

0.1 Chapter 3: relationships: Maturity

0.2 Maturity

1 On the Longing for Authority

President Obama was out the other week inspecting the navy at the largest US mainland base in Norfolk, Virginia. A month ago, he was out at the Wright-Patterson air force base in Dayton, Ohio.

It can look rather impressive. Hes in charge. The generals have to do what he says, and they will. Around the world, the tanks, the aircraft carriers, the fighter planes and the combat troops are all waiting for his orders.



We are so painfully aware of what can go wrong when power is abused that we tell ourselves we never like authority. Yet there are important parts of ourselves that want to feel protected; we want someone to be there to anticipate danger, someone to stand in the front line and to confront whatever threats and harms may be lurking in the wider world with a tone of authority and command.

Maturity has unfairly come to be associated with an overcoming of all emotions connected to being passive or submissive towards others. So we think that if we are to pass muster as plausibly smart and worldly we have to stress how free we are of any desire to have politicians as guardians of our safety, as father (or mother) figures.

One way this is expressed is as a reluctance to admire politicians. Admiration is an admission of inequality

and of need it puts you in a vulnerable position. When you admire someone you look up to them, you recognise they can do something you cant. You might wish you could do it but in admiration youre honest enough to admit their superiority.



Lodged at the back of our minds are deeply traumatic images of enthusiasm for authority going catastrophically wrong. We think that if we like authority at all we are only a hairs breadth away from turning into Nazis. This is such a horrible prospect that we understandably want to signal to ourselves and everyone else how very very far we are from it. Trauma (in this case the worlds collective psychological wounds from the 1930s and 40s) means we get terrified by actually perfectly decent things that unfortunately put us in mind of a nightmare weve gone through already.

But we need to reassure ourselves of the huge safety margins between admiring authority wanting to be protected and looked after and the hysterical worship of a dictator. These two things are not remotely the same. They only look connected because the historical aftershocks are still with us.

Its time to recover our confidence; admiration for authority is not always a disaster, indeed it has a role to play in a functioning state.



1.0.0.0.1 The nightmare really is over