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The authoritarian/libertarian hybrid[1]

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Apparent opposites

We usually think of authoritarian and libertarian tendencies in politics as incompatible opposites. By authoritarian, I will mean here a condition in which the will of a leader is the dominant force in an organisation, a movement or a whole society. Such a regime may be based on coercion, but in many examples of political authoritarianism the leader has been democratically elected and has the emotional allegiance of a large number of citizens. They share a state of mind in which they are intensely identified with the leader, and with the group which the leader represents. An ideological code, demanding certain beliefs and behaviours, may also substitute for the person of a single leader. So the term 'authoritarian' needs to refer to a state of mind as well as to a regime. Freud's 1921 essay on group psychology was intended as a general theory of groups, but tends towards describing the state of mind of a member of an authoritarian group. Karl Figlio (2023) refers to this Freudian model of the group as a 'super-ego community', since in Freud's analysis it is the superego (as it came to be called) which is the part of the mind, in each individual group member, most involved in the tie to the group. An image of the leader, group or ideology comes to colonise the citizenly part of the superego, and so individuals concede their political agency to this occupying force and are at the bidding of the leader/group.

In contrast, I take libertarian to mean an ideological stance, and a state of mind, in which the dominant value is the freedom of individuals to pursue their own desires, with minimal restriction by the state or any other societal authority, or by pressure from any social group. As an ideological principle, libertarianism is a central presence in bohemian counter-cultures (e.g. the hippie 'counter-culture' of the 1960s) and also in the economics and politics of neo-liberalism. As a state of mind, it is the apparently opposite one to authoritarianism, in that close identification with the group is anathema, and instead the ideal is to experience oneself as a monadic, untrammelled agent. In this internal scenario, the political superego has been expelled, so the citizen is free to pursue self-interest. Outside of pure anarchism, the expulsion may not be absolute, so the existence of the state, as the ultimate representative of the superego, may be tolerated, as long as it does not impinge on the individual's freedom.

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[1]A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 2023 *Psychoanalysis and the Public Sphere* annual conference, held online 30 September-1 October 2023. A partial summary of that paper appeared in *The Conversation*, 2.1.24, at https://theconversation.com/why-have-authoritarianism-and-libertarianism-merged-a-political-psychologist-on-the-vulnerability-of-the-modern-self-218949.===

Authoritarianism vs libertarianism is not a Right vs Left distinction. It cuts across that traditional ideological divide, such that there are authoritarian and libertarian versions of both Right and Left (insofar as that axis is any longer meaningful). While some on the Left may argue that socialism in its 'real' form (i.e. its theoretical, pure form) cannot be authoritarian, the actual global performance of socialist 'democratic centralism' suggests otherwise. At the libertarian pole, meanwhile, we have a host of 'right-wing' 'populists'[2] in whose rhetoric 'freedom' is central.[3]

There has been much commentary on the twenty-first century rise of authoritarianism, which is reversing the gains made across the world by liberal democracy in the late twentieth century. To help in understanding this trend, we need a more complex analysis of authoritarianism, both politically and psychologically, than is usually deployed. While they are still deeply relevant, the first psychological theories of the authoritarian mindset, as put forward in the mid-twentieth century by psychoanalytic thinkers, now need to be expanded. In particular, it is now necessary to examine how and why authoritarianism is becoming more manifestly interwoven with its apparent opposite, libertarianism.

Logically, authoritarianism and libertarianism may be contradictory, and in practical politics it is hard to see how they might point in the same direction. But psychologically, there has always been a deep connection between the two, for which there is a psychoanalytic explanation. I will suggest that the psychoanalytic concept of the 'core complex' can help to make sense of this paradoxical affinity between authoritarianism and libertarianism, since both can be seen as expressions of an unconscious anxiety at the core of selfhood.

This being an unconscious connection, it has historically not always been clearly visible in the manifest dimensions of politics. However, we are now in an age of hybridity and liquidity, in which many of the distinctions, categories and boundaries which have organised everyday life are becoming porous or are weakening. Now, these two tendencies are becoming more intertwined at the manifest level. The resulting hybrid fusion is an increasingly disturbing presence in today's politics. As Nachtwey and Amlinger (2023) have said, 'A new social character is emerging in modern Western societies: the libertarian-authoritarian personality – a dark by-product of late modernity.'

The most prominent instance of this fusion today is probably Trumpism in the USA, though here I will also point to two other examples. One, related to Trumpism but distinct from it, is found in some contemporary forms of conspiracism, that is, of beliefs that the world is controlled by hidden and malevolent powers. Globally, levels of belief in some form or other of conspiracy theory are disturbingly high (see the YouGov/Cambridge

[2] The term 'populism' is over-used, and usually taken to be a critical label. Yet the implement-ation of popular policies is arguably what democracy is about. This is a complex area beyond the scope of this article. Here, I use the term in the fairly well-established sense of a style of rhetoric in which politicians present themselves as representing a 'people' against an elite or establishment.

[3] I have previously explored the anti-authority dimension of 'populism': see Richards (2013; 2019; 2021).

Globalism Project, 2022). The other, from the territory of culture wars, is the transgender debates. While in most countries these areas are not core interests for a majority of the public, the Scottish National Party's support for 'trans' policies was one of the reasons for its massive losses in the 2024 General Election in Britain. In the UK as a whole, conspiracism has become a familiar presence in online political discourse. These developments illustrate how the libertarian-authoritarian fusion can find expression in extreme identitarian and minoritarian politics.

The American example

The present major American version of authoritarian/libertarian hybridity took shape as Trump's feral yet autocratic project of undermining American democracy came into full political daylight. Trump himself may be too chaotic or too ignorant to be an effective authoritarian leader. But he has successfully sought an authoritarian relationship with his followers, one in which he is an object of idealisation and a source of truth, representing and defending the community which those followers believe they belong to. Joining that community is fairly simple – you need just to declare absolute faith in Trump, and your gestures of submission to his authority bring you the benefits of tribal life, of belonging amongst people awash with shared certainty and an ostensibly common anger.

Yet at the same time, in some of his rhetoric and his persona of predatory playboy, in his wealth and indifference to others, Trump offers a hyper-realisation of a certain kind of individualistic freedom, the craving for which he models and legitimates. This is very different from the individualism of Friedrich Hayek, or that of Jack Kerouac. However it rests, as all libertarian outlooks do, on the principle of the sovereign individual.

The authoritarian-libertarian has little interest in, and often much contempt for, the moral codes of the classical authoritarian. S/he 'does not submit to conventional values, such as discipline, orderliness and diligence' (Nachtwey and Amlinger, op. cit.). Trump's power over many of his followers seems to rest heavily on the licence he gives them as individuals to assert themselves in a transgressive idiom, while they enjoy the warmth, protection and meaning to be found in tribal membership. Trumpism's fusion of the authoritarian and the libertarian was clearly embodied in the attack on Capitol Hill on 6 January 2021. This was conducted by people for whom Trump was the passionately desired autocratic leader, but who were also leading a transgressive, carnivalesque assertion of their individual rights, as they defined them, to defy and attack the American state.

Of course, the American state itself has always given house room to this kind of libertarian presumption, in, for example, the 2nd Amendment of the US constitution, asserting the right to bear arms. And in much populist rhetoric internationally, including that of Trump, the leader is positioned as an outsider to the establishment, and can therefore be seen as a true representative of the people standing up to the self-serving elites. So populism generally, but perhaps especially in the American context, is hospitable to an *insurrectionist* type of authoritarianism, within which the licence to attack existing authorities may appeal to libertarian impulses, alongside the wish for ecstatic fusion with the community of believers in the chosen leader.

The iron fist of conspiracism

Let us look at two other current examples of authoritarian/libertarian hybridity, although the first of them overlaps extensively with Trumpism. The Covid19 pandemic brought a surge of interest in conspiracy theories - about the origins of the virus, if indeed it existed, and the purpose of vaccinations and lockdowns. Of course, a pandemic is going to release primitive fears of attack and death. There are similar fears at work in other conspiracy scenarios, for example of mass biological, chemical and radiation poisonings carried out deliberately by authorities on the pretext of protecting us. When amplified by a growing army of conspiracy theorists, such fears can lead to divisive delusions, with a key role in preparing the ground for this being played by libertarian ideologies which rationalise suspicion of and antipathy towards authority of all sorts and legitimise anti-social libertarian behaviours such as refusing vaccination. This is of course an international phenomenon, but there are some local hotspots. In Britain during the Covid pandemic, one of these was the town of Totnes in Devon, where was a lot of campaigning against lockdowns (seen not as a public health measure but as an exercise in social control), against vaccines (again, seen not as a public health necessity but as a reckless experiment or even attack on the public), and against 5G rollout (the network has been blamed for Covid, as well as cancers and more besides).

Culturally, Totnes was well placed for libertarian outlooks to flourish. In recent decades it has seen an influx of people involved in a variety of interlinked pursuits such as arts and crafts, alternative medicine and other 'wellness' practices, spirituality and mysticism. This has created a strong 'alternative' ethos in the town, in which soft, hippie-esque forms of libertarianism are prominent. Those sceptical of this trend have seen Totnes as 'the UK capital of pseudo-science', and as being 'twinned with Narnia'. One might have thought that it would therefore be the last place where we would find sympathy for authoritarian politics. Disturbingly, however, in the preoccupations with conspiracy theories, that indeed is what can be found. There may be no single dominant leader at work, but, under the influence of conspiracism, New Age anti-authority sentiments can be seen to morph readily into intolerance and hard-edged demands for retribution. A virulent sense of grievance against an enemy or oppressor who must be punished is a regular feature of authoritarian culture.

In the anger over lockdowns and vaccinations, there are calls for those who led the implementation of those measures to be tried in a special court – a 'Nuremberg 2.0' as it is called – where, as a Totnes acupuncturist asserts, they should face the death penalty.[4] This, by the way, is one of many current examples where authoritarians of various stripes use the language of anti-fascism to explain their own actions – as in the claim that the invasion of Ukraine was a 'de-nazification' operation.

A Totnes artist and gallery owner presents himself online as a full-on anti-Semite and Islamophobe. He has been banned from YouTube, though some of his videos, of

[4] See episode 5 of the BBC podcast series Conspiracyland, discussed below.

interviews with guests on political topics, are still available elsewhere online.[5] In one, he airs his view that the West is led by 'lunatic psychopaths', while his guest – an American 'expert' on politics – tells us that Putin is a 'peace-loving liberal'. (Faced with such sympathy for massive old-style authoritarianism, we might find it hard not to imagine that there is some Russian encouragement of it, though one has to be cautious in speculating about covert intrusion by a malevolent power.)

A BBC investigation[6] of 'conspiracyland', which focused on Totnes, reported that advocates of QAnon had been using weekly meetings of Totnes people interested in conspiracy theories as a recruiting ground. QAnon is very popular in the USA, where surveys in 2022 found 18% of the public to be believers (Public Religion Research Institute, 2022). It would be wrong though for Europeans to see it as a peculiarly American affliction, since it has become a template or reference point for a swarm of conspiracy theories internationally (Ball, 2023; Sommer, 2023). Britain has been a substantial producer of pro-QAnon material online. As is widely known, Q is perhaps the ultimate in bizarre conspiracy fantasy – we should say perhaps, because there is a very large field of contenders for the most bizarre award.

Q supporters believe there is a cabal of child-abusing cannibalistic members of the global elite (Hillary Clinton, Bill Gates, George Soros, Tom Hanks, Jeffrey Epstein, to name but a few). They drink the blood of the thousands of children they have imprisoned and tortured in underground tunnels, because the blood of terrified children is rich in a hedonistic drug which they crave. QAnon followers lionise Trump as the heroic authoritarian leader who is secretly leading the fightback against this cabal, and who will defeat them in a coming crescendo to his struggle which they call the Great Storm. The QAnon slogan 'Where we go one, we go all' (WWG1WGA) captures the sense of monolithic group solidarity, of belonging in a chosen community, which is the key psychic underpinning of an authoritarian movement. Yet 'Where we go one' also enables individuals to feel they are forging their own path, beholden to no one other than Trump and his anonymous lieutenant 'Q', who has provided an esoteric narrative on the war against the elite.

There are also other towns in South West England, such as Glastonbury and Frome, where concentrations of support for conspiracy theories have been reported. While Totnes leads the way, these towns have shown similar cultural shifts, though are less intensely developed as hubs of pastoral counter-culture libertarianism. Wherever conspiracy theories are finding support in the UK at present, it is likely that a publication called *The Light*[7] is playing some facilitating role. This 'news' monthly is a compendium of many kinds of

[5] See, e.g., https://jasonliosatos.com/paul-craig-roberts-assange-israel-gaza-iran-putin-and-the-global-madness/.

[6] Listen at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001mssm/episodes/player

[7] For its current issue, May 2024, go to: https://thelightpaper.co.uk/assets/pdf/Light-45-May-24-Web-Final.pdf

conspiracy theory, interspersed with other material, possibly to camouflage its purpose.[8] Its readers are twice as likely as people in the general population to believe in conspiracy theories. The BBC found *The Light* to be closely linked to a German publication called *Democratische Alternativ*; both share the aims of propagating conspiracy theories, and occasionally link them to what could be called extreme right-wing politics. This is done in a scatter-gun, disruptive way rather than with focused ideological purpose, but it creates opportunities for libertarian sensibilities to find common cause with authoritarian movements.

Escaping the cage of the body

The third example of this fusion to be looked at here is the most controversial, potentially. It concerns the huge increase over the last two decades in the number of young people seeking to escape their biological gender, their sex 'as assigned at birth'. I suggest we see this as a maximal expression of the libertarian impulse. Social restrictions on gender role plasticity have of course never been absolute, but in recent decades they have substantially weakened. Moreover, new technologies of reproduction mean that creating babies no longer requires heterosexual intercourse, if only for very small minorities of the population. These cultural and socio-technical developments have greatly expanded the space for individual choice and agency in relation to sexuality and sexual relationships, and parenting. In the context of these broadly beneficial changes, and the expectations they might raise, new sexual identities have proliferated, and a new challenge for the further expansion of voluntaristic agency has opened on the *biological* front. Can individuals choose to transcend even their biological gender?

The preferred answer for radical libertarianism is yes: the individual's freedom to choose must be paramount. It is insisted that individual choice must defy and supplant biological conservatism. And in the movement which has quickly gathered around this insistence, there is a spontaneous accompaniment to the libertarian valorisation of individual gender choice. This is the authoritarian demand that no critique of unquestioned transitioning, let alone opposition to it, can be allowed.

This demand is clearly articulated in the work of Judith Butler, one of the major sources of intellectual support for the trans movement. In her book *Who's Afraid of Gender* (Butler, 2024) she criticises opponents of this movement for their construction of what she calls a 'phantasm', a term she borrows from the psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche. By this she means an imagined threat to civilisation: she claims that opponents of pro-trans gender studies have conjured up the spectre of a monstrous, monolithic force which is attacking the world of heteronormativity and sexual dimorphism, and which we should fear for the destructive chaos it will bring, and which therefore must be destroyed. While this combination of panic and cruelty is clearly evident in some more extreme forms of anti-trans rhetoric, it is not what motivates the majority of those who are, in Butler's terms, 'afraid of gender'; they are a very diverse crowd indeed.

[8] I was surprised to discover that some of my work had been discussed in one article, though it turned out to be in a meandering essay on social theory, unconnected to conspiracies.

Butler frequently uses the terms ‘fascist’ and ‘fascistic’ to refer to her opponents. For example, she writes of ‘the fascist potentials that are increasingly actualized in several regions of the world through the anti–gender ideology movement’ (op. cit., p.264). In this and many similar assertions, she is performing the kind of fear-mongering production of a ‘phantasm’ which she accuses others of, by identifying a mortal enemy, a fascistic totalitarianism, as the core problem from which all ills flow. This kind of Manichean scenario is the psychological bedrock of authoritarianism, since it justifies an absolute rejection of any and all dissent. All the ‘fascist potentials’ must be rooted out and defeated. It’s a matter of survival, and it’s us or them. So in much trans activism, the authoritarian silencing of others is a moral and existential necessity. Those whose concern for gender-dysphoric young people is not expressed in the simple ‘affirmative’ mode must be denounced, excluded and silenced.

If this authoritarianism is to be adopted by people whose political self-identity is anti-authoritarian, there has to be massive projection of the authoritarian impulse onto the enemy. So to call those who question trans ideology ‘fascistic’ meets a psychological need, as well as being a strategic device to discredit opponents. And this leads to striking examples of linguistic acrobatics. An American institute for the study of genocide, previously concerned only with situations in places like Palestine and Armenia, recently issued a red alert regarding a potential ‘genocide’ unfolding in the USA.[9] It says:

> The Lemkin Institute reminds American voters and legislators that “the gender critical movement is a totalitarian and genocidal social force that targets not just transgender people, but also all the institutions of democracy that protect individual and collective human rights”, as we pointed out in our statement on November 29, 2022.

Thus ‘genocide’ is deemed to be an appropriate description of the concerns many people have, in the complex debates around trans identities, about so-called ‘affirmative’ interventions. This alert is an extension, via a flawed logic, of the already flawed claim that TERFs (‘trans-exclusionary radical feminists’), and others who question the extent to which biological sex can be re-engineered, or does not really exist anyway, are ‘denying the existence’ of trans people.

Questioning a person’s narrative of themselves, while usually demanding great sensitivity in doing so, is not the same as denying them a platform, let alone denying their ‘existence’. Yet gender dysphoria is imagined to define the equivalent of a ‘people’ whose collective life and individual lives are being threatened. This sort of catastrophising has on many occasions provided the justification for authoritarian attacks on those seen as the source of the threat, and who may be projectively denounced as ‘fascist’. Identitarian and ideological authoritarianism of this sort is perhaps unlikely to morph into a totalitarian political force, but it can impact heavily and divisively on social policy, as well as nurturing

[9] https://www.lemkininstitute.com/red-flag-alerts/red-flag-alert-for-genocide---usa.

authoritarian mindsets amongst some members of the public who will, in conditions of social division and conflict, be more receptive to that influence.

The unconscious equivalence

Overall, the fusion of authoritarian and libertarian tendencies is politically potent, in a bad way. It confuses and disorients, but most importantly it renders wider groups of people vulnerable to strategic manipulation by programmatic authoritarianisms. Ultimately, it seems likely that in this hybrid fusion it is the authoritarian impulse which will prevail, in political terms, since it will have the organisation and the leadership to do so. But in the process it will have broadened its support base amongst the public.

To understand how this illogical hybrid can come about, let us go back to the psychoanalytic understanding of authoritarianism. In his analysis of the extreme authoritarianisms of twentieth century fascism and Nazism, to which we should add Stalinism and Maoism, Erich Fromm (1941)[10] saw the identification with the leader and group as driven by the terror of aloneness, of the desolate condition feared to be the fate of the modern individual whose 'freedom' is actually experienced as abandonment. This produces a highly conformist political milieu, in which the predominant form of anxiety can be described as having an agoraphobic quality: there must be no separation from the group and its authority figure, no venturing from the home, from the human solidarity which the leader and her or his supporters represent. A kind of emotional merger with the group and/or its leader offers a refuge, an experience of safety (albeit illusory) for those unable to tolerate the anxieties, the demands and the potential aloneness of independent selfhood.

This account differs from the better known, slightly later analysis of authoritarianism by Adorno et al. (1950). That saw this state of mind as driven by a punitive superego, which threatens the ego with abandonment, and thereby the individual with loss of self, unless there is an absolute identification with the authority object, be that an individual leader or some other 'central figure' (Redl, 1966), or some impersonal totemic representation of the group and its identity. Though it soon became much better known than Fromm's earlier analysis and was based on a different (less qualitative) kind of empirical data, the Adorno et al. work was indebted to Fromm's (see Brunner, 1994), and converges with it in the emphasis on imperative identification with authority.

Libertarianism was not on the agendas of mid-twentieth century psychosocial theorists, though Fromm was aware of its incipient presence within authoritarianism, in his discussion of the 'tendency to defy authority' (op. cit., pp.145ff.) which could, apparently paradoxically, be found amongst authoritarians. He was also working towards recognition of it in his next book (Fromm (1947), in the account given there of the emergence of a characterological feature, the shallow, instrumental 'marketing orientation' – a proto-libertarian mode of detachment from others in response to the coldness of commodified

[10] See McLaughlin (1996) for a detailed discussion of this important work and the case for its continued relevance today.

social relations. (This trail of theory led later to the conceptualisation of contemporary culture in terms of narcissism.) Now, we can see libertarianism more fully as the complementary pathology to authoritarianism, characterised by a more or less complete rejection of authority, and by the ego's intense identification with the 'free', monadic individual. This of course is also illusory, since the human condition is one of interdependency, and libertarianism is a defence, a way of denying the dependence and vulnerability inherent in that interdependence. Its signature anxiety is not agoraphobic but claustrophobic. The group represents suffocation not safety. The lockdowns during the pandemic were an obvious trigger for that kind of anxiety. Similarly, the vaccination programmes represented how a malevolent authority might seize control over one's own body. So also does the anatomical form of that body become a prison of the self.

Claustrophobic panic also colours responses to some developments in urban planning. For example, a traffic management scheme in a part of the city of Oxford, another area with a strong presence of 'alternative' culture, set off a local eruption of conspiracy theorising.[11] Some people feared that it heralded sinister restrictions on their personal freedom of movement. And this fear is by no means restricted to such culturally distinctive areas: astonishingly, the 2023 survey conducted by King's College London (The Policy Institute, 2023) found that 33% of a weighted national sample (comprising 2274 people) believed it to be definitely or probably true that:

> 'So-called "15-minute cities", where all services are with a 15-minute walk of where people live, are an attempt by government to restrict people's personal freedom and keep them under surveillance.'

The central fear in claustrophobia is not of abandonment but the loss of self *in* the other. In social life, and in our political experience as subjects or citizens, this may be threatened through restrictive immersion in any collective organisation or aggregation. A state of mind assailed by this fear prioritises the need to assert separateness and independence. Politically, this produces a highly individualistic milieu, in which obligation and commitment to others threatens suffocation.

In using the language of 'phobic' anxieties here I am invoking the concept of the 'core complex', first named as such by Glasser (1979), in which agoraphobic and claustrophobic anxieties are seen not as specific psychiatric symptoms but as expressions of a fundamental psychic predicament. They are the interchangeable products of the same underlying difficulty, which is the inability to sustain a state of mind that is secure enough in its selfhood not to need either merger with the other, or disavowal of the need for the other. In other words, there lacks a self that is secure enough not to need either authoritarian or libertarian defences. In the absence of such good-enough security, these two political choices - so different on the surface - are psychically equivalent in their defensive function.

[11] See, e.g., this report: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/24/far-right-trying-to-infiltrate-low-traffic-protests-campaigners-warn

There are a number of ways in which this core complex has been identified in the clinical work of psychoanalysts, and described in the psychoanalytic literature. (I discuss some of these in Richards, 2022.) One of especial relevance here, given its focus on the unconscious life of social groups and social systems, is that developed by Earl Hopper (2019). He sought to describe a dimension of collective psychology that was not captured in the influential theory of group processes developed by W. R. Bion (1961). According to Bion, there are three 'basic assumptions' which are at the heart of group life and which govern group dynamics, concerning dependency, conflict and pairing. Hopper argues the need for a fourth such theme, based on the level of social cohesion found in a group or society – or rather, on the type of *incohesion* it tended towards. This bipolar phenomenon is the group-level equivalent of the 'core complex' in individuals. He suggests that where the societal context does not provide sufficient containment of fundamental, existential anxiety (which Hopper characterises as the fear of annihilation), then social relations will tend to be incohesive in one or both of two ways.

The first of these is 'aggregation', a socio-cultural condition in which individuals are 'excessively detached from one another' and are isolated within 'crustacean character structures' (op. cit., p.17). Aggregated groups and societies contain 'dysfunctional subgroups and contragroups that cannot relate to one another in constructive and productive ways' (loc. cit.). This, says Hopper, is the primary form of incohesion, and it closely resembles the picture sketched above of how the claustrophobic state of mind tends towards a certain mode of citizenship. Where the predominant form of existential anxiety is fear of loss of self in the other, the typical defence will be the denial of dependence and interdependence, and the consequences will be atomised subjectivities - and libertarian values.

In Hopper's formulation, this is the primary form of incohesion. It inevitably involves further anxieties and difficulties, against which a defence develops which is the second form of incohesion: massification. This occurs when individuals become 'involved in personal and collective merger with a shared and idealised object', and 'obliterate all distinctions and differences amongst themselves' (loc. cit.). This is the agoraphobic kernel of the authoritarian mindset and its fusion with the group.

Other versions of the concept of the core complex do not install one of the two poles as primary, and then see the other as a secondary defence. But otherwise Hopper's account fits well with the model of functional equivalence advanced here to explain the convergence of authoritarian and libertarian tendencies. Moreover, his analysis steps out of the clinic to suggest some direct links between certain events or situations in the external world, and raised levels of annihilation anxiety. He suggests that large-scale immigration, rapid inflation and assassinations of leaders are amongst the factors which can intensify anxiety within a social system. This in turn we might expect to increase resort to both authoritarian and libertarian defences, whether separately, jointly or with rapid toggling between them. This gives some sociological starting points from which we might explore the sources of the increasing prominence of hybrid forms of ideological outlook, and their contribution to deepening polarisations today.

So, in summary, I am suggesting that the concept of the core complex can helpfully be seen as describing the psychic underpinning of both authoritarianism and libertarianism. It sees both merger with the other and absolute separation from the other as defences against an underlying fear of loss or annihilation of the self. These defences appear to be opposite alternatives but are functionally equivalent and so can also work in concert. The hybrid forms of political allegiance and protest which are now emerging mean that states of mind occupying *either* pole of insecurity can be recruited to causes which are divisive and often delusional. The most important distinction now is that between all anxiety-driven, illusion-based and defensive forms of politics on the one hand, and on the other, efforts to preserve and develop reality-based modes of political discourse and behaviour.

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