predict who will succeed in a university program based on past academic performance, scores on SAT-type exams, letters of recommendation, etcetera, has never supervised graduate students admitted to his program.) [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>14</sup> I could add other, fairly obvious recommendations to this list of long-term solutions to the authoritarian threat. For example, psychologists have long argued that “authoritative” child-rearing (where rules exist and are enforced, but can be openly discussed and modified) produces better adults than authoritarian child-rearing does. Stories that low RWAs told me about their upbringing, which led to the portrait of “Lou” in Chapter 2, indirectly support this. IF I had a study demonstrating a solid connection between having an authoritative background and being a low RWA, I’d be recommending such an approach in the main text. But I don’t, and I am sticking to the promise I made in the Introduction not to lather you up with my opinions, but to talk instead about what data show.

Similarly, our educational systems could encourage--even train--disobedience of malevolent authority. Don’t expect the authoritarians in your community to climb all over each other in support of this idea. Resistance to teaching evolution will look

like a church picnic compared to the furor this would stir up. But a module in high school civics classes on unjust governmental actions in the past could help lower authoritarianism. IF I had a study showing this...

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<sup>15</sup> I really deserve the “F.” Consider how you found this website. It happened because someone else told you about it--probably a friend or a stranger on another site. Nobody has been paid to publicize this work.

Since I think what I’ve found in my studies is important, maybe I’m wrong to be so un-promoting. But I believe--call it an experimental hypothesis--that many people care about what has happened to America lately, and what might happen next. If they’re there, they’re going to determine this book’s future. And if they’re not there, or if they are but find this book uninformative or unimportant and it then “dies,” it won’t be the first experiment I tried that turned out “wrong.”

My adversity to self-promotion runs so deep, by the way, that if it were possible to publish studies under a pseudonym, as one can a novel, you would be reading a book now written by Roger Galtenflyer. (“Roger Galtenflyer” was the name I acquired as I was passed down the reception line at the President’s Tea during Freshman Orientation Week at Yale. I was Robert Altemeyer at the beginning of the line, but by the time I got past the Freshman Dean and his wife I was being introduced as Ronald Alteflyer, and so on until President Griswold shook my hand and said, “So nice to have you with us, Roger.” You can tell this was a long time ago, in what now seems a galaxy far, far away: stick-um name tags had not yet been invented. Honest!)

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<sup>16</sup> My hesitation about “going public” with my findings may also explain why virtually none of what you now know has ever appeared in psychology text books. This stuff would fit very nicely in the chapters on personality in introductory psychology texts, for example, which have gotten pretty dull since the demise of Freud. But it never has. .

In my certifiably paranoid moments I wonder whether publishers recoil in terror at the thought of putting out a textbook that will offend the Religious Right. If so, I doubt anyone had to even make a phone call to produce this censorship. After experiencing all the pressure to keep evolution out of biology textbooks, the publishers might simply censor themselves now: “Who needs all that trouble?” Of course, ducking that trouble rather than offending pressure groups who want unfavorable findings about themselves squelched means the rest of the population won’t learn the dangerous things about these groups. Perhaps that’s wrong, or at least unwise. So if a prof thought some part of this on-line book was relevant to her course...

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<sup>17</sup> Altemeyer, B., *The Authoritarian Specter*, 1996, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, p. 306. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>18</sup> The quote is from Alexandra Pelosi’s film, “Friends of God,” broadcast on HBO on January 25, 2007. [Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>19</sup> Some high RWAs may be especially energized now because the backlash that is growing against their causes convinces them that *they* are being discriminated against. Overgeneralizing the findings that reveal their shortcomings would indeed be wrong. But these highly prejudiced people appear to be performing another of their amazing mental gymnastics by seeing themselves as the victims of prejudice. [Back to Chapter](#)