

*Review Article*

THE MANY VOICES  
OF POLITICAL CULTURE  
Assessing Different Approaches

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Richard J. Ellis and Michael Thompson, eds. *Culture Matters: Essays in Honor of Aaron Wildavsky*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997, 252 pp.

Michael Gross. *Ethics and Activism: The Theory and Practice of Political Morality*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 305 pp.

Samuel P. Huntington. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996, 367 pp.

Ronald Inglehart. *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic and Political Change in Forty-three Societies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, 453 pp.

David I. Kertzer. *Politics and Symbols: The Italian Communist Party and the Fall of Communism*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996, 211 pp.

THE popularity of political culture has waxed and waned, yet it remains an enduring feature of political studies. In recent years the appearance of many excellent books and articles has reminded us of the timeless appeal of the subject and of the need in political analysis to account for values and beliefs. To what extent, though, does the current batch of studies in political culture suffer from the difficulties that plagued those of an earlier time? The recent resurgence of interest in political culture suggests the importance of assessing the relative merits of the different approaches that theorists employ.

ESTABLISHING EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

The earliest definitions of political culture noted the embedding of political systems in sets of meanings and purposes, specifically in symbols, myths, beliefs, and values.<sup>1</sup> Pye later enlarged upon this theme, stating

<sup>1</sup> Sidney Verba, "Comparative Political Culture," in Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba, eds., *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 513.

that political culture “encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity. . . . [It] is thus the manifestation in aggregate form of the psychological and subjective dimensions of politics.” And as he concluded: “A political culture is the product of both the collective history of a political system and the life histories of the members of that system.”<sup>2</sup> Political culture thus never addresses individuals or societies singly. It holds that individuals are the fundamental units of societies and does so in a way that embraces the attributes of both personality and social systems. Assumptions emphasize different factors, such as how individuals and/or groups are socialized, how different individuals organize their thinking about rules and norms, how discourse affects the legitimacy of political institutions, how and why individuals orient their thinking and communication in terms of salient myths, rituals, and symbols, and how moral criteria are apprehended and with what consequences for political behavior. Because these assumptions vary in importance depending on intellectual taste and training, it is impossible to speak of a single political culture approach. Rather, different approaches have been utilized to solve different problems and to suit different methodologies.

In seeking to assess the claims of these various approaches one needs a measure against which they can be evaluated. To this end, I suggest beginning with a critical component of all political culture studies—preference formation and, more specifically, how culture constrains preferences and how preferences affect culture. The nature of preferences is an irreducible, necessary, and shared focus of all political culture analyses; the critical factor underlying preference stability is the social and psychological constraints that act upon it. Concomitantly, what happens to preference stability when these constraints become inoperative is also of crucial importance.

One way to conceptualize preference stability is through a modification of the law of relative effect.<sup>3</sup> If we posit that (R) is the rate of expressing a preference, (k) is the maximum possible rate in these terms, (s) is the satisfaction from making choices in terms of this preference orientation, and (sa) is the satisfaction from making choices in terms of alternative preference orientations, then the hypothesis states that

$$R = \frac{k(s)}{s + sa}$$

<sup>2</sup> Lucian W. Pye, “Political Culture,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 12, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968), 218.

<sup>3</sup> Peter du Preez, *A Science of Mind: The Quest for Psychological Reality* (London: Academic Press, 1991), 101–2.

This equation tells us that as (s) increases so will (R), dramatically. But to the degree that (sa) is important with respect to (s), then (R) will fail to materialize to any significant degree. As hypothesized here, the probability of (R) being high—that is, the constraints that maintain a significant degree of (s) are high—is related to the following factors:

- the degree of congruence in the cognitive and affective valences of society's members
- the degree to which the norms and symbolic referents that coordinate social interaction are based on mutually reinforcing definitions and are widely accepted as legitimate
- the degree of congruence in individual and social interpretations of reality
- and, at the individual level, the degree of consistency in response repertoires

Such constraints obviously have an impact on the value of (k), the maximum possible rate of expressing a particular preference. When these constraints are weak or nonexistent with respect to (s) and/or when entirely different criteria become significant as constraints on preferences, the probability of (sa) being large relative to (s) is likely. In this circumstance social (and cultural) disorganization will be marked, as groups and individuals struggle to maximize alternative preference orientations through peaceful discourse, street demonstrations, revolution, and so on.

This essay begins by assessing five different books, each representative of a political culture approach—the five approaches that largely define the theoretical space of current political culture studies. In exploring how (s) and (sa) are conceptualized in each approach, the relationship between them, and the affect that this has upon (R), it becomes clear that while each approach has its strengths, not all are equally effective in explaining rates of preference formation (R). This is a key point, for if political culture is to have utility in political analysis it must be able to explain why and when people choose particular courses of action over others and the likelihood that these choices will be widely shared. The second part of the essay considers the difficulty political culture theorists have in confronting the relationship between preference formation and political cultural norms. Finally, the essay briefly highlights some promising avenues for future research.

#### ASSESSING POLITICAL CULTURE APPROACHES

To compare political culture approaches, one needs to assess how they identify and measure the relative magnitudes of (s) (the satisfaction from making choices in terms of a particular preference orientation)

and (sa) (the satisfaction from making choices in terms of an alternative preference orientation). This yields a critical measure of theoretical adequacy: how well an approach can determine (s) and (sa), identify constraints on their formation, and establish a plausible connection between constraints and satisfaction.

Each of the books reviewed deals broadly with the question of political transformation, utilizing different criteria to explore this phenomenon. In evaluating the approaches attention is paid to how alternative ways of assessing preferences affect our understanding of political change.

### POLITICAL CULTURE APPROACHES IN THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL TRADITION

#### THE HERMENEUTIC OR INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH

One powerful framework of explanation is grounded in the anthropological tradition of fieldwork and immersion in community life.<sup>4</sup> Many political scientists consider these studies to be especially appropriate for areas lacking survey data and for studies of local communities; this type of work has produced many useful concepts and midrange theories that are as applicable to national polities as they are to local levels. The focus on the symbolic dimension of politics, including the role of myth and ritual, has been applied to analyze nineteenth-century Bali and to explain changes in societies as diverse as contemporary Poland and Israel.<sup>5</sup> Derived from both a Weberian concern with the meaning of social action and a phenomenological focus on the socially constructed nature of knowledge and society, culture in this approach is defined as the collective meanings that groups create, share, and symbolically express. There is commonly a myth of origin, which relates how a people came to be or how a nation was created. Ideologies, the more particular interpretations of these wider cultural themes, tend to be more conscious and rationalized versions that give legitimacy to the claims of

<sup>4</sup> See, as examples, Lowell Dittmer, "Political Culture and Political Symbolism: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis," *World Politics* 29 (July 1977); Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Laura Desfor Edles, *Symbol and Ritual in the New Spain: The Transition to Democracy after Franco* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); James W. Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Bruce Kapferer, *Legends of People, Myths of State* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1988); Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff, *Secular Ritual* (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1977); Sherry B. Ortner, *High Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Myron J. Aronoff, *Power and Ritual in the Israel Labor Party* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1992); Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); and Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State-Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993).

different groups.<sup>6</sup> Although studies using this approach employ a variety of methodological techniques, participant observation remains a central one, and surveys are generally supplementary. As a consequence, the approach interrelates well with studies that seek explanations for community fragmentation or cohesion in situations where dramatic macrolevel political change is occurring.

David I. Kertzer in *Politics and Symbols* develops an interesting and informative account of the demise of the Italian Communist Party. So swiftly did this occur that many of the party faithful were shocked and dismayed. Although as early as the 1960s trust in the USSR as the leader of the world's proletariat had eroded, by the mid-1970s both Italians and foreigners were predicting that the party might even come to hold a majority in the national government. Nonetheless, the party's momentum began to slacken, such that by 1989 events in Eastern and Central Europe accelerated the belief of the party secretary, Achille Occhetto, and of others that bold action to transform the party was required. This transpired in November 1989, with Occhetto's announcement of the *svolta*, or turnabout—the need to change the name of the party and create a new-style leftist political entity.

Kertzer spent a year in the working-class quarter of Bologna talking with those involved, attending meetings, visiting cafes, and participating in protest meetings and rallies. Occhetto's statement had clearly provoked a crisis resulting in huge defections from the party and a drop in the share of the party's vote, from 30 percent in 1985 to 24 percent in 1990 (p. 14). The name of the party and the use of its emblems and symbols were hotly contested by a powerful secessionist group, and there soon developed a battle over the party's history, its myths, and the construction of a new postcommunist identity. This conflict was the basis for Kertzer's "concern . . . with the role of symbolism and the manipulation of history in the Communist struggle" (p. 15), and he turned his focus to "the evolution of the party's Communist identity" (p. 15).

The twin processes of mythologization and ritualization, says Kertzer, create history. The party's identity was bound up in a mythologized past associated closely with the resistance against fascism. The events of this struggle, not always depicted by the faithful with accuracy, were used by communists over the years to construct the themes of an evil conspiracy, the existence of a savior, and the coming of a golden age. When the members of the party discovered that they no longer had a name (that is, Communist), the situation signified as well the loss

<sup>6</sup> Aronoff, *Israeli Visions and Divisions: Cultural Change and Political Conflict* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Transaction Publishers, 1989), xv–xvi.

of the symbols, myths, and rituals associated with that name, for all were inextricably intertwined. Notwithstanding, in the ensuing political struggle both Occhetto and his opponents drew on the symbolism of the party while redefining both the party's symbols and its history to suit tactical needs.

The analysis of symbols is central for Kertzer because he believes that politics is at root a symbolic activity. This led him to explore how important symbols (for example, the red flag and revolutionary martyrs) are constructed and altered and how some symbols become legitimate and others are rendered illegitimate. Crucial to understanding the importance of symbols is the nature of ritual defined as "any symbolic behavior that is socially standardized, repetitive, and meaningful. Indeed, it is through ritual that symbols come to be defined, diffused, and energized" (p. 123). Prior to the *svolta* it was ritual that had promoted solidarity by legitimating "a symbolic descent from common ancestors whose mythic status [was] promulgated through rites" (p. 125). As a consequence, standing at the heart of the conflict over the transformation of the party was a struggle over the symbols on which rites were based.

Kertzer claims that "the emotional dimension is central" (p. 156), but nowhere is there a discussion of the psychological mechanisms that link emotions to preferences in a way that can help explain why preferences do or do not change. The result is an interesting account, but aside from the author's assertions no convincing argument is advanced about how "emotions" stimulate the process of identification with myths, symbols, and rituals. Missing is the critical why. Instead, one comes away with a plausible but nevertheless fundamentally narrative explanation of the unique features surrounding the transformation of the Italian Communist Party.

The hermeneutic approach looks to uncover constraint, in the form of myth, ritual, and discourse, largely through immersion in community life (where possible) and by "thick" description, relying heavily on semiotic analysis. There is no explicit psychological dimension. Rather, causal relationships are validated through observation of repetitive patterns: habits and habit complexes at the individual level and customs and custom complexes at the social level. Conceptualizing (s), the satisfaction derived from making choices in terms of a particular preference orientation, and (sa), the satisfaction gained from making choices in terms of an alternative orientation, is done largely by reference to variables at the social level (for example, shared adherence to a common myth of origin) and is achieved by expert interpretation based on ob-

servations of individual and mass behavior in actual social contexts. Satisfaction is inferred from public activity while the degree of constraint, linked to (s) and (sa) respectively, is determined by the inferred strength of enduring predispositions, loyalties, and so on regarding political life.

#### THE "CULTURE THEORY" APPROACH

The culture theory approach has evolved from the anthropological tradition, in particular, from the work of Mary Douglas.<sup>7</sup> It explicitly eschews direct reference to individual psychological variables and focuses instead on typological distinctions between subgroups said to exist in every polity. These groups are differentiated by two criteria: (1) the extent to which individual behavior within the group is socially prescribed (termed "grid") and (2) the degree to which persons are locked into membership in their group (termed "group"). Based on the relative strength of these criteria, ideal subcultures are identified according to behavior patterns that vary from *apathetic* (fatalism: high grid, low group), to intense concern for *hierarchy* (collectivism: high grid, high group), to *competitive* (individualism: low grid, low group), to *egalitarian* (egalitarianism: high group, low grid), and, finally, to *autonomous* (retreatism: neutral group and grid). The importance of actual subcultures in any society is ascertained by research into the prevalence of these behavior patterns, with the ways that subcultures interact providing the theoretical basis for understanding the political life of a society. In studies of political change this approach is especially well suited for analyses of contestation. Coalitions and more loosely knit groupings are identified in ways that differ from standard sociological (for example, class) or psychological (for example, relative deprivation) formulations.

Through its impossibility theorem culture theory posits that in any society there are exactly these five theoretically identified social relationship patterns—no more and no less. As individuals transact with each other, they come to know more clearly what they want and choose the pattern that is most congenial for them; subsequent preferences are then derived from and constrained by the particular social relationship

<sup>7</sup> See, as examples, Mary Douglas, ed., *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982); Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Richard J. Ellis, *American Political Cultures* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); Michael Thompson, Richard Ellis, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Cultural Theory* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1990); Aaron Wildavsky, "Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preferences," *American Political Science Review* 81, no. 1 (1987); idem, "Indispensable Framework or Just Another Ideology? Prisoner's Dilemma as an Antihierarchical Game," *Rationality and Society* 4, no. 1 (1992).

pattern a person has identified with. Even as each way of life is dynamically stabilized, however, individuals may shift away from allegiance to one pattern as a consequence of a cumulative mismatch between the promise and the performance of a particular relationship pattern. Microculture is thus the type of choice (that is, hierarchical, equalitarian, and so on) that is associated with a particular relationship pattern, whereas macroculture is the relative strength of the patterns.

Toward the end of his life Aaron Wildavsky became a leading proponent of culture theory, arguing against the assumption that history is merely narrative and that culture is simply national, religious, ethnic, racial, or organizational distinctions that defy common measures. *Culture Matters*, edited by Richard J. Ellis and Michael Thompson, is a collection of essays written in honor of Wildavsky, although only half of them are related to culture theory.

Wildavsky believed that a theory should be judged not against an impossible ideal but in comparison with rival theories. The article by Gunnar Grendstad and Per Selle, "Cultural Theory, Postmaterialism, and Environmental Attitudes," does just that, attempting to compare culture theory with alternative approaches. Employing an elaborate test of a public opinion survey conducted in Norway, they found that Ronald Inglehart's<sup>8</sup> hypothesized connection between environmentalism and postmaterialism was a move in the right direction but that the strength of the relationship was weak to nonexistent. In contradistinction they note that the egalitarian subculture, when operationalized, is able to explain far more variation in environmental attitudes (pp. 162–63). Indeed, materialism-postmaterialism were the weakest predictors of environmental attitudes, leading Grendstad and Selle to conclude that Inglehart was either wrong about the relationships or that his measures of materialism and postmaterialism are inadequate (p. 165). While this is but another of the numerous challenges posed to Inglehart and rebutted by him, it does provide support for the predictive capability of culture theory.

Of critical importance in assessing culture theory's claims is the adequacy of its explanation of political change. Charles Lockhart deals with this issue in "Political Culture and Political Change," maintaining that cultural biases are vulnerable to dissolution. According to the theory's postulates, all people must be associated with a subculture of their choosing. As circumstances change, however, a cumulative mismatch

<sup>8</sup> Ronald Inglehart, "Post-Materialism in an Environment of Insecurity," *American Political Science Review* 75, no. 4 (1981).

between performance and expectations may cause the adherents of any particular cultural bias to alter their preferences. A theory of "surprise" (akin to cognitive dissonance) underlies the shift from one bias to another as changing circumstances foster new institutional relationships, which in turn reshape perceptions. Nonetheless, despite the fact that change is said to be inherent and that shifts may alter the relative influence of rival subcultures (important, for example, for understanding the rapid transformation in the balance of cultural biases in Germany following World War II), fundamental changes in cultural commitments are infrequent. The adherents of a subculture are more likely to change institutional arrangements to support their biases than to do the converse (p. 95).

Change is thus conceptualized by culture theorists as "inherent in the different competencies and biases of different cultures" (p. 99). Nowhere, however, is there a good psychological explanation for why people select a particular bias in the first instance or what the intensity of their attachment to that bias is.<sup>9</sup> Rather, preferences are said to derive from choosing a particular way of relating with others. The analyst determines the distribution in society among preference orientations by identifying patterns of social interaction. The strength of the approach therefore is in its division of individuals into subcultural types, which are then used to explain preferences, while its weakness is the lack of a psychological mechanism to explain why particular preference orientations were chosen to begin with. A more complete explanation can be found only by drawing upon other general theories that divide people into cultural types.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the feeble psychological dimension of culture theory, experts are able, through immersion in community life, to identify at the macrolevel the preference orientations associated with (s) and (sa), assess their relative strength, and determine qualitatively the relative weighting of a dominant (s) and a "counterhegemonic" (sa). Changes in the relative strength of (s) and (sa) are revealed by shifts in their salience. While the theory claims more than it delivers, it minimizes the ad hocism and problems of verification that are the weaknesses of the hermeneutic approach. It directs research toward the discovery and relative weighting of preferences that are theoretically postulated. By so

<sup>9</sup> For an attempt to incorporate psychological variables, see Karl Dake, "Orienting Dispositions in the Perception of Risk: An Analysis of Contemporary Worldviews and Cultural Biases," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 22, no. 1 (1991).

<sup>10</sup> Alan Page Fiske, *Structures of Social Life: The Four Elementary Forms of Human Relations* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

doing it clarifies the dilemmas that are embedded within any overall cultural configuration and theoretically accounts for change. Understanding the macropolitical changes that occur as a consequence of preference alterations at the microlevel is as yet poorly conceptualized, however.

## POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

### THE SOCIAL CHARACTER APPROACH

An alternative interpretive approach traces its roots to national character studies and to anthropological studies in culture and personality.<sup>11</sup> Personality variables, drawn frequently but not invariably from Freudian formulations, are utilized as the major means for typing significant value orientations. Thus, societies are described in terms of the unique ways that their members view authority relations, are committed to particular religious/ideological views, fear social disorder, are excessively dependent, and so forth. Case-study analysis of social norms and behavior reveals contextually how the tensions that are associated with particular orientations are conceptualized and resolved. The approach thus supplements contemporary efforts to unravel why regimes make the transition to (or from) democracy and why populations suddenly explode into revolutionary activity.

It is false, immoral, and dangerous to believe in the universality of Western culture, argues Samuel P. Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (p. 310). This central thesis meshes with his primary theme “that culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world” (p. 20). According to Huntington, there are currently seven or eight major civilizations. By studying the interactions among them, he believes, researchers can produce a simple map for understanding the international politics of the late twentieth century.

For Huntington the “central elements of any culture or civilization are language and religion” (p. 59), with language second only to religion

<sup>11</sup> See, as examples, Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (New York: Free Press, 1967); Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996); Alex Inkeles, *Exploring Individual Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Thomas A. Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China's Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Lucian W. Pye, *The Mandarin and the Cadre: China's Political Cultures* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1988); Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); and Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing, 1996).

as a defining feature (p. 70). The relationship of religion to culture is asserted repeatedly (pp. 42, 47, 254), although the connection is never proved and subtle nuances are entirely dispensed with. Thus, Western Christianity confronts Greek Orthodoxy, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, as well as curious hybrids—the civilizations of Japan, Latin America, and Africa. So complete at times is the identity drawn between religion and culture that the very term culture often seems superfluous.

Huntington has an exceptionally gloomy view of the world. Within the United States he sees fundamental conflict between the multiculturalists and the defenders of Western civilization (p. 307). Outside the United States, according to Huntington, the power of non-Western civilizations is increasing while that of the West is declining. He contends that the ability of the West to impose its ideas about human rights and democracy is fading, although the evidence on this point is certainly controversial. The most troubling aspect of Huntington's worldview is the psychology that he imputes to the members of what are presumably irreconcilable civilizations. Conflict, he says, is ubiquitous, for "it is human to hate. For self-definition and motivation people need enemies: competitors in business, rivals in achievement, opponents in politics. They naturally distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them" (p. 130). Thus he concludes that if Chinese power is expanding and that of India is growing then "conflict seems highly probable" (p. 244).

Nothing appears as menacing for the West, however, as the looming confrontation with the Islamic world. In the 1990s nine of twelve intercivilizational wars (as of the time of writing) were between Muslims and non-Muslims, a fact that presumably bodes ill for any peaceful accommodation among civilizations. This, unfortunately, is not the worst of it, in Huntington's view: there is now a Confucian-Islamic connection that threatens ultimately to sweep the West to its doom.

Much of this account borders on one-sided conjecture. No one would dispute the often thorny relations between the United States and China or the difficulties that Muslims and non-Muslims alike have faced with Islamic fundamentalists. Yet as Huntington's critics have pointed out, he ignores the huge differences among peoples within his civilizations and the fact that to greater or lesser degrees all societies are experiencing similar developmental pressures. Huntington, however, believes that there is little or no evidence to support the idea of significant convergence in values and beliefs among the world's populations (p. 59)—this despite the fact that a walk down a major street in any

world city reveals that in the conflict between “Jihad and McWorld” it is by no means clear that Jihad is winning.<sup>12</sup>

Frightened and angry people populate Huntington’s civilizations. They are referred to en masse as Chinese, Muslims, and so on, and their preferences are similarly imposed upon them. Huntington knows there are significant internal differences, but his definition of culture as derived basically from religion and language allows little room for nuanced interpretation or for understanding cultural change, as the latter would necessarily be tied to the dynamics of linguistic and religious change. Indeed, given his focus on conflict and his perception of the sinister nature of religious fundamentalism, there is little possibility for any significant cultural change that would ameliorate the clash of civilizations.

This approach links the anthropological and psychological approaches but shifts its emphasis from symbolic interpretation and the analysis of discourse to the psychology of learned behavior. Populations are said to possess modal and enduring personality characteristics (that is, psychological constraints) that are imparted from one generation to the next via political socialization. Individuals enter political life as members of families, clans, religious groups, ethnic blocs, and so on. In some formulations group patterns with deep historical roots are said to uniquely mold values and behavior, as seen, for example, in the persistence of civic virtues in northern Italy.<sup>13</sup> Specifying group membership and loyalties is thus critical for explaining the prevalence of democratic values, religious affiliations, ethnic identifications, and so forth. The approach carefully delineates the reasons for the satisfaction derived from preferences in terms of a prevailing pattern of constraints (s) but is less successful in providing a psychological explanation for the emergence of alternative preferences (sa). As a consequence, (R) is largely inferred. Cultural ambiguity and conflict are invariably explained descriptively from analysis of group behavior. Given the methodological emphasis on insightful interpretation, empirical comparisons of different societies are virtually impossible.

#### THE SOCIAL LEARNING APPROACH

In this approach values and beliefs are ascertained from survey data that have been subjected to various forms of statistical manipulation.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (New York: Random House, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>14</sup> See, as examples, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Prince-

These analyses, grounded in psychological theories of social learning, consider socialization in particular and the influence of social life in general to be critical determinants of values and behavior. The best of these studies have focused on societies where systematic survey research is possible. To simplify somewhat, the psychological model that informs these analyses is one in which the values and beliefs of a populace are assumed to reflect the influences of socialization to a significant degree. It is thus the environment—social and physical—that conditions individual responses. Given the importance of socialization, it is necessary to conduct longitudinal studies to demonstrate how intergenerational differences in preferences correlate with changes in external influences. Cross-national surveys of values and beliefs are based on the same assumption of differences among societies in their historical and contemporary conditions. By identifying long-term transformations in preference patterns, this approach fits well with studies that seek to make sense of how technological changes, increasing educational levels, and so forth affect social and political life.

Wildavsky puzzled over the rise of egalitarianism in the United States. Inglehart provides a stunning explanation in *Modernization and Postmodernization*. He argues that economic development, cultural change, and political change go together in predictable ways to create fundamental alterations in value systems and basic changes in the hierarchical, bureaucratic organizations that have been essential for the creation of modern society. For Inglehart culture is “the subjective component of a society’s equipment for coping with its environment” (p. 55). The interaction between culture and environment may yield profound changes in the way that people view the world. His book is the latest of his works to show how a shift from modernization to postmodernization has been mirrored by an increase in postmaterialist values.

A shift in priorities from materialist to postmaterialist values involves the steady diminution of those values that played a key role in industrialization, such as economic achievement and rationality, and an increasing emphasis on self-expression and quality of life. Change is driven by rising feelings of security. While the shift is not linear, and while the materialist-postmaterialist dimension is only one along which change is measured, the tendency is clear. As Inglehart says: “The linkage between economic growth rates and the percentage of values and

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ton University Press, 1989); Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Harry C. Triandis, “The Psychological Measurement of Cultural Syndromes,” *American Psychologist* 51, no. 4 (1996); and Sidney Verba et al., *Elites and the Idea of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

norms shifting in the Postmodern direction is significant at the .01 level" (p. 321). While a number of different values are involved, it is movement from traditional authority to secular rational authority and from survival values to well-being values that is most significant. Indeed, these two dimensions alone account for 51 percent of cross-national variation (p. 82).

Inglehart's findings are based on tests of two hypotheses: (1) a socialization (that is, social learning) hypothesis that states that change will not occur quickly since the basic values that individuals hold reflect the conditions that existed in their preadult years and (2) a scarcity hypothesis that states that because people value what is in short supply, increasing prosperity will bring a concomitant, predictable shift from materialist to postmaterialist values. Because experiencing prosperity is a formative influence, the emergence in a society of postmaterialist values will occur with generational change; its increasing salience can be measured by analyzing different birth cohorts over time. Inglehart has done this on a massive scale beginning nearly three decades ago with samples from a small number of Western European countries and expanding in this work to sixty thousand respondents from forty-three countries representing 70 percent of the world's population and with per capita incomes ranging from \$300 to \$30,000.

One of Inglehart's most provocative findings mirrors Huntington's identification of civilizations but with vastly different implications. The data reveal that forty of the forty-three societies fall into coherent, historically meaningful clusters on the most significant dimensions such that it is possible to identify a Northern European zone, a Confucian zone, a Latin American zone, and so on. Differences reflect levels of economic development, with the values of richer countries varying systematically from those of poorer countries. Of even greater importance, the ratio of postmaterialists to materialists rises over time in virtually every case. Indeed, advanced industrial societies with widely varying cultural traditions and different economic levels are shown to be experiencing similar changes in political, economic, religious, sexual, and gender norms (p. 49).

Inglehart has offered a new take on modernization theory—one that is not linear, deterministic, or tied to Westernization or democratic theory. He avoids impressionistic historical evidence and relies instead on tightly constructed surveys for data that reveal widespread shifts in preference orientations and societal changes in the configuration of preferences. Not only do younger birth cohorts have a greater preponderance of postmaterialists than older ones, but there is also a notable transformation in in-

stitutional forms. Economic development leads to structural changes (for example, urbanization and mass education) and to attitudinal changes as well (for example, greater distrust and skepticism regarding hierarchical institutions). In virtually all societies where postmaterialism is significantly in evidence, political action that challenges elites increases to the point where a strong positive correlation is found between the postmodernization dimension and democracy (p. 104).

The assumptions of the social learning approach are clear. The use of statistical controls permits replicability and comparison on dimensions independent of expert interpretation. Causation is additive and not conjunctural; estimations can be made of the separate contribution of each independent variable allowing probabilistic statements about a variable's net effect in a wide variety of settings. Alongside these strengths, however, are some significant weaknesses. Surveys are expensive and time-consuming and often difficult to conduct in the very societies where it would be desirable to understand the political culture, namely, societies in crisis (for example, where revolutions are in progress) and countries with closed, authoritarian regimes.

The most difficult problem relates to the conception of culture. In Inglehart's work as the satisfaction from espousing a postmaterialist orientation grows (s), and as the satisfaction from holding a materialist orientation decreases (sa), the rate (R) of expressing postmaterialist preferences increases. As postmaterialism becomes a significant orientation, support for democratic institutions and democratic norms increases. The feedback loop is thus closed; normative prescriptions and preference orientations are reciprocally related. However, the postmodernization cultural dimension needs to be more fully elaborated and greater care needs to be given to explaining the definition of culture as a "subjective component" (p. 55). For instance, interpersonal trust and subjective well-being are noted as the two most prominent cultural values that sustain democratic institutions (pp. 194, 197), although both are more properly individual psychological dispositions than they are normative injunctions. As a consequence, the causal significance of culture in the social learning hypothesis, independent of feedback, is unclear.

#### THE COGNITIVE EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACH

The study of political culture has recently incorporated Piagetian theory in its theoretical design.<sup>15</sup> These analyses differ from social charac-

<sup>15</sup> See, as examples, Dan Candee, "Ego Developmental Aspects of New Left Ideology," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 30, no. 5 (1974); Stephen Chilton, *Defining Political Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1988); Nicholas Emler, Stanley Renwick, and Bernadette Malone,

ter studies in the way they conceptualize value orientations. They also differ from studies utilizing survey research in the reduced importance they impute to social influences, unmediated by individual psychological variables, as determinants of values and beliefs. In this perspective individual and social life are conceived as developmentally and reciprocally organized, if not necessarily synchronous. There is a continuous interaction between individual- and social-level constructions of meaning, between the ways that individuals think and the norms of the political culture. Age-related changes in the organization of thinking occur at the individual level, and these lead to increasingly abstract and complex conceptions about obedience, obligations, relations with authority, reciprocity, and benevolence. And at the social level increasingly complex normative prescriptions evolve to minimize the transaction costs involved with maintaining status hierarchies and to provide a moral underpinning for social solidarity. Because reasoning about social issues inevitably involves the invocation of moral criteria, it is moral reasoning that especially influences the norms of the political culture. The consequence is a specification of preference constraint that is dependent on both an individual's stage of moral development and the nature of normative prescriptions.

Michael Gross in *Ethics and Activism* confronts a paradox: what we want in a democratic political culture are individuals with considered moral judgment who act judiciously and who resolve disputes in a peaceful, institutionalized manner, but what we get may be something quite different. For as Gross points out, activism to foster a democratic political culture may involve groups whose incentive structures are highly parochial and whose members are motivated by materialistic goals.

Gross begins by asking what best anchors democratic integrity in ethical activism. Is it strong political morality, exemplified in the works of Locke, Mill, Rawls, and Habermas? Or is it weak political morality, as found in the work of Madison. Strong political morality states that collective action to remedy injustice requires that citizens have both moral insight and the cognitive capacity to recognize injustice. In possession of these qualities, they will feel an obligation to become active defenders of democratic norms. Gross concludes, however, that moral

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"The Relationship between Moral Reasoning and Political Orientation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45, no. 5 (1983); Shawn W. Rosenberg, *Reason, Ideology and Politics* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1988); Shawn W. Rosenberg, Dana Ward, and Stephen Chilton, *Political Reasoning and Cognition; A Piagetian View* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1988); John R. Snarey, "Cross-Cultural Universality of Social-Moral Development: A Critical Review of Kohlbergian Research," *Psychological Bulletin* 97, no. 2 (1985); and Richard W. Wilson, *Compliance Ideologies: Rethinking Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

behavior and moral-political behavior are two different things. As a consequence, it is weak political morality, with its emphasis on benign regulation and nonviolent participation, that best anchors democratic integrity by stressing limited social altruism and a relatively narrow concern for the common good.

Gross supports this conclusion with three case studies backed by extensive empirical evidence. The first of these involves groups that rescued Jews during the Second World War. He found that among those sheltering Jews moral competence did have an effect on rescue activity but only when joined with strong parochial motivations or weak post-conventional moral preferences (p. 149). In his second case, an analysis of pro-life and pro-choice abortion activists, he found that normative incentives had a weak effect on activism while material and solidarity incentives had a strong effect (p. 173). He thus concluded that "without exception, no measure of moral development has any significant effect on any form of activism" (p. 179). In his last case study, of peace activism in Israel, he came to conclusions that were similar to those drawn in the abortion study. What emerges from analysis of the cases, therefore, is a paradox: the morally competent are politically incompetent. Successful collective action rests on parochial norms that are inherent in small and interdependent communities.

Specifically Gross found that "moral outrage does not mesh well with effective political action" (p. 115) in part because moral judgment is not always a necessary condition for moral-political action. The most effective moral motivations, in fact, are anchored in narrow perceptions of altruism, moral duty, and fairness. The most successful collective action is cultivated in small groups that have well-developed social and organizational infrastructures with intense parochial affiliations. In such groups conventional moral reasoners, who in any case are always a majority in societies and whose moral outlooks stress the correctness of group norms, are especially well integrated cognitively. Gross believes the chief obstacle to successful activism is not insufficient moral energy but free-rider problems. As a consequence, organizational incentives that tap rational, self-interested concerns within the context of tight social networks are required to overcome collective action problems. The successful pursuit of moral claims occurs when effective organization is linked to rational and solidarity incentives.

Do these conclusions mean that morality has no place? Not at all. Action proceeds from a perception that moral interests are threatened. The material and solidarity benefits that are crucial for collective action

would be useless without a clearly delineated moral community. Normative incentives, moreover, are the strongest reason for joining a group, although it is personal identity norms (such as guilt and self-interest) that actually sustain activism. Interestingly, because moral incentives are amenable to a utilitarian calculus (solidarity and material benefits), both cognitive psychology and rational choice offer insights into understanding political morality and behavior. Cognitive epistemology sets forth the stages of moral development that range from self-interest to a Kantian perspective; it explains why people cleave to particular moral orientations. Collective action and incentive theory explain how individuals utilize their convictions in politics. "Ultimately," says Gross, "the two psychological theories can be combined into a single, more predictive model to investigate ethics and political activism" (p. 65).

The cognitive epistemological approach provides a coherent explanation of individual-level reasoning and its link to preference formation, but it is theoretically complex and highly abstract, positing that it is the moral development of individuals that changes the relationship between (s) and (sa). At a given point in the maturation process an individual reasons in a certain manner. Only with maturation does there develop a new pattern of reasoning (sa) that reduces the probability of choices in terms of a developmentally lower stage of reasoning (s). The relationship of (s) to (sa) thus shifts, seriatim, as new and more complex structures of reasoning evolve. However, given that people are always at different stages of development, determining how and in what way preferences affect the norms of political cultures is still a matter of conjecture. Michael Gross has provided an intriguing answer to this problem.

#### PREFERENCES AND POLITICAL CULTURE

It is surprising that political culture theorists have had such difficulty confronting the question of preference formation. The answer, I believe, lies in a tendency to conflate political culture and preferences—to assume, on the one hand, that an explanation of political culture reveals the preferences of those who live within that culture or, on the other hand, that an explanation of preferences and preference formation is sufficient to reveal the political culture. We should ask, therefore, what a political culture is and what its relationship is to preference formation. Any understanding of political culture must first ascertain what the function of political culture is within a social system. Such an ex-

planation necessarily takes us beyond the description of a political culture as a distribution of values or as meanings embedded in myths, symbols, and rituals.

In the most general sense political cultures are socially constructed normative systems that are the product of both social (for example, rules that coordinate role relationships within organizations) and psychological (for example, the preferences of individuals) influences but are not reducible to either. They have prescriptive qualities that stipulate not only desired ends but also appropriate ways to achieve those ends. The norms are not coterminous with legal codes, although they often overlap. They are manifested in a variety of ways, including symbolic representations and the content of hegemonic discourse, especially of socialization. Preferences, by contrast, are ends desired by individuals. They vary widely depending on differences in individual experience and psychology. The relationship between the two levels is interactive in the sense that individual preferences continuously affect the normative order while the norms themselves are one of the influences that shape preferences. They are not, however, identical and, as stated previously, neither is reducible to the other. A political culture is not simply the sum of individual preferences, nor do preferences, especially those of any given individual, necessarily correspond with normative prescriptions. Indeed, the mismatch is at times quite glaring. Yet it is essential to understand the goals that are embodied in both individual preferences and normative prescriptions, for it is the dynamic relationship between the two that underwrites the stability or instability of political systems.

Each of the political culture approaches has strengths and weaknesses with regard to the relationship between political culture and preference orientations. In the *hermeneutic approach*, for example, careful fieldwork involving immersion in local networks reveals the myths, symbols, and rituals that convey the meaning and intensity of the norms that underwrite social solidarity. There is a careful and nuanced description of sets of interrelated normative prescriptions. The researcher delineates which symbols undergird authority, how these symbols came into being, and how their salience is made known through a variety of rituals. The analysis is rich in detail but is concomitantly highly descriptive. Why people choose to believe in certain symbols or are swayed by particular rituals is generally inferred from analysis of social action and discourse. In explaining change the presence of opposing preference orientations is usually adduced by observation of an alternative, or counterhegemonic, discourse that references an “unoffi-

cial” set of myths, symbols, and rituals. Interpretive analysis of behavior is privileged and surveys and/or psychological interviews tend to be avoided.

Kertzer makes the case succinctly when he speaks of political change as encapsulated in a narrative about the party and its history. Occhetto, the leader of the Italian Communist Party, proposed “that the narrative itself change and, with it, the identity and history of those who based their personal narratives on it” (p. 155). Narrative in this sense is a proxy for preference orientations. These dispositions are then said to be connected to symbolic associations and forged through ritual, which fosters “heightened emotional states” that link the cognitive aspects of political allegiance and political activism “both with particular social bonds and with a particular world view” (p. 127). Notwithstanding the intent of this formulation, the cognitive aspect is largely asserted. Kubik, in his excellent study of legitimacy in Poland, states clearly where the focus of analysis lies: “The introduction of sociological surveys, with their specific methodology and results, would destroy the thematic, theoretical, and methodological unity of the book, whose primary concern is with *the interpretation of symbolic behavior*.”<sup>16</sup>

*Culture theorists* adhere to the opposite extreme. In their concern to avoid ad hoc description, they embrace a theoretical model in which only a stipulated number of ideal-type preference orientations can exist. This conception is necessarily coercive and arbitrary, as macropolitical culture (the level familiar to most people) virtually drops from sight. Instead, political culture is interpreted as the preference orientations of individuals.

A strength of culture theory is its parsimony in mandating the recognition of five (no more and no less) different preference orientations. It requires, as well, an understanding of interactions among people with different preferences. The preferences themselves, however, are said to be derived from conscious choices that individuals make regarding an appropriate lifestyle. This ignores important socialization influences and unconscious motivations (for example, aggressive impulses) that may also affect preference orientations.

Culture theory incorporates an explanation for why an individual’s preference orientation may shift—because of dissonance caused by an accumulated mismatch between the promise and the performance of an individual’s chosen lifestyle. However, because political culture is conceived of as microculture, that is, the preferences of individuals, there

<sup>16</sup> Kubik (fn. 5), 10, emphasis in original.

has been less exploration of dominant configurations at the macrolevel. A general typology of such distributions for macropolitical cultures has not been attempted. (A start has been made, however, for the United States, which is said to have two dominant orientations, egalitarianism and individualism, and for Britain, where the dominant orientations are said to be hierarchalism and egalitarianism). The relationship between micropolitical culture (the preferences) and macropolitical culture is thus poorly articulated. There is no convincing explanation of how dominant configurations at the macrolevel influence the choices of individuals. The problem of feigned compliance, where people express particular preferences in order to avoid punishment, is also unexplored.

The *social character approach* recognizes the broad differences that exist among political cultures, employing criteria such as language or religion to assess significant differences from society to society. Although this approach is ideally suited for generalizations about large-scale differences among political cultures, these sweeping descriptions impose a uniformity on society's members that does not exist. The consequence is that political cultures are reduced to little more than a description of dominant cultural themes.

Preferences in the social character approach are presented as group preferences, derived from a shared socialization experience, with the consequence that they are virtually synonymous with cultural norms. The dynamic interaction between political-cultural norms and individual preferences is elided. Indeed, they merge. As Richard Solomon put it regarding the Chinese: "The notion of a dependency social orientation as the modal personality configuration . . . establishes conceptual linkages between the system of personality and the larger cultural tradition."<sup>17</sup> That there may be a significant number of people within the group who hold alternative preference orientations is often not acknowledged, nor does analysis of political transformation generally proceed by reference to the dynamic interaction among people who hold different preference orientations.

The *social learning approach* provides an exhaustively detailed account of dominant and emergent preference orientations within societies. Based on an assumption of shifts in socialization practices related to changes in variables at the social level (for example, increasing affluence), the approach specifies the relative salience of modal preference orientations at any given point in time. However, in Inglehart's work

<sup>17</sup> Solomon, *Mao's Revolution and the Chinese Political Culture* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 5.

the approach places preferences in a dependent relationship to cultural, political, and economic variables. Two dimensions, survival/well-being and traditional authority/secular rational, define a field; differences among societies in their materialist-postmaterialist value orientations are mapped on this field according to their position relative to the pole values of the two dimensions. Only the values associated with one dimension (traditional authority/secular rational authority), however, could be construed as embodying political-cultural norms, and that dimension has meaning as an explanatory variable only in conjunction with economic and social variables. Hence, the cultural merges with the social/economic and is not treated as having independent validity.

If culture entails normative prescriptions that result from the interaction of sociological and psychological variables, but is not reducible to either, then Inglehart needs to focus more attention on culture per se if he truly wishes to retain it as an independent variable. Otherwise, culture is not clearly distinguished from the value orientations (materialism and postmaterialism) that are presumed to be the product of cultural (and economic and political) influences. As his work clearly reveals, the weight of the socialization hypothesis falls instead largely on political and economic variables.

The *cognitive epistemological approach* sees societies as composed of people who reason differently depending on their stage of development. Societies thus always contain individuals with different preference orientations. As a consequence, the normative component of moral and ethical norms, the political culture, is subject to continuous reassessment. The approach has been criticized for its conception of change (although without reference to the theory itself).<sup>18</sup> It does provide an explanation for transformations in political cultures, in part as a consequence of the emergence of new modal preference orientations that are infused with developmentally higher levels of moral reasoning.

In this approach political cultures and preference orientations are distinct areas of analysis. The dynamic forces that foster changes at both levels are explained by reference to Piagetian theory. The resolution of "dilemmatic concerns" is a major conceptual device for understanding why individual preference orientations change and why there are shifts in the moral and ethical norms of political cultures.<sup>19</sup> Such concerns often address the functional requirement of political cultures both to legitimize status inequalities and to underwrite social solidarity.

<sup>18</sup> David D. Laitin, "The Civic Culture at Thirty," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 1 (1995).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Billig et al., *Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking* (London: Sage Publications, 1988), 18, 25.

But a significant body of empirical data is still lacking. Thus more clearly needs to be done to clarify (and verify) the linkage between the two levels of analysis.

There is, then, a general failure of most approaches to recognize the dynamic interaction between political culture and preferences. Serious implications flow from this: a theory of political culture that slights preferences risks being little more than a description of cultural norms; a theory that slights the normative dimension in favor of an analysis of preferences risks being no more than a typology of individual values. A fully formed theory, therefore, must take account of the fact that political cultures are not simply the product of preferences and that preferences are not simply a reflection of the political culture. They are, rather, inextricably interdependent in a manner that requires theoretical explanation at both levels and of the linkage between them.

#### LINKAGE

Linking the norms of a political culture with preference orientations is the most difficult theoretical task faced by political culture theorists. As linkage implies a reciprocal relationship, a theory of linkage must stipulate what changes at either the cultural or the personality level will stimulate change at the other level and what mechanisms foster interaction. It must explain how preferences act upon culture and, conversely, how normative prescriptions affect individual choices. Thus, for example, if massive and rapid technological change alters the moral justifications that legitimize status, then prevailing normative prescriptions, if unchanged, will become less effective as coordinators of social behavior and as an influence on preference formation. If the introduction of novel ideas alters individual preferences, then normative prescriptions, if unchanged, may become incongruent with the moral preferences of an increasing number of people. Changes in meanings at either level are thus interactive; they are related to the mixing of people from different cultures, the invention or diffusion of new relationship patterns, changes in social complexity, technological or environmental changes, the introduction of new ideas, and the capacity of individuals to assess and compare moral alternatives.<sup>20</sup>

Linkage thus requires a correspondence of meanings; normative prescriptions must be comprehensible (if not universally legitimate) to the

<sup>20</sup> Alan Page Fiske and Philip E. Tetlock, "Taboo Trade-offs: Reactions to Transactions That Transgress the Spheres of Justice," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1997), 284.

members of society, while individual preferences must resonate with selected aspects of normative prescriptions. In addition, there must be some way to transmit meanings between levels. I suggest that transmission has two aspects: (1) communications about political-cultural norms to the members of society (for example, socialization, ideological campaigns, party rallies, and legal decisions) and (2) communications among individuals that evaluate political cultural norms (for example, moral discourse, activism, dissident literature, and voting). Evaluating linkage for degrees of congruence in meanings reveals important information about the stability of political systems and clues about which groups are central or marginal in the political process.

The question of correspondence of meaning, however, is thorny given the widely different assumptions and methodologies employed in the various approaches. I contend, therefore, that the normative prescriptions of political cultures must be viewed in terms of how public morality is addressed—how right and wrong are stipulated in social life, who gets what kind of reward and in what amount, how particular property rights regimes are legitimized, and so on. Given this feature of political cultures, it follows that the most fundamental axis around which communications of meaning revolve is moral in nature, linking in some fashion the ethical standards embodied in normative prescriptions with the moral sentiments of individuals.

How then might theorizing about moral linkage enrich studies of political culture? Four avenues for future research will be noted. All emphasize morality but do so in different ways. The first refines the concept of preference formation to include an explicit moral dimension. The next two focus on linkage itself. The last presents a startling new vision of culture with linkage defined in biological terms. Each requires further elaboration and testing and ultimately greater scrutiny in the marketplace of ideas.

First, while many works on political culture use a combination of approaches<sup>21</sup>—placing variable emphasis on surveys, historical analysis (that is, path dependency), and understanding the themes embedded in myths and rituals—they rarely, if ever, attempt to evaluate the merits of the approaches or develop theory that links preferences and political culture. An effort in this regard has obvious value. For example, it is clear that the norms of cultures are learned and must be widely shared for social viability. At the macrolevel shared values, ascertained in the social learning approach through surveys, are the general wiring dia-

<sup>21</sup> Putnam (fn. 13).

gram that knits the members of society together. Because the process of uncovering these values is subject to statistical controls, the determination of patterns is less subject to error than when they are decoded by expert identification. Survey research by itself, however, is insufficient for understanding changes in cultural norms. Longitudinal studies to ascertain change, based on the assumption of modifications in the learning environment, say nothing about why in fact people change their values and beliefs.

To understand the dynamic of change it is necessary to determine the relative strength of the social relationship patterns that people choose to be identified with, the moral bases for these choices, and the way that these choices relate to the moral quality of political-cultural norms. This takes analysis into the realms of culture theory and cognitive epistemology. Culture theory posits that change occurs because individuals experience a cumulative disjunction between values and opportunities and hence shift their choice of social relationship pattern, leading ultimately to differences at the macrolevel in the relative strength of the patterns. Cognitive epistemological theory, however, posits that individuals develop morally with age, and thus as they mature apply different standards of evaluation to cultural rules. As individuals change, they will choose social relationship patterns that more closely accord with their changed moral competencies. Adding this explanation of preference change to culture theory's notion of "surprise" thus strengthens the underpinning of interpretations of the changes that can occur in preference orientations. Overall shifts in the relative salience of different preference orientations will then provide clues for reciprocal changes in normative prescriptions.

A second avenue for exploration focuses on understanding the mechanisms that link how individuals comprehend moral norms and how these normative injunctions are formed and made known. One place to start is by reference to North's definition of institutions (the major constraints on social relations) as "a set of rules, compliance procedures, and moral and ethical behavioral norms designed to constrain the behavior of individuals in the interests of maximizing the wealth or utility of principals."<sup>22</sup> On the basis of this formulation, political culture can be conceptualized as the "moral and ethical behavioral norms" that undergird rules (noted preeminently in the legal culture) and that stipulate the ways that rules are enforced (that is, as "compliance ideolo-

<sup>22</sup> Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), 201-2.

gies").<sup>23</sup> Linkage is thus the interactive relationship between the moral prescriptions of the political culture and the moral preferences of individuals. Specifically, there is a reciprocal relationship (that is, a correspondence of meaning) between moral constructions of meaning at the political-cultural level regarding rights and duties and moral constructions of meaning at the individual level regarding expectations and social obligations.

In this conception the moral rules that undergird political-cultural norms are expressed in terms of culturally specific definitions of rights and obligations. Political cultures, both contemporaneously and historically, reflect different ways that rights and obligations are defined and honored. These result in different definitions of deviance, different ways that political legitimacy is secured, differences in who may participate in the political process, different limitations on the exercise of power, differences in the type and extent of the rewards that elites may legitimately claim, and variations in likely trajectories of change. Although the differences among societies may be large, the focus on rights and obligations makes it possible to compare different political cultures.

At the individual level an examination of moral discourse (how and when people talk to each other about rights and obligations) aids in understanding why status rules change (as, for instance, changes in the role of women that have occurred in many societies over the past hundred years). Changes such as this occur in response to a variety of influences (such as technological change, famine, and defeat in war) but always involve a moral questioning of prevailing normative standards.<sup>24</sup> The result is by no means always the swift alteration of cultural rules, for powerful countervailing forces may block the development and diffusion of more inclusive moral standards. What does occur is a debate, often fraught with danger, about the possibilities inherent in a transformed political culture.

A third promising avenue for further research is exemplified in the work of Michael Gross. Gross grounds preference orientations in two theoretical frameworks, moral development theory, and rational choice theory.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the development and maintenance of a demo-

<sup>23</sup> Wilson (fn. 15).

<sup>24</sup> Richard W. Wilson, "American Political Culture in Comparative Perspective," *Political Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>25</sup> Another work that utilizes a rational choice perspective although without specific reference to political culture or moral preferences is James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, "Explaining Interethnic Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 4 (1996).

cratic political culture cannot be based on moral preferences alone. Rather, individuals make rational calculations in small group contexts that further the group's ability to pursue moral objectives. This formulation locates political culture within a complex sociological field that includes the organizations within which people strive for the realization of particular goals. Preferences and political cultures do not interact directly but through intermediate groupings whose internal structures are characterized by solidarity pressures, face-to-face relations, and immediate hierarchical concerns. These are the contexts within which people actually live and where, to get along, they make prudential calculations as well as moral judgments. It is an arena where preferences have an immediacy and a relevance that is lacking when political culture is conceptualized only at the societal level. The consequence is an enriched understanding of the linkage between individual preferences and political cultures. A clear theoretical advantage is that rational choice is dealt with on its own terms (as an aspect of incentive theory and organizational theory), rather than being reconceptualized as utility calculations bounded by moral preferences.

Finally, work in evolutionary psychology (or, more broadly, universal Darwinism) places cultural studies in the controversial framework of sociobiology. Specifically, it is suggested that biological evolution, rooted in the way that genes are copied and spread, has an analogue at the cultural level in memes. These are ideas, beliefs, instructional codes, and norms that are passed from person to person by a process of imitation. Organic evolution and cultural evolution are said to resemble each other in the sense that both genes and memes are replicators that obey the general principles of evolutionary theory, carrying out the crucial evolutionary tasks of mutation, replication, and selection. Both are associated with the concept of reciprocal altruism, which functions (albeit weakly) as a preference orientation. At the genetic level altruism favors animals who reciprocate friendship (thus allowing their genes to be copied at a rate greater than for those who do not reciprocate); at the level of memes altruism is rooted in moral sentiments and ideas of justice.

To date no theory of political culture has been elaborated, although game theory has modeled memetic strategies favoring cooperation that are exceptionally robust (for example, Tit-for-Tat). What is now needed is a tighter specification of the relationship of altruism to preferences, of how other preference orientations affect altruism, of memes as replicators of altruistic norms, and of the link between them. Rapid advances in the life sciences in understanding the genetic bases of be-

havior suggest that such theories will not be long in coming to the social sciences, almost certainly within the next decade.<sup>26</sup>

### CONCLUSION

A theory of political culture must do four things. It must specify the functional role of political culture and define the concept in a way that maintains an analytical distinction between social and psychological variables. It must ground preference formation in a theory of motivation that specifies how and why people make choices that affect political life. It must specify the nature of the interaction between the normative level and the level of preference formation and show how particular interconnections (for example, socialization, moral discourse, and activism) link the two levels and how and why behavior or discourse generated at one level has an affect on the other. Finally, it must specify a sociological context in which hypotheses can be fruitfully tested.

The debate about political culture is an old one, yet at the same time it is in its infancy. New conceptualizations are challenging received wisdom in ways that enrich the culturalist-rationalist dichotomy set forth by Eckstein a decade ago.<sup>27</sup> The field is now poised to move beyond the sterile description of effects to an understanding of basic causes. From the vigorous debate now taking place there has arisen the possibility of a new and invigorated theory of political culture.

<sup>26</sup> See, as examples, Richard D. Alexander, *The Biology of Moral Systems* (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1987); Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Comides, and John Tooby, eds., *The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Susan Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); William H. Durham, *Coevolution: Genes, Culture and Human Diversity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); and Robert Wright, *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Harry Eckstein, "A Culturalist Theory of Political Change," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 3 (1988).

