

Libertarians and the Authoritarian Personality

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Like the United States, Australia has a libertarian political party. As in the United States it is plagued with dissension and gets very few votes. Once called the Workers party, it is now called the Progress party. Upon its formation it was immediately identified by the press and much of the community as right-wing and indeed "fascist". Party members and even libertarians who are not party members are also commonly so described. Similar experiences could be related from other parts of the world.

Libertarians themselves find it a strange experience to be labelled with the very thing they are devoted to opposing, but the ascription is nonetheless a hard one to dislodge. It stems of course from the habit of seeing all parties as fitting neatly along a single left-right continuum. Since any party's economic policies are a very salient part of its image and since free market policies in general tend to be associated with the political Right, the finding that libertarians advocate extreme market freedom seems to justify an assumption that they are extremely right-wing.

In these circumstances, any proof that libertarians can offer to show that libertarianism is not right-wing must be seen as very welcome. There is in the social science literature a very large body of such proof. This paper will review some of it. A reason why the proof might not be well-known to many libertarians is that it goes under the label of the antonym to libertarianism—"authoritarianism".

What the literature shows, then, is that it is authoritarianism—not libertarianism—which is characteristically "right-wing." Advocates of individual liberty tend, on the whole, to be "left-wing."

The literature starts out with the now-famous book by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson and Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*. This book had its genesis in an attempt by these four Jewish scholars to explain the rise of German Nazism. Most of the research reported in the book, however, was done in California.

These authors constructed a "scale" (list) of authoritarian attitudes which they administered to a wide variety of population samples. They found that

those who "scored high" on this scale (endorsed most items on the list) tended to be sympathetic to the political Right and in fact showed "pre-fascist" personalities. Love of authority was fascist, not love of liberty. The book also showed that authoritarian personalities were in important senses "pathological". Opponents of liberty were psychologically inadequate or even "sick".

Welcome though these findings may sound to libertarians, they were soon challenged. A follow-up book by Christie and Jahoda challenged the California findings on both methodological and substantive grounds.² Methodologically, the point was raised that Adorno *et al.* had included in their list of attitudes only pro-authority items. There were no actual pro-liberty items. One could only express pro-liberty attitudes by rejecting pro-authority statements. Since many people are rather careless in saying "Yes" to questionnaire items, one could never be sure whether a "Yes" response represented genuine agreement or careless agreement. A high scorer could be either simply agreeable or a genuine authoritarian; in such circumstances, one could never be sure whether it was acquiescence which was correlating with right-wing attitudes or whether it was genuine authoritarianism.

The substantive point raised against the California studies was that they were simply obviously false. Right-wingers such as Nazis and Fascists may be authoritarians but equally so are Communists such as Mao and Stalin. Authoritarianism was to be found not at one end of the political spectrum but rather at both ends. This would make libertarians the paragons of moderation and compromise. Libertarians, however, are not moderate or compromising in their love for liberty. They are indeed extremists in that respect as judged by general community standards.

A new proposal that substantially helped to resolve this dilemma was a long overdue reconceptualization of political allegiance along two dimensions rather than one. This reconceptualization was associated with the names of Rokeach and Eysenck.³ They rightly identified authoritarianism-libertarianism as being at right angles to (unrelated to) the normal radical-conservative dimension of politics. Both authors, however, had proposals for re-naming the authoritarianism-libertarianism dimension. Rokeach wanted to call it open- and closed-mindedness and Eysenck wanted to call it tough-tender-mindedness.

However the two dimensions were labelled, the new schema made a lot of sense. Communists and Fascists could be shown to fall at opposite ends of the first dimension (radicalism-conservatism) but at the same end (authoritarian) of the second dimension. Democrats and Republicans on the other hand could be shown to fall also on opposite sides of the radicalism-conservatism divide but in the same position on the authoritarianism-libertarianism dimension (half-way between the two). European Liberals and libertarians would fall in the middle on the left-right dimension but

towards the libertarian end of the second dimension (with libertarians in fact at the extreme end of the libertarian dimension).

Neat as this schema was, however, there proved to be a great deal of difficulty in showing that people's individual attitudes could in fact be ordered in accordance with it. A particularly crushing attack was directed against Eysenck's theory by Christie and by Rokeach and Hanley on the grounds that Eysenck had failed to find a single attitude statement that was purely "tough-minded" (without being at the same time either right- or left-wing).⁴

Rokeach later had better success in this respect but follow-up work by other researchers tended to show that there was always at least a slight tendency for his "closed-minded" (authoritarian) statements to be more characteristic of the political Right.⁵

Rokeach's scale (the "D" scale) also shared with the Adorno *et al.* "F" scale, the problem of one-way wording. Again there were no explicitly libertarian items.

Three attempts to remedy this problem were made by Ray using Australian data.⁶ Three new scales were constructed wherein there were equal numbers of authoritarian and libertarian items. On each occasion, there were strong negative correlations between the two sorts of items and on each occasion the total scores on the scales showed strong correlations with political conservatism as measured both by voting preference and by other scales expressing conservative attitudes on particular social and political questions. The beauty of scales with an equal balance between the two sorts of items is that to get a maximum score a person has to say "Yes" to half the questions and "No" to the other half. People who just say "Yes" to everything thus get a low score on half the items and a high score on the other half. The overall score for them is right in the middle where they belong—not at one end as artificially high scorers. The results obtained with balanced scales are then much more trustworthy than results from one-way-worded scales.

Thus, at this point, although we have seen that there are theoretical inadequacies in a one-dimensional description of political options and although there have been methodological inadequacies in much of the research in the area, the overall conclusion when all these are taken into account is still the same as that originally drawn by Adorno *et al.*—it is authoritarians, not libertarians, who tend to be politically right-wing and fascist.

In fact Ray (1973) showed that both by the mechanical/statistical procedures of factor analysis and by the criteria of various historical definitions, the Adorno *et al.* "F" scale was indistinguishable from a measure of conservatism.⁷

There are two very important ways, however, in which the Adorno *et al.*

account has *not* been shown to be true. First, authoritarians/conservatives can *not* be shown to be psychologically sick, and, second, authoritarian attitudes can *not* be shown to go with authoritarian behaviour.

Various measures of authoritarianism have repeatedly been found not to correlate with various measures of maladjustment (including standard clinical indices such as the Eysenck "N" scale.⁸ Examples of such findings can be found in Ray, Masling, Elms, Richek *et al.*, Fraccia *et al.* and Gaensslen *et al.*⁹ Attributes that authoritarianism has been found to correlate with (e.g., rigidity, dogmatism) are obviously not always maladaptive. As "stick-to-it-iveness", such attributes might in some circumstances be, in fact, rather admired.¹⁰

The failure of authoritarian attitudes to relate to authoritarian behaviour is, however, a more serious failure of the Adorno *et al.* account. In fact, to psychologists the attitude/behaviour discrepancy is a familiar phenomenon. It is certainly true in other fields such as racism.¹¹ Explanations for it differ, but it could have its origin in the desirability of other people's not being able to guess our motives. Since a motive hidden even from ourselves (Freud's "unconscious motivation") is probably the one best hidden of all, real and conscious motivations of opposite character may be quite common. Since not everyone is so devious, however, there are also large numbers of people who do consciously acknowledge their real motivations. Overall, then, there is "orthogonality" between the two. One cannot even guess whether the acknowledged motivation is the real motivation or not. This, however, is only one possible explanation for the phenomenon. Other effects will surely be involved also. The evidence for the unrelatedness of authoritarian/libertarian attitudes and authoritarian/libertarian behaviour has been extensively summarized before, so it will not be repeated here.¹²

Since a distinction is necessary between authoritarian attitudes and behaviour, a very obvious question becomes: Given that we have seen authoritarian attitudes to be characteristically conservative, is it also true that those who *behave* in an authoritarian way are conservative? The evidence on this question is not yet extensive but so far all available results show no relationship between the two whatever.¹³ People who behave in an authoritarian way are equally likely to be from the Left, the Right or the center.

From all the above, then, the conclusion appears to be that a person of libertarian views is likely to have more in common with the political Left than the political Right, but whether in his personal life he will tend to behave in a liberal/permissive way or in an authoritarian/directive way cannot be predicted.

NOTES

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2. R. Christie and M. Jahoda, *Studies in the Scope and Method of "The Authoritarian Personality"* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1954).
3. M. Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1960); H. J. Eysenck, *The Psychology of Politics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954).
4. R. Christie, "Eysenck's Treatment of the Personality of Communists," *Psychological Bulletin* 53 (1956): 411-38; M. Rokeach and C. Hanley, "Care and Carelessness in Psychology," *Psychological Bulletin* 53 (1956): 183-86.
5. D. J. Hanson, "Dogmatism and Political Ideology," *Journal of Human Relations* 18 (1970): 995-1002.
6. J. J. Ray, "An 'Attitude to Authority' Scale," *Australian Psychologist* 6 (1971): 31-50; *idem.*, "Non-Ethnocentric Authoritarianism," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 8 (1972): 96-102; and *idem.* "A New Balanced 'F' Scale—and Its Relation to Social Class," *Australian Psychologist* 7 (1972): 155-66.
7. Ray, "Conservatism, Authoritarianism and Related Variables: A Review and an Empirical Study," in G. D. Wilson, ed., *The Psychology of Conservatism* (London: Academic Press, 1973), chap. 2.
8. H. J. Eysenck, *The Biological Basis of Personality* (Springfield, Ill.: Thomas, 1967).
9. Ray, "Attitude to Authority"; *idem.*, "Militarism, Authoritarianism, Neuroticism and Anti-social Behavior," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 16 (1972): 319-40; M. Masling, "How Neurotic is the Authoritarian?" *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 49 (1954): 316-18; A. C. Elms, "Those Little Old Ladies in Tennis Shoes are No Nuttier Than Anyone Else: It Turns Out," *Psychology Today* 3 (1970): 27ff.; H. G. Richek, C. D. Mayo, and H. B. Puryear, "Dogmatism, Religiosity and Mental Health in College Students," *Mental Hygiene* 54 (1970): 572-74; J. Fraccia, G. Sheppard, J. Pintyr, J. Crovello, and S. Merlis, "Personal Adjustment and Authoritarian Attitudes Towards the Mentally Ill," *Psychological Reports* 31 (1972): 483-86; and H. Gaensslen, F. May, and F. Woelpert, "Relation Between Dogmatism and Anxiety," *Psychological Reports* 33 (1973): 955-58.
10. Also see J. J. Ray and J. Martin, "How Desirable is Dogmatism?" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology* 10 (1974): 143-44.
11. See Ray, "Ethnocentrism: Attitudes and Behavior," *Australian Quarterly* 43 (1971): 89-97.
12. See Ray, "Do Authoritarians Hold Authoritarian Attitudes?" *Human Relations* 29 (1976): 307-325.
13. Ray, "Does Authoritarianism of Personality Go with Conservatism?" *Australian Journal of Psychology* 31 (1979): 9-14.