# Authoritarianism
# and
# Conservatism:

## Political Implications of
## Recent Psychological Research

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# 1. Introduction

Current psychological research provides a robust but parsimonious explanation of support for conservatism, using scales intended to measure authoritarianism. The problematic relationship between psychological authoritarianism and conservatism was first highlighted by Edward Shils (1954), as a criticism of the Berkeley group's The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, *et al.*, 1950). In 1973, G. D. Wilson, and J. J. Ray advanced an influential conceptualization of conservatism that was strikingly similar to the one proposed for psychological authoritarianism by the Berkeley group. Prior to the early 1990s, social psychologists had differentiated these two conceptualizations. Over the course of the 1990s, social psychologists began to perceive these related areas more in terms of their overarching commonalties than in terms of the specific differences between their various constructs. As a consequence, the terms "authoritarianism" and "conservatism" are increasingly seen as synonyms referring to the same underlying psychological disposition, as opposed to two distinct but related ones. While acknowledging the value of this research, this paper will argue this conflation is empirically unwarranted, and conceptually problematic.

When Shils made the argument that the Berkeley group's conceptualization of authoritarianism conflated it with conservatism, this was seen primarily as a criticism of the concept and construct. The underlying supposition was that authoritarianism and conservatism were related but distinct. The apparent overlap between authoritarianism and conservatism was largely seen and accepted as a flaw in the conceptual and methodological construction of authoritarianism. This perception began to change, in 1973, with Wilson *et al.*'s contention that the Berkeley group's construct was an implicit measure of conservatism. In other words, what Shils had originally presented as a criticism Wilson *et al.* transformed into a positive description of conservatism.

To a large extent, this equation has been broadly accepted because of the consistent correlations between measures of authoritarianism and conservatism. An exemplar of this shift in orientation can be seen in two comprehensive and influential multi-volume compendia of social attitude scales, both edited by John P. Robinson, Phillip R. Shaver, and Lawrence S. Wrightsman. Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Attitudes was published in 1991, and contained a chapter written by Richard Christie that discussed the literature on and measures of psychological authoritarianism. This chapter made no reference to conservatism in the context of authoritarianism. It reflected the field's traditional view of authoritarianism as the psychological basis for pro-fascistic attitudes.

The successor series, Measures of Political Attitudes, was published in 1999 and contained a chapter entitled "Liberalism and Conservatism" by Kathleen Knight (Knight 1999, p. 72). She grouped measures of authoritarianism, including the F and RWA Scales, as "direct measures of liberalism-conservatism" (Knight 1999, p. 61). While she acknowledges Altemeyer's claim that the RWA Scale is not a measure of conservatism, she argues that it captures the fundamental psychological disposition underlying the left-right continuum in politics (Knight 1999, p. 73). She argued that "authoritarianism spans two major areas of political science research--political tolerance and liberalism-conservatism" (Knight 1999, p. 72).

Knight's broader discussion situated authoritarianism within the context of social psychological approaches to understanding ideologies as social attitudes.

Knight's argument encapsulates the growing consensus among political psychologists that measures of authoritarianism capture the core attitudinal characteristics of conservatism. From an empirical standpoint, this means that measures of authoritarianism also measure attitudinal conservatism. Knight's discussion is also influential because it is presented in the framing discussion for a chapter that provides a comprehensive overview of the state of research into ideological attitudes within an advanced and highly influential reference manual on social attitude scales and research methods. While such works are not canonical, they are still influential, especially among those who do not have a detailed grasp of the literature.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for treating the concepts and measures for conservatism and authoritarianism as synonyms is that this allows researchers to construct a powerful and parsimonious attitudinal explanation for the entire left-right continuum of political ideologies. From this standpoint, the apparent differences between ideologies such as "liberalism", "socialism", "conservatism", and "fascism" are merely justifications for relatively degrees of difference in attitudinal dispositions. This approach explains not just ideological preferences, but also issues and aspects of life only tangentially related or entirely unrelated to politics. As such, it accounts for both a pervasive worldview and the underlying psychological reasons for its adoption. This is not a trivial benefit, even if it comes at the expense of losing explanatory power with respect to questions regarding specific phenomena. From the standpoint of empirical research into political attitudes and ideologies, the explanatory power of this approach is seductive. In the absence of a superior alternative, and none presently appears to exist, theoretical and methodological objections are unlikely to persuade researchers to reject this as the basis for empirical research.

This shift is a consequence of the recent surge in research into psychological authoritarianism. Signal theoretical and methodological achievements in that field offer the promise of resolving substantial problems in other areas. This has already born fruit with respect to efforts to understand ethnocentrism. The consistent relation between authoritarianism and conservatism implies that the same may be achieved with respect to the latter. As a consequence, areas of research that, in the past, had been treated as distinct attitudinal phenomena are increasingly viewed as sufficiently related to merit integrated discussion. This appears to be a major change from as recently as the early 1990s. Even a cursory inspection of the literature suggests that the volume of current empirical research in these areas appears to be greater than at any time since the 1960s. Similarly, the current degree of theoretical innovation appears to be greater than at any time since the 1940s. The broader literature and related fields of research are presently in a state of remarkable intellectual flux and vitality.

## 2.      Psychological Authoritarianism and Social Dominance Orientation

The most prominent of these recent advances are Robert Altemeyer's "right-wing authoritarianism" (RWA Scale) (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 1996), and James Sidanius's and Felicia Pratto's "social dominance orientation" ( SDO Scale) (Sidanius and Pratto 1999). These two scales are revolutionizing research into ethnocentrism. Along with the work of others, they also

provide significant insight into some of the important psychological bases underlying the current appeal of political conservatism.

The Berkeley group presented authoritarianism as a syndrome of nine related tendencies that reflected an "anti-democratic" or "pre-fascist" personality. Their F Scale measured the strength of this disposition. Crucially, they also designed the scale to act as a disguised measure of ethnocentrism and prejudice because this was the primary rationale for their project. The American Jewish Committee funded the Berkeley group's research project in order to develop a disguised measure of ethnocentrism and prejudice, not authoritarianism. One of the most appealing features of the F Scale for a host of social psychologists was its ability to indirectly measure ethnocentrism (Allport, 1954). This dual role would have profound unexpected implications because the way the Berkeley group measured ethnocentrism also captured a generalized fear of out-groups, change, and uncertainty. It also produced an expected relationship with conservatism. Although the Berkeley group explicitly differentiated authoritarianism from conservatism, the F Scale consistently showed a moderate correlation with a wide array of measures of conservatism.

The Berkeley group conceptualized psychological authoritarianism as a highly complex syndrome consisting of nine tendencies. These were "conventionalism", "authoritarian submission", "authoritarian aggression", "anti-intraception", "superstition and stereotypy", power and "toughness", "destructiveness and cynicism", "projectivity" and "sex". For each of these tendencies, the Berkeley group designed specific items. Of the items identified as measuring these tendencies, only those with a strong relationship with either "authoritarian submission" or "authoritarian aggression" contributed to the overall scale stability (Adorno *et al*. 1982, p. 160-162). The specific items the Berkeley group included in the F Scale that most strongly measured ethnocentrism were those associated with "conventionalism" (Adorno *et al*. 1982, p. 76-81, 158-161, 170-175, 182, 189). These items seemed to capture not only a strong sense of punitive hostility toward stigmatized groups, but also an underlying hostility toward social change more generally. They all emphasized a highly punitive orientation toward those who are perceived as violating established social norms. None of the items without a punitive aspect performed well, including ones that simply captured attitudes toward conventional norms.

Research in the late 1950s and 1960s established that while ethnocentrism and prejudice are related to authoritarianism, they were not the same (Duckitt 1992, p. 55-6). Only where such hostility is no longer a consensus position among the population, or, when the social consensus to stigmatize specific groups is in the midst of change, do such attitudes appear to possess a strong relationship with authoritarianism (Brown 1995, p. 32).

What this aspect of authoritarianism indirectly captures is not so much "ethnocentrism" per se, but rather, the presence of widespread social disagreement over the ascribed social status of traditionally stigmatized specific groups. Put differently, it measures resistance to attitudinal change in the presence of widespread conflict over and protest of perceived changes to the social status of groups whose degree of social stigmatization is becoming increasingly equivocal. This is a somewhat different phenomenon than what the Berkeley group intended to measure, and one that has subtle but important implications of understanding authoritarianism and its relationship with conservatism. By constructing a measure that conflated ethnocentrism and

authoritarianism, they also inadvertently created a measure that captured resistance to attitudinal change, which is an important feature of conservatism.

Out of the Berkeley group's original set of nine tendencies that they believed constituted the "Pre-Fascist Syndrome", Robert Altemeyer found just three accounted for virtually all the systemic variation in the items tested. These are "conventionalism", "authoritarian submission", and "authoritarian aggression" (Altemeyer 1981, p. 170). These three factors overwhelmingly account for the phenomenon of psychological authoritarianism, as it has been operationally understood since the late 1940s. Altemeyer also found that the F Scale items that had relatively strong loadings on these factors were also the ones that provided the original F Scale with virtually all its scale stability and explanatory coherence.

Though conceptually distinct dimensions, the items that scored high on one dimension also tended to score moderately to highly on the other two. Altemeyer interpreted these findings as indicating that these dimensions reflect the same underlying phenomenon, which he labeled "right-wing authoritarianism". High authoritarians perceive the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with strange and threatening people who intend to do harm, and they need to be punitively controlled. He described this as an enduring attitudinal disposition that influences but does not strictly determine a person's behavior (Altemeyer 1981, p. 3-4). This single factor accounted for virtually all the non-artifactual covariation of the items associated with authoritarianism, prior to Altemeyer's work. Despite his claim that his RWA Scale was fundamentally different from the F Scale, he actually developed a scale similar to one that the Berkeley group could have constructed, but chose not to for theoretical and pragmatic grounds.

Echoing Adorno *et al.*, Altemeyer gave the labels "authoritarian submission", "authoritarian aggression", and "conventionalism" to the three factors comprising his new RWA Scale. "Authoritarian submission" reflects acceptance of and compliance with the normative dictates of conventional authorities (Altemeyer 1981, p. 151). "Conventionalism" is strong acceptance of traditional social values (Altemeyer 1981, p. 153). Conventional authorities are those individuals or institutions perceived as possessing the legitimate authority to assert moral or legal pronouncements that are binding on others (Fromm 1976 (1941), p. 4). "Authoritarian aggression" is an inclination to inflict punishment that is perceived to be approved by conventional authorities (Altemeyer 1981, p. 152). This definition ties authoritarian aggressiveness to conventionalism and authoritarian submissiveness. One of the implications of Altemeyer's conceptualization is that the RWA Scale does not even measure "right-wingness" as much as it does an authoritarian submission to a punitive conventionalism (Altemeyer 1981, p. 152). The definitions he gave these strongly resemble those applied to by the Berkeley group to their similarly labeled tendencies.

Of these three, the fundamental one is "authoritarian aggression". The test items relating to conventionality and authoritarian submission Altemeyer retained in the RWA Scale were ones strongly associated with authoritarian aggression (Altemeyer, 1981, p. 123-153). Altemeyer's follow-up research suggests that authoritarian aggression is the defining characteristic of psychological authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1988). His experiments on authoritarian aggression established three crucial findings. First, authoritarian aggression is a consequence of just two sets of attitudes: fear, and self-righteousness (Altemeyer 1988, p. 177-180). Second, feelings of guilt are a potent prophylactic that prevents these feelings from becoming authoritarian

aggression (Altemeyer 1988, p. 182-185). Third, specific types of religious belief construct the self-righteousness underlying authoritarian aggression and prevent guilt from blocking its expression (Altemeyer 1988, p. 216-217; Altemeyer 1996, p. 157-159). Authoritarian aggressiveness arises out of a combination of generalized fear of a threatening and dangerous world, and a strong belief that punitive treatment of them is necessary and justified toward specifically stigmatized groups as well as all those who are unconventional or simply unfamiliar groups and persons (Altemeyer 1988, p. 121-2, 146-7). This is a parsimonious but powerful set of explanatory findings.

Altemeyer's discussion highlights the importance of research in political science and social psychology on cross-national patterns of political socialization (Altemeyer 1988, p. 122-3). Increased authoritarianism emerge in response to the adverse consequences of social change and instability. One way in which high authoritarianism can arise even in societies with relatively low pro-authoritarian styles of political socialization is as a consequence of sudden or prolonged events that generate broad feelings of fearfulness and the perception of external hostility. Persons who are fearful of change and instability may psychologically invest heavily in the existing structures of authority and manifest active hostility towards those who are seen as the agents of change (Altemeyer 1988). Increased authoritarianism is not, directly, a consequence of social change. Rather, it is a consequence of social changes that have adverse consequences and generate significant feelings of powerlessness.

Altemeyer found that a significant source of authoritarian socialization are religions that tend to actively stigmatize and punish non-believers or apostates. They rationalize self-righteousness among adherents, and dehumanized and aggressive treatment of those who are not (Altemeyer 1988, p. 200-230; Altemeyer, 1996, p. 31-33, p. 157-161). Religious beliefs that demand high levels of self-denial create the inner tensions that manifest themselves in terms of both an underlying propensity toward punitiveness, and the self-righteousness that releases it. Those that propound an essentially "us versus them" worldview, one that understands the world as hostile and dangerous, instill the generalized fearfulness characteristic of high authoritarians. Beliefs that identify non-believers as not meriting the same regard as believers and that also instill a pronounced sense of self-righteousness create the stigmatized targets of punitive aggression, justify it, and remove potentially inhibiting feelings of guilt. It is critical to note that not all religious beliefs possess all or even any of these characteristics. But those that do are instrumental in socializing increased receptivity to authoritarian aggression. Altemeyer's findings suggest that this combination results in the punitiveness toward stigmatized groups that is characteristic of high authoritarians. His findings suggest religious belief has an important effect in that it assuages or eliminates feelings of guilt and thus "disinhibits" punitive aggressiveness (Altemeyer 1988, p. 127).

Since the early 1970s, the West European tradition of social psychology has led to the emergence of new and compelling theories for understanding the formation of social identity and identifications, eventually resulting in the development of "social identity theory" (SIT) (Tajfel 1970, 1984; Hogg and Abrams 1988). One of the most interesting new developments deriving from this confluence of approaches is the conceptualization of "social dominance theory" (SDT) and the resulting "Social Dominance Orientation" (SDO) Scale by Jim Sidanius and Felecia Pratto. Sidanius and Pratto distinguish SDT from SIT by noting that while SIT accounts for group conflict and favouritism, SDT is primarily a conceptualization of the dynamics of conflict

and mediation based on group hierarchy (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 305-307). SDT also emphasizes the role of social ideology and institutional relationships in constructing and perpetuating social inequality. SDO is striking in its capacity to capture and explain what appear to be the key psychological motivations underlying ethnocentrism, prejudice, and the social stigmatization of identifiable groups, more generally. Social Dominance Theory is a conceptually novel and methodologically sophisticated basis for understanding a long and intensively studied phenomenon.

Sidanius and Pratto conceptualized SDO as a "social ideology" that captures two distinct but highly correlated sub-dimensions that account for group identity and inter-group conflict. Validation studies found that the SDO Scale captures a single dimension with two sub-dimensions. The first is support for social inequality, while the second reflects support for social hierarchy and domination by in-groups over out-groups (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 48-49). In many respects, SDO has achieved the same role and status with respect to ethnocentrism that RWA has with regard to authoritarianism. The SDO and RWA Scales are comparable in terms of their psychometric validity.

Sidanius and Pratto draw upon a broad array of social theories as well as recent psychological research to construct their theory of group hierarchy and social relations. Out of these, they construct a general theory of social groups and hierarchy. Sidanius and Pratto posit that humans in societies have an inherent tendency toward forming sub-groups, that these sub-groups tend to be hierarchically ordered in terms of social resources and control, and that this results in patterns of social hierarchy that manage the resulting potential and actual conflict (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 31-38).

They identify "three proximal processes" that construct group-based social hierarchy. These are "*aggregated individual discrimination, aggregated institutional discrimination, and behavioral asymmetry*" (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 39). The first refers to the accumulated impact of individual-level discriminatory acts. Institutional discrimination represents patterns of systemically unequal treatment organized and perpetuated by existing social structures. These can vary from the unintentional reproduction of patterns of historic inequality to conscious and systematic actions oriented to creating, maintaining, or increasing inequality (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 40-1). Behavioral asymmetry refers to tendential behavioral differences between members of groups that serve to maintain or reinforce existing patterns of social inequality. These consist of asymmetrical ingroup bias, deference or outgroup favouritism, self-debilitation, and ideological asymmetry. Sidanius and Pratto emphasize that the maintenance of social inequality requires a considerable measure of active and cooperative behaviors on the part of both dominant and subordinate groups and their members. It cannot be maintained simply by passive social inertia (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 43-5).

At the heart of Sidanius and Pratto's explanation is the concept of "legitimating myths" (LMs). Legitimating myths constitute the ideational basis for inducing acceptance and compliance with social relations that would be expected to engender social conflict. Sidanius and Pratto explicitly derive their concept of "legitimating myth" from the Marxist notion of "false consciousness". They argue that "the extent to which an individual endorses legitimating myths depends on whether he or she generally endorses, desires, and supports a system of group-based social hierarchy or not". They refer to the tendency to endorse LMs that support social

hierarchy and inequality as *social dominance orientation* (SDO)" (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 39). These legitimating myths, when combined and articulated as a cohesive, comprehensive, and largely consistent system of beliefs, constitute a social "ideology". Most SDO legitimating myths are associated with conservatism, though this is not true of all (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 45-48).

Many aspects of Sidanius and Pratto's framework can be seen as syncretic, reductionist, simplistic, and mechanistic (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 31). Nonetheless, Sidanius and Pratto provide a sophisticated explanation of how social hierarchies and inequalities are psychologically legitimated, and a remarkably well validated basis for measuring the process. They identify the psychological dynamics underlying mass support for regimes that are manifestly oppressive. They credibly integrate a wide array of different processes that sustain social inequality, and present a systematic account of social conflict that explains its critical psychological dimensions. They not only reaffirm the importance of understanding how social and political factors construct the psychological bases for social order, but also offer a cogent theoretical explanation connects the psychological to the social and the political.

The RWA and SDO Scales measure politically related attitudinal dispositions. They share in common generalized hostility toward out-groups. But they are also conceptually and empirically distinct. A series of studies found the correlations between the two scales ranged from .07 to .28 (Altemeyer 1998, p. 53-60; Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 74-76; Duckitt 2000, p. 90-94; Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 350). These clearly indicate that the relationship between recent versions of the SDO and RWA Scales varies from non-existent to weak. While both measures capture dimensions underlying prejudice, these dimensions are virtually "orthogonal" (i.e.: quite different) (Sidanius and Pratto 1999, p. 74-75). There is no empirical basis for arguing that right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation conceptualize or measure the same phenomenon, despite their strong relationship with ethnocentrism and conservatism.

Altemeyer has identified an array of differences between those who score high on the SDO and RWA Scales (Altemeyer 1998, p. 61-62). In typically vivid language, Altemeyer summarized their implications stating:

> Right-wing authoritarians, who do not score high on (personal power, meanness, and dominance) seem to be highly prejudiced mainly because they were raised to travel in highly ethnocentric circles; and they fear that authority and conventions are crumbling so quickly that civilization will collapse and they will be eaten in the resulting jungle. In contrast, high SDO's already see life as "dog eat dog" and - compared with most people - are determined to do the eating (Altemeyer 1998, p. 75).

Altemeyer argues that the key difference between the RWA and SDO Scales is that RWA reflects passive deference and submission to authority combined with hostility to perceived threats to their well-being by out-groups whereas SDO captures an active desire to stigmatize, subjugate, and humiliate members of out-groups as the basis for their own personal advancement and social domination of others. What appears to differentiate the two is that high authoritarians do not necessarily score high in terms of their support for social hierarchy and inequality.

Likewise, those scoring high on the SDO Scale do not particularly conventional or deferential to authority.

John Duckitt echoes Altemeyer's observation that the SDO Scale seems to capture a "dominant" personality version of authoritarianism whereas the RWA Scale reflects a "submissive" version (Duckitt 2000, p. 92). He argues that while the RWA and SDO Scales are largely independent of each other, they nonetheless seem to measure two distinct, powerful and substantively independent dimensions of the same sociopolitical and psychological phenomenon, one captured by RWA and the other by SDO.

What both RWA and SDO share in common is the importance of a particular type of ideology. At the heart of authoritarianism is the combination of a worldview that inculcates a sense of (1) fear and uncertainty, and (2) self-righteousness, and a related belief system that instills self-righteous hostility toward out-groups. SDO is a social ideology that justifies and guides dominance-seeking attitudes and behavior. Despite their differences, both require ideologies that emphasize in-group versus out-group hostility, and legitimate aggression against out-group in terms of a value system. At least some aspects of political conservatism seem tailor-made to serve this role of ideological suture.

## 3.     Understanding Conservatism

There is no single, generally accepted conceptualization and measure of "conservatism". Instead, this area is dominated by a host of distinct approaches (Altemeyer 1981, p. 13-115; Christie 1991; Knight 1999). Among the earlier efforts, the Berkeley group constructed a measure of political conservatism, which they called the "Politico-Economic Conservatism (PEC) Scale", as part of their broader effort to understand authoritarianism. In the late 1950s, Herbert McClosky created a Conservatism, or "C", Scale that reflected political, economic, and social viewpoints commonly associated with American conservative ideology of that era. This became part of a broader investigation of "democratic values" (McClosky 1958; Sullivan, Piereson *et al.* 1982; McClosky and Brill 1983; Finkel, Sigelman *et al.* 1999). These were followed by a number of distinct efforts to measure dimensions of conservatism, variously understood. Some of these efforts, depending upon the context, are more important than the others.

The most influential effort was Glenn D. Wilson's and John J. Ray's conceptualization and operationalization of "conservatism" as an alternative to the Berkeley group's construct (Wilson 1973). Wilson argued that "conservatism" refers to a broader "sense of resistance to change and the tendency to prefer safe, traditional and conventional forms of institutions and behavior" (Wilson 1973, p. 4). By itself, such a description of conservatism is unobjectionable.

What is problematic about Wilson et al.'s understanding of conservatism are what they claim are its characteristic attributes. Wilson listed them as religious fundamentalism; pro-establishment politics; insistence on strict rules and punishments; militarism; ethnocentrism and intolerance of minority groups; preference for the conventional in art, clothing, institutions, etc.; anti-hedonistic outlook and restriction of sexual behavior; opposition to scientific progress; and superstition (Wilson 1973, p. 3). A cursory comparison of Wilson's formulation with that of the

Berkeley group's highlights the striking similarities between the two, even to the point of Wilson claiming the presence of nine "attitude clusters" as characterizing the "ideal" conservative.

A close reading of the descriptive text further emphasizes the close similarity to virtual equivalence of specific clusters with comparable tendencies (Wilson 1973, p. 5). Wilson's co-author, J. J. Ray, stated

> By now it must be clear that the picture of the typical conservative which has so far emerged bears startling resemblances to the "authoritarianism" of Adorno *et al*. (1950). The "rigidity" of the authoritarian and the "opposition to innovation" of the conservative are wholly identifiable. The stress on the importance of duty and the desire for a hierarchical social structure are also identical. (...). Thus it is not surprising that Adorno *et al*. felt that the F- and PEC-Scales must correlate; it is almost impossible to distinguish the two concepts. *The only distinction that appears tenable is to say that "authoritarianism" is a rather more particular concept than conservative" as far as content is concerned*. (Italics in original) (Wilson 1973, p. 23).

This raises the question as to why Wilson *et al*. would propose an "alternative" that substantively resembled the conceptualization they proposed to supplant. Wilson explained

> The term "conservatism" is preferred not only because it provides the best overall description of the factor concerned, but also because it is relatively free of derogatory value-tone. Most people would quite reasonably take exception to being described as "fascist", "authoritarian" or "dogmatic" whatever their actual orientation, but would probably be happy to admit to being "conservative" if they were, in fact, positioned towards this end of the spectrum (Wilson 1973, p. 4).

Of itself, this explanation seems intelligible. However, study subjects are not asked to "self-categorize" in the context of these measurements. The labels are applied afterward. What this relabeling does is provide a more socially acceptable facade for the underlying disposition in the context of broader discussions.

Wilson *et al*. conceptualized "conservatism" in a way that entails characteristics that are also identifiably "authoritarian". The conceptual foundations of Wilson *et al*.'s measure gives the appearance of having been significantly influenced by The Authoritarian Personality to the point of appearing to be an alternate measure of the Berkeley Group's conception of authoritarianism, but under the label of "conservatism". While one may question the explanatory value of this effort, it has had quite significant interpretative effects. Courtesy of Wilson *et al*.'s conceptualization, the same disposition underlying both constructs is shorn of its association with fascism, and is instead presented as the attitudinal basis for conservatism. By implication, its more "extreme" manifestations are simply those attitudes identified with those of an "ideal" conservative. Quite tellingly, Wilson himself uses "extreme" and "ideal" interchangeably in his description of "conservatism" (Wilson 1973, p. 5-9). This has the striking effect of "rehabilitating" attitudes that the Berkeley group associated with anti-democratic tendencies, and relating them instead with one of the ideological dispositions broadly accepted as "democratic".

Wilson *et al.* did not simply remove a negative connotation from this disposition. They also substituted for it one that is broadly favourable in most democratic societies.

*Contra* Wilson, Shils argued that the Berkeley group conceptualized authoritarianism such that it strongly resembles significant features of conservatism. But he never argued, at a theoretical level, that conservatism and authoritarianism are the same. Shils explicitly argued that modern conservatism has a democratic aspect that he claimed the Berkeley group ignored. His core point was that authoritarianism and democratic conservatism are distinct, and that the Berkeley group failed to properly operationalize this distinction.

Wilson *et al.* erased the distinction Shils emphasized. The implications of Wilson *et al.*'s work are in precisely the opposite direction to Shils's contention. Wilson's and Ray's arguments are not simply about psychometric precepts or "value-free" social science. It has the sense of a proxy ideological dispute occurring in the guise of methodology. Ray was quite right in arguing that the Berkeley group's labeling of their attitudinal disposition as "authoritarian" implied negative connotations. But by the same token, his relabeling of the same attitudinal set as "conservatism" conferred upon it, as he explicitly intended, a more socially positive connotation. Further, Wilson *et al.*'s construct not only "normalizes" authoritarianism, it conceptualizes fascism as extreme or "ideal" conservatism. This is a point that Shils and the Berkeley group, for different reasons, consistently rejected.

John T. Jost, Jack Glaser, Arie W. Kruglanski, and Frank J. Sulloway also conflate conservatism and authoritarianism (Jost *et al.* 2003). They begin by acknowledging that many measures of conservatism conflate psychological and what they refer to as "ideological", or "political" dimensions. They accept and justify this conflation, in the context of these types of scales, on the basis of Wilson *et al.*'s research on conservatism (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 340). They acknowledge that this approach entails the presence of what they refer to as the "conservative paradox" of "right-wing revolutionaries" such as Hitler and Mussolini, and "left-wing conservatives" such as Stalin and Krushchev. They refer to these as "dramatic exceptions". In defense of their framework, they argue that their approach accounts for the attitudinal disposition of "most people most of the time" (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 343).

Jost *et al.*'s study is based upon a thorough literature review and meta-analysis of the recent literature on political conservatism and a wide array of related constructs, including authoritarianism. It organizes and integrates the findings of a large and disparate literature into a cohesive intellectual framework. Despite numerous problematic features, Jost *et al.*'s article is the most comprehensive recent review of the major research studies on psychological authoritarianism, and related constructs conducted over the past half century. It offers a comprehensive explanation of how and why measures associated with authoritarianism account for the substantive aspects of conservatism, reinforcing the view that they are manifestations of the same underlying disposition. At its core is the argument that right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation capture the core attitudinal dimensions of psychological conservatism. In effect, it also implies that conservatism and ethnocentrism are rooted in these same attitudes.

Jost *et al.* differentiate between what they refer to as the core and peripheral aspects of conservative ideology. They argue that the core dimensions of conservatism are "resistance (or

fear) of change", and "acceptance of inequality". Resistance to change refers to "opposition to change", "traditionalism", "hostility to social innovation", and "an attitude of opposition to disruptive change". Acceptance of inequality entails viewing "society as inevitably hierarchical" and that such hierarchy is justified. These dimensions strongly resemble "conventionality" and "authoritarian submission" as conceptualized by the Berkeley group and Altemeyer. The peripheral aspects entail a wide assortment of attitudes that are highly variable, dependent upon specific historical and social contexts, and frequently conflicting (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 342-43).

Jost *et al.* note that resistance to change and acceptance of inequality are substantively independent dimensions, even though they co-occur. They claim as historical fact that these co-occur because most societies have tended to change in the direction of greater equality. They hypothesize that in a world of complete equality, where these two dimensions no longer co-occur, that those who resist change would also resist increased inequality. They sought studies that might shed light upon this phenomenon in a variety of countries, most notably post-communist societies, but claimed that the findings were not substantially different from those of other countries. Based upon their contention that these two dimensions usually correlate, they contend that they constitute "conservatism". To the extent Jost *et al.* recognize the contradictory dimensions of conservatism, it is with respect to its peripheral aspects (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 342-3).

Based on their review, Jost *et al.* propose what they refer to as "a theoretical integration of epistemic, existential, and ideological motives" for conservatism (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 351). This "theory" is essentially a highly eclectic compendium of the various explanations already proposed for conservatism and related phenomena. Jost *et al.* present this "theory" as an extended series of eight loosely connected hypotheses which test the relationships between social-cognitive variables, which are treated as independent, and "political" variables, which are dependent (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 352). They state:

> In what follows, we consider evidence for and against the hypotheses that political conservatism is significantly associated with (1) mental rigidity and closed mindedness, including (a) increased dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity, (b) decreased cognitive complexity, (c) decreased openness to experience, (d) uncertainty avoidance, (e) personal need for order and structure, and (f) need for cognitive closure; 2) lowered self-esteem; 3) fear, anger, and aggression; 4) pessimism, disgust, and contempt; 5) loss prevention; 6) fear of death; 7) threat arising from social and economic deprivation; and 8) threat to the stability of the social system. We have argued that these motives are in fact related to one another psychologically, and our motivated social-cognitive perspective helps integrate them (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 352).

Despite substantial grounds for skepticism, Jost *et al.* present a credible argument for regarding all of these distinct psychological phenomena as manifestations of an underlying phenomenon that accounts their apparent coherence similarities.

Jost *et al.* argue that conservatism, like all belief systems, is adopted because it satisfies important psychological needs. This does not mean that such belief systems are irrational or pathological. Nor does it mean that they cannot be highly logical and commitment to them principled. What it does mean is that specific belief systems are adopted because of affective

motivational needs as well. But while Jost *et al.* present a complex understanding of these, they can be distilled down to just two affective motives: fear and uncertainty. "Fear" reflects a host of directional motives that induce specific orientations and a generalized worldview. "Uncertainty" encompasses the non-directional motivations deriving from the strong need conservatives have to eliminate ambiguity, experience cognitive closure, and arrive at clear understandings. In the broadest terms, these are the primary underlying affective motivations for conservatism (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 340-1).

Conservatism satisfies these needs by providing a belief system that comprehends and manages the apparent sources of fear while providing specific content oriented to dispelling uncertainty. Conservatism (or authoritarianism) is not the only belief system that can satisfy these needs. But neither liberalism, as conventionally understood, nor the various ideologies of the democratic left are primarily oriented toward addressing either need. In particular, any ideology that embraces intellectual openness, exploration and acceptance of the unknown, and that perceives the world as largely rewarding and filled with opportunities is likely to be disquieting to those who need a worldview that can enable them to manage feelings of fear, insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty. For such individuals, the critical aspect of any acceptable belief system is that it must enable them to understand, manage, and reduce these disquieting feelings. This is precisely what conservatism (or authoritarianism) accomplishes.

Based on their assessment of the literature, Jost *et al.* argue that resistance to change and acceptance of inequality is likely a consequence of these needs. Likewise, fear and perceptions of threat motivate support for structures of dominance and inequality. The desire to minimize uncertainty results in resistance to change (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 366-8). They note the need to better understand the relationships between affective motivations and ideological structures. But they also note the importance of understanding the factors that result in the periodic increase and decline of conservatism, as mass political movements. A critical point that Jost *et al.* emphasize is that the strength of conservative dispositions is highly susceptible to situational events (Jost *et al.* 2003, p. 366). This same point is strongly implied throughout the relevant literature. Until recently, the primary orientation of the field has been toward better understanding the disposition and its characteristics, as opposed to its more dynamic contextual relationships.

## 4.    Questioning the Conflation

The most influential measures of authoritarianism and conservatism are conceptualized in a manner that results in substantial commonalties. Ever since the Berkeley group's conceptualization of conventionality and authoritarian submission, every subsequent conceptualization and measure of authoritarianism has included them as a central attribute of authoritarianism (Altemeyer 1981, p. 219-220, 277-297; 1996, p. 12-15). They are also fundamental attributes of most measures of conservatism. This accounts for the moderate to high correlations between RWA scores, and various measures of "conservatism" (Feldman, 2003). This is why the criticism that measures of authoritarianism are actually disguised measures of conservatism has considerable apparent validity.

What is surprising is that the correlations are rarely more than moderately strong. Jost *et al.* reported studies that found some measures of conservatism to have inverse relationships with RWA and SDO. The typical range of correlation between measures of conservatism and

authoritarianism, across sixty years of studies, is .5 to .7. A key point emphasized by both the Berkeley group and Altemeyer were the existence of significant proportions of those who score high on conservatism measures who also score low on their respective measures of authoritarianism. These were the Berkeley group's genuine conservatives, and Altemeyer's low RWA conservatives. If conservatism and authoritarianism are the same, then this group should be statistically trivial, and the positive correlation between the various measures should be appreciably stronger. The moderate to strong relationship between various measures of authoritarianism and conservatism does not constitute psychometric grounds for asserting that these are the same phenomenon. As presently conceptualized and operationalized, conservatism and authoritarianism clearly capture overlapping characteristics. The empirical findings also suggest that they measure related but dissimilar phenomena.

The F and RWA Scales do not capture all the manifestations of authoritarianism, only that reflecting the covariation of the three defining tendencies. As discussed earlier, there are strong grounds for regarding authoritarian aggression as the defining characteristic of psychological authoritarianism. Altemeyer's research establishes the existence of "Wild Card Authoritarians", who tend to be have highly aggressive and conventionalist but not submissive tendencies (Altemeyer, 1996, p. 217-230. His research also strongly implies the existence of a variant of authoritarianism that is largely defined in terms of authoritarian aggression, without any significant submissive, or even conventionalist aspects.

Conflating authoritarianism and conservatism also produces troublesome anomalies. These include are Jost *et al.*'s oxymoronic discussion of "revolutionary conservatives" and "left-wing conservatives". A key point emphasized by both the Berkeley group and Altemeyer were the existence of significant proportions of those who score high on conservatism measures who also score low on their respective measures of authoritarianism. These were the Berkeley group's genuine conservatives, and Altemeyer's low RWA conservatives. Even more striking are the non-existent or inverse correlations between the RWA and SDO Scales, on one hand, and various measures of conservatism, on the other, reported by Jost *et al*.

Hence, the results of Jost et al. survey offer a different interpretation. The ideological norms and social institutions that conservatives defend are less a function of their specific content than the degree to which they are broadly accepted throughout their society, and affirmed by the structures of conventional authority. The normative content of "conservatism" is highly dependent upon historical and social context. What matters is not the specific ideological content of the values being defended, but rather, the degree to which these values are understood and accepted as social conventions. A corollary to this is that "conservative" values do not need to be ideologically consistent or even consistent with each other, so long as they are generally consistent with broadly accepted norms.

Conservatives defer to and defend the established authorities of a society, regardless of their ideological character or justifications. As a consequence, specific combinations of socially accepted norms and established structures of authority can result in conservatives, in specific societies and historical situations, defending ideological positions and political institutions that, from a classic left-right perspective, may seem more readily associated with the left than the right. Regardless of the specific ideological character of the regime, so long as it is the socially legitimate authority, conservatives will be predisposed to obey and defend it. What is critical to

conservatives is not that the established authorities espouse specific ideological positions, but rather that they are conventionally legitimate. McFarland and Ageyev found precisely this pattern among high authoritarians in the last years of the Soviet Union (1992, 1993).

Thus, the crucial difference between authoritarian and democratic conservatives lies in the characteristics of the social values and institutions of the societies they seek to defend. The degree of overlap or conflict between the authoritarian and democratic conservatism is culturally specific. From this perspective, there are no "conservative paradoxes". "Right-wing revolutionaries" are right-wing revolutionaries and "left-wing conservatives" are left-wing conservatives. "Right-wing" and "conservative" are no more synonyms than are "authoritarian" and "conservative". The least important consequence of the inability to understand what differentiates fascists from conservatives are oxymoronic phrases. But they reflect is a deep failure to understand the substantive differences between the conventionality of conservatism and the radicalism of right-wing authoritarianism.

This point was made over half a century ago. Shils (1954) addressed the conceptual problems, and Hyman and Sheatsley (1954) the methodological ones created by these overlaps. However, no one explicitly addressed the relationship between the conceptual and the methodological difficulties until very recently. Deliberately or not, this point was also ignored by those who have sought to construe "authoritarianism" as "conservative". This has started to change, largely because research in the field has reached the point where this issue has become a major point of contention.

In "The Dimensionality of Right-Wing Authoritarianism: Lessons from the Dilemma between Theory and Measurement", Friedrich Frunke (2005) provides strong empirical support for this argument. His study decomposed the effects of authoritarian aggression, conventionality, and authoritarian submission into the statistically "virtual" equivalent of distinct scales. His model indicated that the RWA items accounted for a greater degree of variation in three dimensions than one. While he did not note the implications, his model also reported results showing that authoritarian aggression is sufficiently different from conventionality and authoritarian submission to manifest as the distinct factor in a two factor model. He did note findings showed global RWA scores disguised distinct combinations of the three dimensions within the apparently unidimensional distribution. These three dimensions combine as conditional and not bi-conditional relationships. Substantively, the RWA Scale conflates attitudinally distinct clusters of subjects via the appearance of indistinguishable RWA scores. Frunke's study supports the view that the seemingly linear relationship implied by RWA scores are actually the consequence of conditional relationships between the three distinct dimensions, and of these, authoritarian aggression is the most distinctive both as a dimension, and in terms of its combinatory effect.

Using a very different approach, Stanley Feldman (2003) reported findings with somewhat similar theoretical implications. Feldman started from the perspective that RWA is a function of the interaction between three distinct attributes: social conformity-autonomy (SCA), perceived threat, and social conservatism. These capture authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, and conventionality, respectively. He sought to test the impact of these variables, and their interaction effects, upon RWA scores. He found that while SCA had virtually no impact in the absence of perceived threat, it acted as a substantial multiplier (interaction effect)

when perceived threat was present. Conversely, while social conservatism accounted for a substantial proportion of initial RWA scores, it had no effect on their change in response to perceived threat. In other words, virtually all of the dynamic relationship that accounted for variation in RWA scores derived from SCA and perceived threat, while conservatism had no dynamic effect on authoritarianism.

Studies like Funke's and Feldman's are not definitive. But they do offer grounds for "unpacking" the RWA Scale into unidimensional scales separately measuring authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission, and a reconceptualized form of conventionality. By extension, they also offer nuanced grounds for rejecting the conflation of authoritarianism and conservatism.

Scholarly problems arising from the conflation of conservatism and authoritarianism are trivial compared to their political implications. Equating conservatism with authoritarianism "normalizes" and legitimates political authoritarianism. At the level of discourse and ideology, it disarms conservatives facing authoritarian demands and challenges premised on claimed conventional values. This is precisely how authoritarians have historically suborned non-authoritarian conservatives to accept their leadership.

## 5.    Conclusion

At the heart of the debate over the relationship between conservatism and authoritarianism is the question "what is conservatism?" Wilson and Ray defined conservatism in terms of its most reactionary attributes. They present reactionary conservatism as synonymous with conservatism in general. Unquestionably, conservatism can have an authoritarian and reactionary cast. But this is not the only aspect of conservatism that is of consequence.

Political scientists generally understand a core set of beliefs to be integral to conservatism. These beliefs are (1) deference to established authority, (2) resistance to change, and (3) support for and adherence to conventional norms and values (Kekes 1998). These are broadly consistent with key elements of how psychologists understand conservatism. The difference between the two positions lies in the perception, commonplace in political science, that the actual norms and values that conservatives support are themselves a product of the specific political and cultural history of the society within which one is a "conservative". As "conventional norms" of a society change, so do what conservatives seek to preserve and protect. Conservatives are committed to the preservation of traditional norms and conventions. It is an inherent characteristic of modern society that these change. The consequence is that many of the specific norms and conventions that conservatives defend also change.

The psychologists who have conducted virtually all of the research into psychological authoritarianism and conservatism have compelling reasons for perceiving them as substantively equivalent. Whatever the criticisms that may be leveled at this conflation, it offers robust research opportunities, and the ability to compellingly explain ideologically motivated mass political behaviour in terms of two psychological constructs.

Political scientists have compelling reasons for differentiating conservatism from authoritarianism. Much of the substantive political science literature on ideologically motivated political movements strives to account for the substantive bases for complex political ideas, events, and patterns. This point is especially important to understanding many pivotal events in twentieth century politics. In societies with strong and deeply rooted democratic traditions, democratic conservatism has acted as an important barrier against authoritarianism. In other cases, conservative politicians and parties have allied themselves with ultra-rightist political movements, facilitating the rise of authoritarians to national power. The divide between democratic conservatives and ultra-rightists has been or is a major feature of the internal politics of many societies, including some quite influential ones. Important features of twentieth century politics become inexplicable if these two cannot be distinguished.

Attitudinal theories that cannot account for manifest and highly salient political phenomena such as the problematic relationship between reactionary (authoritarian) and democratic conservatives, or the existence of left-wing authoritarians, are of limited explanatory value. Such theories are especially unhelpful to those who study the politics of societies where such phenomena constitute structurally significant political cleavages or have had major historical consequences. In short, understanding psychological authoritarianism and conservatism is too important to substantive political science to be left exclusively to social psychology.

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