

Authoritarianism and Ideology

Asad Haider

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), [European Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Other Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Other Film and Media Studies Commons](#), [Reading and Language Commons](#), [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), [Television Commons](#), and the [Theatre and Performance Studies Commons](#)

Dedicated to the dissemination of scholarly and professional information, [Purdue University Press](#) selects, develops, and distributes quality resources in several key subject areas for which its parent university is famous, including business, technology, health, veterinary medicine, and other selected disciplines in the humanities and sciences.

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Recommended Citation

Haider, Asad. "Authoritarianism and Ideology." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 23.1 (): <<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.4011>>

This text has been double-blind peer reviewed by 2+1 experts in the field.

The above text, published by Purdue University Press ©Purdue University, has been downloaded 0 times as of 05/10/21.

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](#).

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture

ISSN 1481-4374 <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb>>
Purdue University Press ©Purdue University

CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture, the peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access learned journal in the humanities and social sciences, publishes new scholarship following tenets of the discipline of comparative literature and the field of cultural studies designated as "comparative cultural studies." In addition to the publication of articles, the journal publishes review articles of scholarly books and publishes research material in its *Library Series*. Publications in the journal are indexed in the Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature (Chadwyck-Healey), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (Thomson Reuters ISI), the Humanities Index (Wilson), Humanities International Complete (EBSCO), the International Bibliography of the Modern Language Association of America, and Scopus (Elsevier). The journal is affiliated with the Purdue University Press monograph series of Books in Comparative Cultural Studies. Contact: <clcweb@purdue.edu>

Volume 23 Issue 1 (March 2021) Article 2
Asad Haider,
"Authoritarianism and Ideology"
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol23/iss1/2>>

Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 23.1 (2021)**
Special Issue **New Faces of Authoritarianism. Ed. Massimiliano Tomba**
<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol23/iss1/>>

Abstract: In "Authoritarianism and Ideology," Asad Haider approaches the problem of authoritarianism by considering the classical question of tyranny, as framed by Spinoza, and how this can be traced to the Marxist theory of ideology. A fundamental axis of the debate over ideology in twentieth century Marxism was the phenomenon of fascism, theorized in highly influential but also markedly different ways by figures like Wilhelm Reich and Theodor Adorno. A close reading of two major texts—Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* and Adorno's contributions to *The Authoritarian Personality*—provides a basis for conceptually elaborating different directions that can be taken in the study of authoritarianism within the framework of ideology critique. The essay concludes by examining a specific form of ideology which is gestured to by both Reich and Adorno, though not systematically explored: racial ideology. As a fundamental component of contemporary authoritarianism, the phenomenon of racism allows us to elaborate the theory of ideology and its political implications.

Asad HAIDER

Authoritarianism and Ideology

In his classic investigation of authoritarianism, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, Wilhelm Reich proposed an inversion of common-sense political reasoning: "what has to be explained is not the fact that the man who is hungry steals or the fact that the man who is exploited strikes, but why the majority of those who are hungry don't steal and why the majority of those who are exploited don't strike" (19). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari famously traced Reich's formulation to the foundational question of Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*: why do people fight for their servitude as if it were their salvation? Spinoza refused to answer his question at the level of *consciousness*. Instead, he proposed that the "sad passions" which accompany servitude should be understood in terms of the material forces which diminish our power to act. It is only by entering into composition with other bodies, by adding our powers to theirs, that we can know the joy of acting. When the corporeal constraints imposed by tyranny make us unable to act, we are susceptible to superstition, and so our impotence appears in our imaginations as the result of our own will.

Intuitively, we know this is the case. While we might initially believe that people are not constantly on strike because they are foolish, complacent, or complicit, we also know that their lives are determined by the physical force of the police, the inescapable compulsion to earn a paycheck, and the everyday habits which lead us now to sit quietly in our chairs.

But when the authors of *Anti-Oedipus* equate the theory of ideology with mystification or illusion, and argue that Reich fails to follow through on the implications of his analysis when he maintains the contrast of rational material interests to irrational desires, they misconstrue the concept of ideology (104, 257, 344–5). In fact, it is essential to maintain the theory of ideology; without this the analysis of desire will lead, as it does in both *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* and *Anti-Oedipus*, to a biological vitalism. I will return to the perspective of Spinoza with which I began.

If ideology cannot be explained by mystification, rational material interests are not an inert baseline but are always constituted by social powers and are themselves also apprehended in imaginary representations. Material interests are in fact constituted in the rationality of revolt. From the perspective I am proposing, superstition is better understood as something like what Marx will later describe as ideology, though not in the sense of false beliefs. It is rather a theory of ideology continuous with Spinoza's appendix to Book 1 of the *Ethics*, which says: "men believe that they are free, precisely because they are conscious of their volitions and desires; yet concerning the causes that have determined them to desire and will they do not think, not even dream about, because they are ignorant of them" (239). Ideology, on this reading, is the field in which the material institutions and practices of the state are represented in an imaginary form. It takes hold in our imaginations because our bodies are limited and cannot form knowledge of nature without the practice of reason. Tyranny, which has an interest in keeping us ignorant, is the material relation which is represented in the imagination as superstition. Ignorance cannot *explain* the existence of tyranny and servitude; it is the effect which itself has to be explained.

Along these lines, what Deleuze and Guattari found so profound in Reich's analysis was his refusal "to accept ignorance or illusion on the part of the masses as an explanation of fascism." The masses were "not innocent dupes," but rather, "under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for" (29). To explain the susceptibility of the masses to fascism in terms of fascist mystifications, Reich argued, would quite simply be to invert the real question. Fascism had mystification as its very function. Its mystifications could not be used to *explain* its mass success; it was rather precisely the fact that its mystifications were successful which had to be explained (21). We cannot proceed in our analysis by explaining the desire of the masses as the result of their choice, but only in terms of a material analysis of the powers of acting, which is also the rationality of revolt. When these powers are decomposed and disorganized, the irrationality of obedience is represented in the imagination as an act of will.

On the basis of this analysis, I will turn now to the theory of ideology in *The Authoritarian Personality*, which relates it quite specifically not only to authoritarianism but also to prejudice. In a formulation which at first glance seems curiously similar to that of Reich, Adorno writes in his "Remarks on *The Authoritarian Personality*": "Today, each and every man is faced with a tremendous bulk of objectively existing prejudices, discriminations and articulate anti-Semitic attitudes. The accumulated power of this objective complex is so great and apparently so far beyond individual powers of resistance that one might indeed ask, why are people not anti-Semitic, instead of asking why certain kinds of people are anti-Semitic" (lxii).

Of course, despite the seemingly similar logic of inversion, Adorno's line of reasoning is something like the opposite of Reich's: instead of beginning with the rationality of revolt, he begins with the irrationality of the existing society. The task he sets for himself is to explain the extent to which anti-Semitism expresses the character of the historical period and its forms of social life. Rather than the division represented by revolt, Adorno begins from the social totality. He writes that "this totality manifests itself in numerous aspects, all of which are comprised in it and appear as particular 'causes' only to the kind of thinking which, naively following the pattern of natural sciences, forgets that all social facts bear the imprint of the system in which they appear and which can never be explained satisfactorily by atomistic enumeration of various causes" (l). "The principle of social totality," he affirms, "accounts for prejudice" (li).

Now, the key insight of *The Authoritarian Personality*, which converges with that of Reich, is that it is not enough to show that fascist propaganda fools people, but rather to ask why people are fooled. For fascism "to be successful as a political movement," it "must have a mass basis": "It must secure not only the frightened submission but the active cooperation of the great majority of the people." But since fascism "favors the few at the expense of the many, it cannot possibly demonstrate that it will so improve the situation of most people that their real interests will be served. It must therefore make its major appeal, not to rational self-interest, but to emotional needs—often to the most primitive and irrational wishes and fears. If it be argued that fascist propaganda fools people into believing that their lot will be improved, then the question arises: Why are they so easily fooled?" (10).

In the introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*, we see a broader methodological ambiguity in the deployment of the concept of ideology. The authors argue that it is insufficient to study fascist propaganda, and that it is necessary to go beyond this to understand "not only the psychological structure of the individual but the total objective situation in which he lives." The guiding assumption is that "people in general tend to accept political and social programs which they believe will serve their economic interests." At the same time, "economic motives in the individual may not have the dominant and crucial role that is often ascribed to them." Indeed, if "economic self-interest were the only determinant of opinion," this would logically entail that "people of the same socioeconomic status" would "have very similar opinions," an assumption not borne out by the research. Thus, the authors conclude: "To explain why it is that people of the same socioeconomic status so frequently have different ideologies, while people of a different status often have very similar ideologies, we must take account of other than purely economic needs." And indeed, researchers must account for the fact that "people very frequently do not behave in such a way as to further their material interests, even when it is clear to them what these interests are," and in certain instances appear even to go against these interests (8).

The authors answer this question with reference to the personality structure. But what theory of ideology does this entail? *The Authoritarian Personality* is not entirely clear on this question. There are a few different indications of how this notion is used, but throughout the text ideology is defined in terms of "opinions, attitudes, and values" (2). In his preface Horkheimer presents a theory of ideology in terms of illusion and debunking, grounded in Descartes rather than Spinoza. He writes that "the superstitious belief in witchcraft was overcome in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries" with the influence of modern science and Cartesian rationalism. Once the "immediate effect of spiritual factors on the realm of the corporal" was exposed as an illusion, "the foundations of the belief in magic were destroyed" (lxii). Along these lines, in the case of fascism, *The Authoritarian Personality* concludes that "fascism is imposed on the people, that it actually goes against their basic interests, and that when they can be made fully aware of themselves and their situation they are capable of behaving realistically" (976). Of course, this is in apparent tension with the view which is also put forth in the conclusion, that "the modification of the potentially fascist structure cannot be achieved by psychological means alone," since it is the product of "the total organization of society" and can be "changed only as that society is to be changed" (975).

The role of opinion turns out to be ambiguous, and this extends to the whole theory of ideology. In Adorno's "Remarks," referring to views on "economic problems," he says that the "study remains on the level of ideology. We register, and to a certain extent interpret, our subjects' overt opinions on specific economic matters" (xliv-xlv). On the other hand, regarding the question of prejudice, he notes that opinions are not sufficient. Most subjects would be unlikely to characterize themselves as anti-Semites, or to indicate an interest in joining a fascist movement. Furthermore, he points out, "prejudice may be pre-conscious or even unconscious." In these formulations, ideology as consciously held opinion is contrasted to the unconscious determination of prejudice (xlv).

In an analysis broadly structured by the distinction between conscious opinion and unconscious prejudice, Adorno contrasts individuals as "autonomous units whose decisions are important for their

own fate as well as that of society" to the "submissive centers of reactions" which are their high-scoring subjects (xlii). What underlies the analysis of the authoritarian personality type is an analysis of the expression of the historical transformation of the social totality, in which the classical individual has been undermined by the extension of the commodity form and mass consumer culture.

As Peter E. Gordon puts it, this problem is implied by the very methodology of the study:

Here a certain irony comes into view, even if it remains only partially recognized and thematically underdeveloped. In Adorno's suggestion—that a given person may be "standardized" and "think" in a standardized way or may instead "oppose" standardization—we may detect a self-reflexivity problem. The distinction risks measuring the high-scoring subject on the F scale against a triumphalist image of the true individual who is apparently immune to typological thinking. Only the "high-scoring" individual is prone to stereotypical thinking. The distinction itself, in other words, looks at social reality from the perspective of the high-scoring subject rather than the true individual. This opens up the possibility of a vicious circle or self-referential paradox where the principle that animates the study becomes trapped in its own diagnostic. If stereotypical thinking involves the reduction of differentiated persons to quasi-natural kinds, one cannot help but wonder if the social-psychological method of the study itself has not deployed the very technique it marks as a pathology. (56)

The only way, Gordon argues, to "rescue the research study from this self-referential problem" is "to recognize that (from Adorno's perspective) the very category of a 'true individual' was beginning to vanish from social reality" (56). Thus, as Gordon puts it:

Such a research agenda corresponded to emergent patterns in contemporary social reality. Modern patterns of economic exchange and commoditized cultural experience meant that genuine individuals were gradually being reduced to social types, and this developing feature of society itself served as a realist justification for a research agenda that methodologically compressed individuals into recognizable social types. Lurking in this argument, however, was a far more radical claim that identified stereotypical thinking and authoritarianism with general features of the modern social order itself. (57)

In Adorno's words, "the all-pervading trait of social 'alienation' largely reflects the nature of a commodity economy in which man appears as producer and consumer of goods and not as the subject of his society" (li). We can distinguish this theory of the historical dialectic, in which the autonomous subject is displaced by the submissive center of reaction, from the classical theory of ideology of Spinoza, which proposes that this submissiveness may precisely be autonomously chosen by a subject which is formed in subjection to a particular power. From this vantage point, it would not be possible to say that the classical individual has been historically undermined by the social reality. The subjection of individuals is not the result of a historical dialectic. Rather, the individual is itself an effect of impersonal causes. The individual psyche, or the bourgeois self, far from dissolving in the period of mass commodification, remains the form taken by subjection.

Let's now also compare this account to Reich's theory of ideology. Reich much more firmly and consistently rejects the notion that the debunking of mysticism could succeed as a measure against fascism (21). He argues, in contrast to Horkheimer, that the exposure of superstition by scientific enlightenment did not succeed in eliminating religious morality, which was the effect of the social basis of the authoritarian family and sexual repression, and thus could not be eliminated without transforming this basis (121, 171).

From the vantage point of rational analysis, Reich writes, workers should develop a consciousness of their economic situation, and from there develop a program to overcome their exploitation. But this is not what happens historically. There is instead a "cleavage between the social situation of the working masses and their consciousness of this situation," which means that in fact the working masses end up worsening their social position rather than improving it (10). This cleavage is the site of the irrational thought and action which manifests itself in the most extreme case of fascism. As Étienne Balibar writes of Reich:

What he dares affirm is that historical materialism (the only "real" one at a given moment) denies out of principle the reality, the "material force" of ideology as an "emotional" or affective structure of the masses, distinct from the "consciousness" they have of their conditions of existence, and as a consequence denies the irreducible split between class condition and mass movements (179).

This can be distinguished from the division of the social totality described by Adorno, which is the contradiction between the total and the individual that is the expression of social alienation (lv-lvi). It

is rather, Reich writes, "a question of the role of ideology and the emotional attitude of these masses seen as a historical factor, a question of the *repercussion of the ideology on the economic basis*" (10). The question becomes: "what prevents the economic situation from coinciding with the psychic structure of the masses?" (14). Rather than the contradiction between the total and the individual, it is a question of the disjunction of ideology and the economic basis, characterized by the logic of repercussion. Thus, Reich concludes:

The sexual morality that inhibits the will to freedom, as well as those forces that comply with authoritarian interests, derive their energy from repressed sexuality. Now we have a better comprehension of an essential part of the process of the "repercussion of ideology on the economic basis": *sexual inhibition changes the structure of economically suppressed man in such a way that he acts, feels, and thinks contrary to his own material interests.* (32)

Now, to understand Reich's theory of ideology we have to pay attention to his insistence on distinguishing the irrational from mystification (17-8). What is the basis of ideology if not a mistaken apprehension of reality? As is well known, the role of psychoanalysis in Reich's theory is to explain the basis of ideology in terms of sexual repression. But what is significant for Reich is not simply "the effects and mechanisms of sexual suppression and repression and of their pathological consequences in the individual," but the social basis of this repression, which leads Reich to take a distance from Freud's "philosophy of civilization" (28). Sexual repression, according to Reich, cannot be understood in terms of the transhistorical imperatives of civilization. Of this theory he writes: "One becomes a bit skeptical and asks how it is possible for the masturbation of small children and the sexual intercourse of adolescents to disrupt the building of gas stations and the manufacturing of airplanes" (29).

In elaborating a social theory of sexual repression, however, Reich also takes a position quite distinct from the one which would explain it in terms of the alienation and reification of the commodity form. The character structure does not emanate from the center of the social totality but is rather the result of indifferent processes, specifically the historical emergence of the authoritarian patriarchy and the subsequent introduction of class divisions. Sexual repression and its accompanying morality are part of the reproduction of the institution of private property which is organized by marriage. Ideology is then a contingent result of a historical sequence of causes and effects. The repercussion of ideology on the economic basis is not merely the intersection of two distinct systems, but rather implies a mutually constitutive relation. Ideology does not simply reflect the economic process, but embeds it in the psychic structure, and itself becomes a material force. Reich writes:

The ideology of every social formation has the function not only of reflecting the economic process of this society, but also and more significantly of embedding this economic process in the psychic structures of the people who make up the society... *inasmuch as a social ideology changes man's psychic structure, it has not only reproduced itself in man but, what is more significant, has become an active force, a material power in man, who in turn has become concretely changed, and, as a consequence thereof, acts in a different and contradictory fashion.* (18)

The materiality of ideology is also embedded in a complex historical temporality. Reich posits that ideology "changes at a slower pace than the economic basis," with an extraordinary reasoning. Since the character structure is formed in early childhood, he says, it develops at a much slower rate than the rapidly changing forces of technical production. He says:

The basic traits of the character structures corresponding to a definite historical situation are formed in early childhood, and are far more conservative than the forces of technical production. It results from this that, as time goes on, the psychic structures lag behind the rapid changes of the social conditions from which they derived, and later come into conflict with new forms of life. (18)

In other words, a few discordant timelines are established: the longer development from the contradictions of matriarchal society which yield the authoritarian patriarchy and thus the economic structure; the persistence of sexual repression alongside the development of the economic structure; the rapid change of the technical forces of production alongside the formation of the character structure. There is thus no unitary line between economic structure and ideology. This is once again quite distinct from the view that the personality structure is the manifestation of the social totality. The forms of subjectivity are not the expression of the commodity form, but rather belong to relatively autonomous sequences of cause and effect constituted by cleavage, repercussion, and lag.

As a case study, I will now finally turn to the form of racial ideology. As Robyn Marasco writes:

One of the most provocative arguments put forth in *The Authoritarian Personality* is that the affective and ideological energy for fascism comes mainly from racism. Other elements surely matter—class alliances, political opportunities, the state of the state—but fascism takes root in the soil of racism. Would it be appropriate to call Trump the F-word? Historians remind us of the profound differences between Mussolini's dictatorship in Italy, Hitler's Germany, and Shōwa Japan, each of these "fascisms" distinct from the other. But the diversity of national political movements does not cancel the underlying momentum that drives and unites them: an ideology of race, attached to an idea of the nation and national greatness, that authorizes every inhumanity. Neofascist movements, surging in the United States and around the world, may differ from their twentieth-century predecessors in any number of ways, but the ideology of race remains. It has new targets and new means of organization and new forms of expression, but murderous racism defines this new fascism as much as the old. (716)

However, racial ideology is to be distinguished from what *The Authoritarian Personality* calls "ethnocentric ideology." The well-known subject of the study, Larry, who scores low in ethnocentric ideology, says that "The discrimination toward Negroes is because they aren't understood and because they are physically different. Towards Jews it's because of their business ability – the fear that they'll take over business control of the country" (39). Another subject, referred to as F109, says: "I have an age-old feeling against Jews, some against Negroes. Jews stick together, are out for money... Jews are in big businesses. It seems they will be running the country before long. I know some people of Jewish descent who are very nice, but they're not full-blooded Jews. Jews have large noses, are slight in stature, little sly Jews. The women have dark hair, dark eyes, are sort of loud." The notes on F109's interview add: "Subject knows she's prejudiced; she thinks she needs educating too, by working with people of different races" (625). We might say in today's terms that F109 seeks to check her privilege. Whatever the consciously held opinions of Larry, who is low in ethnocentric ideology, and F109, whose bad conscience reveals a typical psychic structure, we can clearly observe that both remain caught up in the structure of racial ideology.

Let me proceed by distinguishing ethnocentrism and ethnocentric ideology from what I am calling racial ideology. The significance of these distinctions becomes clear when *The Authoritarian Personality* is situated in its American context. There is a constant comparison in the study between anti-Semitism and racial prejudice against black people, which is inseparable in the responses of the subjects yet distinguished analytically. Ethnocentrism is defined in the study by R. Nevitt Sanford as "the tendency to express opinions and attitudes that are hostile toward a variety of ethnic groups and uncritically favorable to the group with which the individual is identified" (45). Daniel J. Levinson characterizes it as "an ideological system pertaining to groups and group relations," suggesting a certain redundancy to the term "ethnocentric ideology" (104). Levinson insists that this term is preferable to prejudice, and that it has the advantage of shifting the emphasis away from "race," which he rightly points out is not scientifically or anthropologically valid (103). In a discussion of the E scale, the study says "Since Negroes are a large and severely oppressed group and since imagery of 'the Negro' has become so elaborated in American cultural mythology, they merited a subscale of their own" (106). Adorno writes that "Our study grew out of specific investigations into anti-Semitism. As our work advanced, however, the emphasis gradually shifted. We came to regard it as our main task not to analyze anti-Semitism or any other antiminority prejudice as a sociopsychological phenomenon per se, but rather to examine the relation of antiminority prejudice to broader ideological and characterological patterns" (605).

However, we are confronted with the question of the *sociological* validity of race, which is inescapable in the analysis of American society, and thus the substantive distinction of racial prejudice from ethnocentrism. This was the topic of a study published two years before *The Authoritarian Personality*, Oliver Cromwell Cox's *Caste, Class, and Race*. In the destructive moment of his analysis Cox proposes that studying "race relations" entails eliminating the notions of ethnocentrism, intolerance, and even "racism." His definition of race is quite simple: "race may be thought of as simply any group of people that is generally believed to be, and generally accepted as, a race in any given area of ethnic competition" (319). Ethnocentrism, since it need not take a specifically racial form, cannot explain the reality of race relations, and intolerance can be directed against any group which does not conform to social convention (321). Racial prejudice, Cox argues, is "prejudice marked by visibility, physical distinguishability," but "it is not, however, caused by physical differences" (350). Here the argument of Larry that prejudice against black people is to be explained by their physical difference must be inverted. To repeat a consistent methodological maneuver, it is rather the fact that prejudice is attached to visible physical differences which has to be explained.

The reason that Cox argues against racism as an explanation returns us to the problem of ideology. First of all, Cox takes a distance from ideology, which he equates with a "system of rationalization" (321). The important achievement of this method is that it does not isolate the abstraction of race and project it throughout history. In the absence of this historical specificity we would only have the transhistorical and ultimately theological notion of prejudice, which cannot explain what Cox characterizes as race relations and leads to absurd possibilities. He writes: "It would be, for instance, a ridiculous inversion of thought to expect the native peoples of America to have had race prejudice for the white invaders" (350).

This means that Cox highlights the contingency of race: "It should be made clear that we do not mean to say that the white race is the only one capable of race prejudice. It is probable that without capitalism, a cultural chance occurrence among whites, the world might never have experienced race prejudice" (345). He adds that any other so-called race could not now aspire "either to duplicate the racial record of Europeans or to dominate them." The advancement of technology would not permit the "cultural distance" (348) that whites cultivated in order to achieve their commercial and industrial development in isolation and therefore become capable of "economic and military world dominance" (331). "Therefore," he says, "we must conclude that race prejudice is not only a cultural trait developed among Europeans, but also that no other race could reasonably hope to duplicate the phenomenon. Like the discovery of the world, it seems evident that this racial achievement could occur only once" (348-9).

Cox says, "Studies on the origin of racism involve the study of the development of an ideology, an approach which usually results in the substitution of the history of a system of rationalization for that of a material social fact" (321). The material social fact, for Cox, is capitalism, which is the basis for the specificity of modern European "race relations," which he also appears to suggest are a material social fact, and are not to be conflated with previous forms of social antagonism. Race in Cox's analysis divides between ideology and material social fact. By making this distinction Cox is able to explain material phenomena without resorting to making ideology into a cause. That is, people are not oppressed because of their race, but are rather assigned a race as a consequence of constitutive power relations. He writes: "The capitalist exploitation of the colored workers, it should be observed, consigns them to employments and treatment that is humanly degrading. In order to justify this treatment the exploiters must argue that the workers are innately degraded and degenerate, consequently they naturally merit their condition" (334).

However, this account leaves open three problems regarding the theory of ideology. First of all, it is difficult to distinguish ideology from the material social fact, because if race relations are constituted by the power relationship established by capitalist exploitation, how does this power relationship take a specifically racial form without the ideology of racism? Cox writes: "This, then, is the beginning of modern race relations. It was not an abstract, natural, immemorial feeling of mutual antipathy between groups, but rather a practical exploitative relationship with its socio-attitudinal facilitation – at that time only nascent race prejudice" (332). The fact that this is a *socio-attitudinal* facilitation which develops nascent race prejudice suggests that ideology plays an overdetermining role.

The fact that this is socio-attitudinal *facilitation* leads to the second problem, which is that by explaining ideology as a system of rationalization, Cox adopts a functionalist theory of ideology. Functionalism demonstrates on the one hand the reproduction of particular phenomena in terms of the reproduction of the system or structure; therefore, it shows how these phenomena are not merely accidental or contingent. Nevertheless, there is a complex relation between structure or necessity and accident or contingency, which is exposed by the relation to historical specificity. If there is a historical process characterized by specificity, there is no necessity or goal to the historical process. Cox is clear that race relations are the result of a "chance occurrence." We can describe the reproduction of a given structure or system in terms of the becoming-necessary of contingency. It is not the evolution of a pre-existing structure but precisely the fact of historical accidents which do not simply dissipate but take hold in a structure which is reproduced and constitutes its elements. The repetition of these relations over time constitutes a structure. For example, in the encounter of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, each class is constituted as an element of a class relation. In Cox's object of race relations, racial groups are constituted by the social antagonism resulting from the exploitation of slave labor. However, the functionalist theory of ideology suggests that the ideology serves the purpose of realizing the goal of reproducing social relations.

The third problem is the question of the subject of ideology, which underlies the language of "facilitation" and "rationalization." What is the agent that facilitates and rationalizes the existing system of exploitation? Is it a conspiracy from above, carried out with propaganda? It is difficult to establish the conscious action of the capitalist class in a conspiracy. This is first of all because capitalists are in

competition and do not constitute a collective interest. But it is further because the perspective of the structure implies that relations are not constituted by conscious action, but that this conscious action is itself the effect of the structure. The capitalist is, in other words, the bearer of the capital relation. The theory of ideology as facilitation and rationalization, on the other hand, reduces structure to subject.

Among the most significant developments of these insights and problems is the argument of Barbara Fields in her article "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America." In her analysis, however, ideology is itself precisely a material social fact. It cannot be understood as a delusion, or even a system of rationalization, but is rather "the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day" (110). To return to our earlier vocabulary, race is an imaginary relation in the sense that it is a way of making sense of the effects of the structure, in the absence of a direct experience of the causes of these effects. In the formation of race in American history, we are dealing with the following relations: first, the differentiation of forced migrant labor according to the origin of migration, susceptibility to coercion, and visible physical characteristics; second, the division between supposedly "free" contractual labor and the ownership of people as property within a political system revolving around citizenship rights. These effects and contradictions are represented in imaginary terms in the form of race.

With Fields we are presented with many of the same methodological insights, but a different theory of ideology, of "racial ideology," which directly situates race as such as an ideological form. She criticizes the conflation of ideology and propaganda, but perhaps more salient for this discussion, she points out that we cannot teleologically understand race as an explanation for historical phenomena in the 17th century: "Historians can actually observe colonial Americans in the act of preparing the ground for race without foreknowledge of what would later rise on the foundation they were laying." What we see is "society in the act of inventing race" (107). However, this is not an explanation according to conscious action, suggesting that the ruling elites decided to create the category of race. Nor is it a functionalist explanation, suggesting that even if race did not exist, it would be necessary to invent it. Rather, a series of contingent determinations, from the fluctuations of tobacco prices to Bacon's Rebellion, produced a situation in which race arose as a way of making sense of real relations. This definition of ideology suggests a different mode of subjectivity. Here the subject is not the agent of the structure but a relation to the structure.

I will conclude by invoking Cox's version of the basic point about the lack of utility of debunking ideology. He writes: "We cannot defeat race prejudice by proving that it is wrong. The reason for this is that race prejudice is only a symptom of a materialistic social fact... Our proof accomplishes nothing. The articulate white man's ideas about his racial superiority are rooted deeply in the social system, and it can be corrected only by changing the system itself" (462). From this vantage point, the attempts to use race to explain the rise contemporary authoritarianism fall significantly short. They frequently reproduce racial ideology, accepting, for example, that people are white because they believe they are, and that this can explain their political action. Instead, we have to think in terms of a whiteness effect, caused both by the structural history of race relations and the contemporary conjuncture marked by the crisis of the political system. Understanding these causes will not debunk illusions and halt the rise of contemporary authoritarianism, but it may allow us to begin to conceive of the possibility of producing different effects.

Works Cited

- Adorno, T.W., et al. *The Authoritarian Personality*. 1950. Verso, 2019.
- Balibar, Etienne. *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*. Routledge, 1994.
- Cox, Oliver Cromwell. *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study in Social Dynamics*. Monthly Review Press, 1959.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, U of Minnesota P, 1983.
- Fields, Barbara Jeanne. "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America." *New Left Review*, no. 181, 1990, pp. 95-111.
- Gordon, Peter E. "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump." *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory*. U of Chicago P, 2018.
- Marasco, Robyn. "Introduction," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 117, no. 4, 2018, pp. 715-9.
- Reich, Wilhelm. *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, edited by Mary Higgins and Chester M. Raphael, M.D. Translated by Vincent R. Carfagno, The Noonday Press, 1970.
- Spinoza, Baruch. *Complete Works*, edited by Michael L. Morgan. Translated by Samuel Shirley, Hackett, 2002.

Author's profile: Asad Haider is a founding Editor of *Viewpoint Magazine*, an investigative journal of contemporary politics. He is the author of *Mistaken Identity* and a co-editor for *The Black Radical Tradition* (forthcoming). His writing can be found in *The Baffler*, *n+1*, *The Point*, *Salon*, and elsewhere. Email: <noswine@gmail.com>