

The Influence of the Concept of Authoritarian Personality Today

Josef Smolík¹

Abstract: This article will briefly introduce the concept of authoritarian personality as its team of authors T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D. J. Levinson and R. N. Sanford, presented it, describe the contemporary influence of the concept and focus on possible implications for the study of non-democratic regimes. The reader will also learn about findings of political psychology and reflections about the concept of authoritarianism, including the approaches of S. Freud, E. Fromm, A. Maslow and others. The following text is based on the theoretical conclusions of political psychology, which by applying its scholarly perspective can uncover some contexts of the study of non-democratic regimes.

Keywords: Authoritarian personality, Authoritarianism, Non-democratic regime, Political psychology

Political psychology, authoritarian personality: history and contexts

Political psychology is usually understood as a field positioned between social psychology and personal psychology, but it can be also classified as an interdisciplinary study which employs the findings of many social sciences, especially psychology (social, general, evolutionary), the political sciences, sociology, philosophy, history, etc.

Political psychology has arrived at important conclusions in its research which significantly enlarge knowledge about both the theory and practice of non-democratic regimes and help us to better understand their essence (Balík, Kubát 2004).

Among other topics, political psychology focuses on the concept of the so-called authoritarian personality² and employs this concept in attempts to explain non-democratic regimes (cf. e.g. Balík, Kubát 2004).

It was already Sigmund Freud who described the mature personality as a result of the ego's efforts to control instinctive urges and regulate them into acceptable forms of behaviour. Freud has defined three subsystems, controlled by mutually dissonant principles and goals which coexist in one personality and constantly struggle with each other: id, ego and superego (Freud 1997; Szczepański 1967: 329-342).

¹ Author works at the Department of Political Science at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University, Joštova 10, 602 00 Brno; e-mail: josef@mail.muni.cz.

² In psychology, personality is understood as a hypothetical construct: it is a term which expresses an existing phenomenon which is not fully observable but derived from what is observable and has a heuristic value (Nakonečný 1993: 10; cf. Drapela 1997).

Jung, on the other hand, has portrayed personality as formed mainly by mutual interactions of contradictory innate propensities towards self-realization or passivity, introversion or extroversion and as a conflict between experience and the “collective unconscious” (concepts, myths and symbols which Jung understood to be inherited from previous generations and thus unacquired; Hunt 2000).

The psychoanalytical approach was represented by the work of S. Freud on *Group Psychology and the Analysis of Ego* (1921/1999). The main argument of this work was that certain group phenomena and social behaviours can be derived from early childhood experiences, such as the relationship of a son to an inaccessible, authoritarian father (Nakonečný 1999).

The psychoanalytic interpretation of various phenomena connected with the Nazi Third Reich (the masses’ fascination by the leader, etc.)³ remained popular (Nakonečný 1999; cf. Freud 1999; Fromm 1997; Stellmacher, Petzel 2005).

One of the first attempts to explain the psychology of fascism is H. D. Laswell’s 1933 book *The Psychology of Hitlerism*, which is however heavily slanted towards disenchantment with results of the war rather than towards deeper psychological analyses. The same topic was treated by P. E. Nathan in *The Psychology of Fascism* of 1943, which emphasized the importance of projection for the creation of the authoritarian character, that is the transition from the scheme “I hate” towards the scheme “they hate me” (Kol. 1996).

Despite the fact that democracy is a widely accepted form of political organization, authoritarian orientations have disappeared in neither democratic nor non-democratic systems (cf. Balík, Kubát 2004).

Analysis of the human aspect of freedom and authoritarianism leads us to the consideration of the main issue, namely the role played by psychological factors as active forces in the social process (Fromm 1993).

E. Fromm was the first to analyze the phenomenon of authoritarian personality from the point of view of psychology. Fromm with W. Reich started studying the problem of fascism in the 1930s at the Institute for Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung) in Frankfurt. Fromm expected that there would be a direct link between adherents of fascism and the authoritarian personality (Balík, Kubát 2004, cf. Münkler 1993).

³ Studies in mass psychology describe the mechanisms that force people to accept the attitudes and the forms of behaviour of others, and that, in the end, end up in the voluntary submission to the leaders. Those ideas have led to the psychological concept of the authoritarian personality (see Oesterreich 2005).

According to Fromm, the proposition claiming that “Nazism is a psychological problem must be supplemented by saying that the psychological factors are formed by social and economic ones; likewise, the proposition that Nazism is an economic and political problem must be supplemented by ascertaining that the way in which it grasped the whole nation has a psychological basis as well“ (Čermák 1992:125).

E. Fromm mentions the so-called authoritarian character principally in his book *Fear of Freedom* (1941/1993, cf. Heywood 1994). Because the concept of “somasochism”, based in psychoanalysis, is connected with the ideas of perversity and neurosis, Fromm (1993) uses the term “authoritarian character” rather than “somasochistic character”.

According to Hacker (in Hole 1998), the authoritarian character lacks insight, reflection, speculation and fantasy, desires “powerful leaders”, is obedient and respects authorities. Hacker lists the following characteristic traits of this personality structure: conventionality, authoritative submissiveness, drive for power, robustness, destructiveness and projectivity.

In comparison with Freud, who was nevertheless aware of the relationship between the individual and culture, Fromm placed greater emphasis on the structures of a given society (consult Fromm 2000 for more details).⁴

Fromm considered authoritarianism to be one of the possible mechanisms which allow the individual to evade freedom, and defined this phenomenon as “a tendency to surrender the independence of one’s own individual ego, to merge it with someone or something outside oneself and thus gain a force which is absent from his own ego” (Fromm 1993: 79).

Submission to an authority means transferring responsibility to another and is “an expression of the inability of the individual ego to live on its own”, because “the drive for power does not root in force but in weakness. It is a desperate attempt to obtain a secondary force where true force is missing” and a consequence of “the conviction that life is determined by forces outside the person itself, outside his interests and wishes” (Fromm 1993: 89).

Fromm has defined the authoritarian character as a type of personality whose attitude towards authority is always important. The authoritarian individual loves authority and tends to subject himself to it. At the same time, he wishes himself to be the authority and to subject others. As far as the authoritarian character is concerned, there are two poles, so to speak: the powerful and the powerless (Fromm 1993).

⁴ Fromm based his theory on the assumption that the relationship between an individual and society is not static but dynamic and that society has not only a suppressive, but also a creative function. Fromm rejected theories claiming that psychological changes are to be understood solely as adaptations to new cultural patterns.

The authoritarian character represents a structure of personality that Fromm understands as the human basis of fascism. It does not lack activity⁵, courage⁶ and faith⁷ (see Fromm 1993).

Fromm (1994) also points out the significant role the irrational passions, such as lust for power and glory, obsession with property, revenge and control, play in the pathological and malign character.

Another trait which is common to all authoritarian thinking, which is itself typical of authoritarian character, is the conviction that life is determined by forces outside the person, outside his interests and wishes, and that the only possible happiness consists in submission to these forces (Fromm 1993).

Complete fatalism is characteristic of authoritarian character; it is manifest not only in the authoritarian personality itself, but through the individual in the whole of society.

Fromm was also one of the first critics of the so-called authoritarian personality. Although Fromm in his book *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1997: 321) rebukes Adorno and his collaborators for employing the behaviourist method in describing the authoritarian character, it is possible to say that Adorno's conclusions are in many aspects identical to Fromm's conception.

As we already said, T. W. Adorno with his colleagues has made the most important contribution to the study of the authoritarian personality. Adorno was one of the best known representatives of the Frankfurt School's critical theory.⁸

⁵ In this sense, activity means acting in the name of something that is higher than the actor. It can be in the name of God, past, nature, obligation, but never in the name of the future, something unborn, something that does not hold power or life as such. The authoritarian character obtains the force to act by relying on a superior force. (Fromm 1993: 94)

⁶ The courage of the authoritarian character is in essence the courage to suffer the fate, as set by the impersonated representative or "leader" (Fromm 1993: 94).

⁷ The authoritarian character believes in authority as long as it is strong and prescriptive. This belief is rooted deeply in the characters' insecurities and provides a foundation to an attempt to balance them (Fromm 1993: 94). A belief in some sort of Providence is a typical example.

⁸ Critical Theory constituted itself in 1930s Germany, during the Weimar Republic. The original intention of this theory was to free Marxism from the dogmatic torpidity into which it was thrown by the Marxist-Leninist dogmatism propagated by the Soviet leadership, and to develop Marxism on the basis of empirical social research (see Šubr 2001:102). The Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt am Main played the key role; its beginnings are connected with the names of Theodor W. Adorno (1903–1969), Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979).

Hitler's rise to power forced the representatives of the Frankfurt School to emigrate, mostly to U.S.A. This also meant shifts in their research programmes. Instead of studying the prospects of emancipative development, the basic orientation is now a philosophy of history with a strongly pessimistic undertone, according to which the process of history does not lead towards fulfilling the emancipative ideals, but towards a world of total control and abolishment of individuality (Šubrt 2001). T. W. Adorno was among those who emigrated to the U.S.A. There he met E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D. J. Levinson and R. N. Sanford, who studied anti-Semitism and ethnocentrism at the University of California in Berkeley. Their meeting led to a research which culminated in the work *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950/1969) which is still today a basic reference for any study in this field. The work brought with it a theory of authoritarian personality and a tool for measuring it – the California F-scale (“F” is derived from fascism; cf. Stellmacher, Petzel 2005; Balík, Kubát 2004; Krech, Crutchfield, Ballachey 1968; Výrost 1998).

The focus was mainly on the potentially fascist individuals whose personality structure is of such a kind that it makes them easily susceptible to anti-democratic propaganda (Adorno et al. 1969: 1).

Adults who scored high on the F-scale had different childhood and assumed more dogmatic attitudes than people with low scores. The authors of the F-scale employed a Freudian perspective and believed that inherent in the personal development of most people are repression and a re-channelling of various instinctive needs, as required by the limitations of social life (see Brown 2006).

The goal was to identify individuals susceptible to prejudices as such individuals are more disposed to succumb to fascist ideology: it was also to establish which determinants are instrumental in the formation of this personality structure.

As far as research methods are concerned, Adorno's large-scale study employed both quantitative questionnaires and unstructured interviews. The research was initially aimed at recognizing anti-Semitic and ethnocentric attitudes.

Friedrich Pollock, Herbert Marcuse and Walter Benjamin are often considered members of the Frankfurt School, as are, occasionally, Franz Neumann, Otto Kirchheimer, Arkádii R. L. Girland and Heinz Maus, while Karl August Wittfogel, Franz Borkenau and Henryk Grossmann only rarely so. These problems of identity or classification stem from the fact that the terms Critical Theory and Frankfurt School were and are self-proclaimed descriptions of the scientific paradigm (Critical Theory) or a term invented by others (Frankfurt School) and are therefore not institutions with formal membership – unlike the Institute for Social Research, opened in Frankfurt am Main in 1923, which constituted the institutional core out of which Critical Theory/Frankfurt School grew (Münkler 1993).

The following techniques were used in the research: A) questionnaires which contained (1) basic information, such as churchmanship, political party membership, occupation, income, etc., (2) opinion-attitude scales⁹ which examined ideological trends such as anti-Semitism, ethnocentrism, political and economic conservatism and anti-democratic tendencies, (3) projective techniques; B) clinical methods, which consisted of (1) interviews¹⁰ and (2) the thematic apperception test¹¹ (cf. Adorno et al. 1969: 13-19).

In the book co-authored with Adorno, Levinson presented the so-called anti-Semitism (A-S) scale, which was composed of two sheets, "A" and "S", each containing 26 statements. Those statements were structured into five subscales: 1) anti-Semitism subscale "offensive", 2) "threatening", 3) "attitudes", 4) "seclusive *vs.* intrusive" and 5) "neutral" subscale (cf. Adorno et al. 1969: 58-71).

Levinson also presented the ethnocentrism scale (E-scale), composed of 34 items divided into three subscales N, M and P. From this scale with 34 items, another E scale with 78 items (but also with 60, 45 and 40 items) were derived and statistical correlations between the A-S scale and E-scale were added. Levinson's final design for the E-scale contained 20 items (Adorno et al. 1969: 142).

Already at this stage of research connected with the A-S and E scales, and in conversations with people with anti-Semitic prejudices, the basic theoretical approaches and methods of later grand theories were born, especially the defining of the authoritarian personality through the triad which included conventionalism, submission and aggressiveness (Krejčí 2004).

⁹ „Each scale was a collection of statements, with each of which the subject was asked to express the degree of his agreement or disagreement. Each statement concerned some relatively specific opinion, attitude, or value, and the basis for grouping them within a particular scale was the conception that taken together they expressed a single general trend.“ (Adorno a kol. 1969:14)

¹⁰ By way of example, Sanford included two extracts from interviews with students in the book *The Authoritarian Personality*: with Mack (24 years old, studying first year of Law) who scored high on ethnocentrism and with Larry (28 years, studying second year of Business Administration), who had low ethnocentrism score. In analyzing the interviews, the following topics were given special attention: a) attitudes towards Jews, b) general ethnocentrism, c) political opinions and orientation, d) religious belief, e) occupation and relationship to money (cf. Adorno a kol. 1969: 31-57).

¹¹ The thematic apperception test (TAT) is a projective test developed at Harvard University in 1930s. It involves twenty equivocal pictures of individuals and situations. The examinee has to invent a story to go with each picture or with the whole set and characterize the individuals and their actions. Distinct and repressed character traits of the person examined, his/hers relationships and attitudes towards others are inferred from the responses. (Hartl, Hartlová 2000: 600)

The F-scale was developed into forms with 60, 45 and 40 items (cf. Adorno et al. 1969: 248-257).

Else Frenkel-Brunswik (Adorno et al. 1969: 304-325) has described the structure of the interviews used in the study of the authoritarian personality. The interview tried to cover the following areas: occupational attitude, socio-economic indicators, religiosity and clinical data (family background, family relationships and structure, childhood, sexuality, social indicators, education, political opinions, attitudes towards minorities and racial prejudices).

The researchers led by Adorno were guided by a general hypothesis claiming that “the political, economic, and social convictions of an individual often form a broad and coherent pattern [...] and that this pattern is an expression of deep-lying trends in his personality” (Adorno et al. 1969: 1; Krech, Crutchfield, Ballachey 1968). Eighty people were interviewed out of which forty-five scored extremely high on the anti-Semitism scale and thirty-five scored low on the same scale. The sample chosen was rather varied. It included psychiatric patients, university students, students of business administration, prisoners, theology students, unemployed war veterans, working women, medicine students, students of postgraduate courses and of summer schools (Krech, Crutchfield, Ballachey 1968: 238).

The study resulted in a set of specific attitudinal predispositions which are characteristic of the so-called authoritarian syndrome (cf. Krech, Crutchfield, Ballachey 1968: 239).

Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford (1950) have identified and described nine characteristics of the authoritarian personality which served as the basis for the Californian F-scale, composed of nine characteristics distributed into thirty items:

- 1) *Conventionalism*. Rigid adherence to conventional, middle-class values.
- 2) *Authoritarian submission*. Submissive, uncritical attitude toward idealized moral authorities of the ingroup.
- 3) *Authoritarian aggression*. Tendency to be on the lookout for, and to condemn, reject, and punish people who violate conventional values.
- 4) *Anti-intraception*. Opposition to the subjective, the imaginative, the tenderminded.
- 5) *Superstition and stereotypy*. The belief in mystical determinants of the individual's fate; the disposition to think in rigid categories.
- 6) *Power and „toughness“*. Preoccupation with the dominance-submission, strong-weak, leader-follower dimension; identification with power figures; overemphasis upon the conventionalized attributes of the ego; exaggerated assertion of strength and toughness.

- 7) *Destructiveness and cynicism*. Generalized hostility, vilification of the human.
- 8) *Projectivity*. The disposition to believe that wild and dangerous things go on in the world; the projection outwards of unconscious emotional impulses.
- 9) *Sex*. Exaggerated concern with sexual „goings-on“.

(Adorno et al. 1969: 228; cf. Balík, Kubát 2004; Mitchell 1968; Marshall 1988; Nakonečný 1993, 1995, 1999; Čermák 1998; Plichtová 2003; Krejčí 2004)

In the last fifty years, many attempts to revise this conception and the scales used for measuring authoritarianism have been produced. They fall into three categories: some scholars have focused on the reformulation of the original concept of the authoritarian personality, others have presented a psycho-dynamic approach, aimed at the phenomenon of authoritarianism and authoritarian behaviour, and the third group has attempted to retain the concept of authoritarian personality, but to reduce it to one central theme.

To name but a few examples, the revisions of the first type were undertaken by Rokeach (1960) and Altemayer (1981), of the second type by Duckitt (1989) and Feldman (2003) and of the third type by Eysenck (1954), Christie and Geis (1970) and Ray (1976) (see Oesterreich 2005 for more details).

Another important social scientist and a representative of humanistic psychology, Abraham Maslow, has (according to Krejčí 2004: 156) highlighted the following typical traits of the authoritarian character:

- hierarchical consciousness, that is the tendency to perceive other people as competitors who occupy either a higher or a lower position than the authoritarian personality in question. The external attributes of power, rather than internal qualities of the individual, are important;
- the tendency to generalize the characteristics of dominance and discomfort;
- striving for external attributes of prestige, such as power, money, status, etc.;
- presence of animosity, hate and prejudices in the person's character;
- identification of goodness with weakness and an attempt to use it for one's own benefit;
- sadomasochistic tendencies;
- incessant discontent and an inability to achieve gratification in life;
- intra-psycho conflict;
- feelings of guilt which produce animosity.

A range of studies has shown that the adherents of left-wing ideologies also display a high degree of authoritarianism. For example, H. J. Eysenck claimed in the 1950s that communists exhibited the highest degree of authoritarianism.¹² Rokeach has shown that the authoritarian personality can be either left- or right-wing, but it will more probably be right-wing.¹³ Those results led a number of scholars to a more detailed study of left-wing authoritarianism (Balík, Kubát 2004).

B. Altemeyer has created a scale to measure left-wing authoritarianism. According to him, in politically consolidated countries right-wing oriented people support the establishment, whereas left-wing oriented people are in opposition to it. In line with this statement, he then defined left-wing authoritarianism in the following fashion:

1. A high degree of submission to authorities which attempt to subvert the authorities currently ruling in the given society.
2. Generalized aggression towards the established elites or those who support them.
3. A high degree of dedication to the norms accepted by the revolutionary authorities.

The results of Altemeyer's research have shown that the left-wing authoritarians are also dogmatic and ethnocentric (Balík, Kubát 2004). Chiefly, it has shown that left-wing authoritarianism correlates with its right-wing counterpart. The distribution of results has allowed the earmarking of four groups of individuals:

1. individuals who are neither left- nor right-wing authoritarians;
2. individuals who are strong left-wing authoritarians and weak right-wing authoritarians;
3. individuals who are strong right-wing authoritarians and weak left-wing authoritarians;
4. individuals who are strong left- and right-wing authoritarians (Balík, Kubát 2004).

¹² Eysenck (1954) was convinced that he discovered how the authoritarian or dogmatic tendencies can combine with political ideologies and suggested the following two dimensions of personality that mutually affect each other:

1. obduracy *versus* openness (obduracy is equivalent to authoritarianism or dogmatism).
2. radicalism *versus* conservatism (equivalents of left- and right-wing orientations).

¹³ Rokeach (1960) has developed a scale of dogmatism measuring the closeness towards other ideas, rigidity and authoritarian properties, disregarding political ideologies. Dogmatic or authoritarian characters can appear on both the left and right ends of the political spectrum. Unfortunately, Rokeach's scale seems to support a tendency to agree with all items of the scale (Hill 2004), a criticism also raised in the cases of the previously presented scales.

In addition to the above-mentioned characteristics, it is possible to observe in some cases of right- and left-wing authoritarian personalities, a categorical intolerance towards (almost) any sort of otherness and an admiration of uniformity and conformity, uncompromising advocacy of the “right” opinions, aggressive behaviour towards political opponents, efforts to legitimize and legalize anti-social activities (often in the name of higher ideals), blanket radicalism, etc. In some cases, it is possible to mention abnormal conservatism, ambitiousness (supported by family upbringing), unlimited loyalty and servility, paranoid ideas, inability to feel sympathy, but also riveting speech, usage of slogans, half-truths, lies and fables, backstage politics, etc. Some of those characteristics form part of Adorno’s nine items or are simply expressions thereof.

Aetiology of the authoritarian character

What are the possible explanations of the formation of the authoritarian syndrome? How is an authoritarian personality born and where are its roots?

The most important constituent in the authoritarian character’s aetiology are the family relationships in the childhood of the individual studied. Case histories of personalities of this type have revealed negative experiences from the childhood, especially the presence of cold, inaccessible fathers (Adorno a kol. 1969; Brown 2006).

According to Fromm (1997), the child is most strongly influenced by his parents’ characters, not by a particular individual experience.

Adorno describes the process of the formation of the authoritarian character with the help of the classic psychoanalytical concept of the Oedipus complex and in reference to E. Fromm and his description of the “sodomasochistic” character (Adorno et al. 1969: 759). The external repression of the family environment that bears on the child is connected with internal suppression and repression of impulses. The child undergoes the process of socialization only because it finds gratification in obedience and submission. As a result of this socialization the sadomasochistic impulses enter the process of upbringing. Gradually, the Oedipus complex (love of mother, hatred of father) is transformed. The hatred towards the father is transformed into love, but the preceding aggression that was aimed against the father is looking for a new object (cf. Brown 2006; Stellmacher, Petzel 2005).

The authoritarian personality usually experienced a very harsh and pedantic upbringing (cf. Adorno et al. 1950; Nakonečný 1995; Giddens 1999; Hole 1998). This may be one of the reasons why the authoritarians present themselves in later life as the advocates of order, despite the fact that they often violate the laws (for example in order to stay in power).

The issues connected with the relationship between the childhood and the authoritarian syndrome were explored chiefly by Else Frenkel-Brunswik, who studied family background and upbringing on the basis of interviews. She was mainly interested in family constellations (premature death of father, mother, divorce, relations to siblings, etc.; cf. Adorno et al. 1969: 358-359).

Socialization also plays an important role in the forming of some negative attitudes (towards minorities, and the like) which are obtained (though not solely) in the environment of the family. The family often moulds and imparts those attitudes, but it also supports behaviour following from them, and sometime it rewards such behaviour.

All of this results in a very rigid, “black-and-white” way of thinking which relies heavily on rules and does not tolerate equivocality well. The authoritarian personality also has strong unconscious feelings of hatred towards the parents, but represses those negative feelings with feelings aimed against “safer” targets – minorities that constitute “alien” groups (cf. Hill 2004).

A large-scale research undertaken in 1970–1985 in Netherlands by J. D. Meleen and C. P. Middendorp has shown the strongest negative correlation between authoritarianism and the level of education of the respondent and his father. Other, more general studies have shown that authoritarianism correlates not so much with the level of education as with intelligence (however, those two categories are closely linked). The authoritarian personality is simply less intelligent. This finding has permitted an expansion of the understanding of the origins of the authoritarian personality. Authoritarianism is a consequence of the level of achieved learning and an inability to cognize. Troubles connected with understanding a complicated reality lead to a situation in which people invoke opinions and instruction of authorities, and employ simplified, black-and-white categories of thought (Balík, Kubát 2004).

Nakonečný (1995) lists some other factors which should be taken into account in describing agents participating in the genesis of the authoritarian attitudes: the political attitudes of the parents; disappointment with the functioning of democracy in general or its institutions; antipathy towards exaggerated destructive liberalism, etc.

The influence of the concept of authoritarian personality

Fromm (1994) said that authoritarianism has significantly receded in Western democracies but the real liberty of the individual has at the same time decreased. He explained it with reference to the gigantic power and dimensions of the bureaucracy of the state, army,

industry, the replacement of personal bosses by impersonal bureaucrats; the individual has become even less powerful than anytime before, although he is not aware of his powerlessness.

Only a free man who has freed himself from the influence of authority, an authority which threatens and protects, can put his rational faculties to good use and understand the world and his role in it objectively, without illusions but, at the same time, in a way that allows him to develop and employ faculties that are truly his own. Only when we mature and cease to be children who are dependent on authority and afraid of it, can we start to think independently. However, the converse is also true. Only if we dare to think, can we shake off the dominion of authority (Fromm 2003).

A man cannot freely decide whether he wants to have “ideals” or not, but he has a choice between the various ideals: he can choose adoration of power and destruction or devotion to reason and love (Fromm 2003).

The authoritarian type of personality was defined on the basis of the psychoanalytic theory, on the basis of the theoretical and empirical tenets of E. Fromm, T. Adorno and others (cf. Oesterreich 2005).

Adorno’s study of the authoritarian personality was criticized for a range of shortcomings, yet many of its original conclusions withstood the tests of later research (cf. Atkinson et al. 2003; Martin 2001).

Although the methods employed by Adorno and his colleagues have attracted certain critical comments, for example by H. H. Hyman, P. B. Sheatsley¹⁴ or L. Srole, his general conception was often confirmed by later studies, such as those by J. G. Martin, F. R. Titus and E. P. Holander. In 1954, a monograph dedicated to the methodology of Adorno’s research edited by R. Christie was published. P. Cook and R. Christie even circulated a guide to published literature about the authoritarian personality (Kol. 1996).

It seems that the authoritarian personality is especially sensitive to fascist ideology, whose very core is formed by the hatred of alien groups. However, recent research has shown that prejudices and authoritarian attitudes can be acquired at home through the usual processes of learning, rather than through the psychoanalytical processes as described in Adorno’s study (Altemeyer 1988 according to Atkinson et al. 2003).

¹⁴ Hyman and Sheatsley (1954) have pointed many methodological shortcomings in Adorno’s research, which led them to question how Adorno and his colleagues interpreted their findings. Hyman and Sheatsley chiefly criticized the sample of people chosen for the study, as their socio-cultural background was relatively homogeneous (for a more detailed criticism, see Krech, Crutchfield, Ballachey 1968: 239-241).

Two main strains of criticism of Adorno's book have appeared:

- 1) *Methodological* – the F-scale is formulated in such a way that agreeing with all statements means authoritarianism, but this can lead to “tuning in” to answering “yes”, i.e. a tendency generally to agree rather than disagree with each item of the scale.
- 2) *Theoretical* – the theory is based on questionable Freudian concepts.

Hyman and Sheathley ascertained that worse education is probably a better explanation of the high scores on the F-scale than invariable authoritarian characteristics of personality.

An explanation based on characteristics of personality cannot explain sudden and widespread changes in the prejudices across the society as a whole. The F-scale focuses only on right-wing politics (Hill 2004).

It is necessary to point out that in their criticism of the concept of the authoritarian personality, some scholars have questioned the scales used, while others refused to accept authoritarianism as a characteristic of personality and understood it as a reflection of the values and norms of some subcultures of society itself (cf. Giddens 1999).

There is no doubt that the concept of the authoritarian personality is an interesting topic, which is today referenced not only in books on political psychology, but also in studies of non-democratic regimes.

However, some important problems connected with the concept were not resolved. Stellmacher and Petzel (2005: 246) provide the following list:

- 1) *The problem of reductionism*. Authoritarianism research started with the aim of explaining collective social behaviors. Theories explaining such social phenomena have to be located on an intra- and intergroup level of explanation. However, most current theories of authoritarianism focus on the individual level of explanation only.

- 2) *The social context*. Authoritarianism research gains greater explanatory power if the social context is taken into account. Several studies over the last decades have shown that authoritarianism and the relationship between authoritarian attitudes and authoritarian behavior is much more flexible and influenced by the social context than was originally proposed by the theory of the Authoritarian Personality.

- 3) *The political bias of measurement*. Authoritarianism measurement has been often criticized because of its confusion with conservatism. Most current authoritarianism scales focus solely on right-wing political orientations. The question about existence or nonexistence of left-wing authoritarianism is still unanswered.

Oesterreich (2005) claims that “the concept of the authoritarian personality is a valid concept because it helps to explain human nonage. From an empirical point of view it might not have been very successful, but this can’t lead to the conclusion of giving it up. A reformulation has to concentrate on the questions that form the core of the concept.”

Oesterreich also points out that contemporary, modern industrialized societies can be threatened by totalitarian tendencies (see Oesterreich 2005 for more details).

This is yet another reason why the concept of the authoritarian personality can provide inspiration for the contemporary study of non-democratic regimes, but is very difficult to use in practice.

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