

## 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 people, undoubtedly supportive of 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 stolen 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 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, and your obedience means you are probably going to kill someone. From our earliest days we are told disobedience is a sin, and obedience is a virtue, the “riht” thing to do.

I saw some of this 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 “memory” 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 person 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. Usually they 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> Part of the “Order Police” formed in Germany to maintain control in occupied countries, it 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 conducted in the 1960s of some 125 of the men 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 overnight. 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 underrate their commonalities. And keep in mind that 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 on 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, especially 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. And 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 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 definite 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 immediately.

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. The late Jerry Falwell declared in 2006, “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, becoming more and more dismayed. Polls confirm that the great majority of Americans feel the country has been going in the wrong direction. People know “the room is filling up with smoke,” but most are just watching it happen.

You can watch the authoritarians tear 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 “[altemey@cc.umanitoba.ca](mailto:altemey@cc.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 be very, very difficult 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, at which point the Learner demands, 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 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 longer, 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.  
[Back to Chapter](#)

<sup>11</sup> Browning, Christopher R., *Ordinary Men*, 1992, New York: Harper, p. 72.  
[Back to Chapter](#)

<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 (and others) 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 research shows.

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...

And of course the media could emphasize the same point. And so on. Conversations about these things are perking along on the Group Discussion website reached through this site's home page. Feel invited to join in. Feel especially free, those of you who can, to do the studies that would test these ideas. [Back to Chapter](#)

<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 you 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 aversion 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 finishing a book 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!)

[Back to Chapter](#)

<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...

[Back to Chapter](#)

<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](#)