

# 1 Introduction: psychology and politics

## 1.1. Introduction

'The subtlety of Nature', said Bacon, 'is a great many times more subtle than the subtlety of Logic.' The complexity of the actual social world demands, not merely invites, empirical methods of investigation, which are indispensable for a proper understanding. In humane studies, deduction from first principles is a path that leads directly to error. An intuitive anticipation of what kind of things may be found, on the other hand, is likely to be an aid to scholarly investigation of human activity, since our ordinary understanding of social processes is often a useful short-cut: there is no need to behave like the blind men trying to discern the shape of the elephant, if we are, in fact, sighted. This book is primarily a statistical investigation, sometimes with an aim of defining structures not previously known; but where structures are already identified, or common knowledge can be adduced, then it is addressed to a better description of the structure and an investigation of its correlations.

It is an interdisciplinary study, in one aspect concerned with four major psychological dispositions, which are regarded as already identified. These are alienation, conceived as social estrangement; the authoritarian personality tendency of the 'right'; ethnocentrism; and anxiety. Since the first three of these have not been well measured, nor their structure well described, this study is partially addressed to the development of adequate measures for them. An empirical test of the disparate nature of their identity is also introduced. In part, therefore, it lies in the domain of social psychology. In considering the correlations of the dispositions and their social meaning, it dwells partly in sociology; and in investigating and identifying disparate structures of political opinion, not previously well recognized, its purpose is best described as political science. Whilst the measurement of the psychological dispositions, on the one hand, and of political attitudes, on the other, are both intended to be substantive, the focal point of the research is at the connections

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13645-7 - Psychology and the Political Experience

Alan Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Psychology and the political experience*

to be discovered between the two, i.e. its central concern is with political psychology.

Greenstein<sup>1</sup> has suggested three divisions of heuristic utility in organizing the issues of enquiry into personality and politics: the 'individual case study', diagnosing a single actor; the 'typological study', to 'classify actors and to explain the origin and behaviour of the types in the classification'; and 'aggregative analysis', to explain features of the larger social and political system.

In its separate investigation of each of the four psychological constructs mentioned above, this study falls within the second category. It is concerned with modal psychological processes which throw light on individual functioning. The alienated man, for example, is first considered as a *possibility*, in that the connectedness of the various sentiments said to be associated with social estrangement is first tested, and their cohesiveness shown *not* to be a result of their covariance with anxiety. It is argued here, also, that alienation cannot be regarded as a social modality of anxiety. The social incidence of alienation and its statistical correlations with other psychological constructs are then elaborated, in accordance with the general strategy endorsed by Lasswell<sup>2</sup> of moving outwards, as it were, from 'nuclear types'. The implications of the investigation of the dispositional paradigm for an understanding of individual actors is then illustrated by introducing two men, 'John' and 'Patrick', both interviewed in depth; the first is alienated, the second not.

A general qualification to the characterization of this investigation as a typological exercise of the kind described by Greenstein should here be made. Whilst it is recognized that each of the four constructs bears upon modes of personality functioning, it is not suggested here that each wholly describes a type of person. A person may be highly alienated and ethnocentric but not anxious or authoritarian, for example. Whilst this book does not attempt a *typology* of persons, in the sense of the preceding sentence, it is also not oriented to the qualities of political actors considered as *unique* persons. The methodological approach of this research, consisting chiefly in correlational analysis of data from a mass survey, is inclined to lead the reader

<sup>1</sup> F. I. Greenstein, 'The Need for Systematic Inquiry into Personality and Politics: Introduction and Overview', *Journal of Social Issues*, 24 (1968), pp. 1–14; see also his book, *Personality and Politics* (Chicago, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> H. D. Lasswell, *Psychopathology and Politics* (New York, 1960; first ed. 1930), ch. 4.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13645-7 - Psychology and the Political Experience

Alan Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: psychology and politics*

away from an appreciation of the idiosyncratic qualities of the dispositions and political views of individuals. Its main hope is that an understanding of general processes will lead back, as it were, to finer insights into the variety of what individuals feel, think, and do.

In its concern with central tendencies, this work extends in some degree into the third division of research described by Greenstein, aggregative analysis. It attempts to define, in a limited area, some of the norms, in the statistical sense, of the interrelations of dispositions and political attitudes in an Australian urban context. Although broad in scope in this sense, it does not aim to provide anything approaching a psychological *interpretation* of all Australian political events or circumstances in the contemporary period. The argument will, indeed, emphasize many of the *limitations* of 'psychological' influences on politics, in general, and of the influence of dispositions, in particular.

The four dispositions were chosen because my primary interest, like that of many, lay in the political repercussions of sentiments of aggression and insecurity. Its primary inspiration was drawn from the research of Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford<sup>3</sup> into the psychodynamics of ethnocentrism, but also from the dramatic, even if methodologically unsound, intervention of Srole<sup>4</sup> in the chain of associated work which followed in such quantity, indicating the need to take into account social frustration and uncertainty. My attention was also excited by the comedy of errors which followed from the intrusion of acquiescence into the measures, the implications of which are reviewed *in extenso*. Anxiety was added as the psychological disposition of most general interest, apart from the first three. It is considered that these four dispositions all deserve the term 'psychological', because they are all related to features of personality functioning, and are all in some degree *opaque* to the common understanding, thus entitling them to be qualified by the name of a specialized discipline. Alienation, on which the term 'psychological' sits least easily, is so described because, conceived as social estrangement, it refers to a very large part of the individual's relations with his social environment, including some areas of which he may be unaware.

<sup>3</sup> T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D. J. Levinson and R. N. Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York, 1950).

<sup>4</sup> L. Srole, 'Social Integration and Certain Corollaries: An Exploratory Study', *American Sociological Review*, 21 (1956), pp. 709–16.

## *Psychology and the political experience*

### **1.2. The structure of this book**

This Introduction touches upon some theoretical considerations, including the present status of the 'behaviouralist' approach to politics, with which, in broad terms, I am in sympathy; and also on the place of the process named *Verstehen* in social inquiry. It suggests what might be considered original, or novel, in this work, considered as a research enterprise.

Chapter 2 provides a very brief sketch of the political environment within which this study is set. Beginning with the normative values (what is 'given') in Australian politics, it proceeds to some implications of the present quasi-federal system, and then to a description of the policies of the main political parties. The new electoral equilibrium established by the Labor 'split' of 1955, and the federal elections of 1963 and 1966 are discussed.

Appendix A describes the sample surveyed in 1966, and compares it with population parameters. The 1966 voter sample, the survey of which was funded by the Australian National University, was of 400 voters, 200 in Melbourne and 200 in Sydney. A 'captive' sample of 155 low-grade public servants was also surveyed in 1966 as a preparatory step to the main operation.

Chapter 3 is a selective review of some empirical work done in recent times, using 'scaling' methods, into authoritarian personality tendency, alienation and ethnocentrism.

We then proceed to elaborate some of the necessary canons of attitude scale technology, and to present new scales for the measurement of authoritarianism, alienation and ethnocentrism (in Chapter 4). The report of the results of the empirical investigation of the psychological structures is to be found in Chapter 5.

Appendix C describes the construction of the psychological measures. The extent of the corruption of research into the authoritarian personality by the defects of the first well-known measure of it, the 'California F scale'<sup>5</sup> is unavoidably highly technical but also very important. It is examined in Appendix E.

A book concerned in part with the relevance of psychological attitudes to politics is nothing without some discussion of political attitudes and their structure. But since these are not, in their detailed analysis, central, standardization data for the 'political' scales are to be found in Appendix D. The political attitude fabric is delineated in the broad in Chapter 6. The connections between the psychological

<sup>5</sup> T. W. Adorno *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 255–7.

*Introduction: psychology and politics*

and political attitude structures are then elaborated in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is a *jeu d'esprit*: it contains a speculative discussion of a tape-recorded political conversation in a small group, which has the advantage of portraying political opinions in conflict *in situ*, as it were, partly to recall to the reader the immense complexity of both the structure and function of political attitudes in situations of personal interaction. The chapter has the added purpose of showing how such contrived situations may be useful in suggesting hypotheses which may be testable with data from larger samples.

Chapter 9 selectively reviews some general findings, and considers their relevance to psychological interpretation of events at other times and in other places, particularly the bizarre role of anti-Semitism in the destruction of the liberal German political order in 1933 and its place in the Nazi imagination.

### **1.3. What is new in this book?**

The main claims to originality lie, firstly, in the construction and validation of three measures of dispositions: alienation, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism. The first and last of these have satisfactory reliability coefficients, and are suitable for general research use. The reliability of the second is modest, but it is capable of being used as a 'core' instrument for the development of an authoritarianism scale with items more central to personality functioning, the desirability of which is argued throughout the text. The procedure for demonstrating, by factor analysis, the disparateness of each of the four constructs, and the substantive outcome, which is consistent with the hypothesis of disparateness, is also an original departure. So too is the test of the cohesiveness of alienation as social estrangement, when the covariance with anxiety of each element of the construct is withdrawn.

The application of these instruments to a representative mass sample in an Australian urban *milieu* is another way in which this research contributes something new. The discovery of the dimension of 'conscience' radicalism, for example, and its separateness from other dimensions of political sentiment, although specific to the Australian urban context, may have applications elsewhere. The report of the relation of the psychological dispositions to political attitudes, and the theoretical discussion of the interconnections between them varies from previous work in other places<sup>6</sup> in differentiating between

<sup>6</sup> For example, H. McClosky, 'Conservatism and Personality', *American Political*

### *Psychology and the political experience*

the varieties of political radicalism and conservatism.

#### **1.4. Some theoretical considerations**

The reputation of political psychology has, in recent times, undergone a change for the better. This is partly through the careful balancing of the nomothetic and idiographic approaches to the problems of analysis by Greenstein<sup>7</sup> and others. It is now generally recognized that, without a comprehension of the special opportunities which may occur for psychological influence, which relies very often on an idiographic study, paying attention to what is peculiar to a situation, the generalizations afforded by nomothetic research resemble an armoury of weapons whose potency is uncertain from time to time and case to case.

Greenstein<sup>8</sup> has specified some of the circumstances in which 'personality' factors may influence political behaviour. Systematization of this kind is desirable and necessary, but there remains an irreducible residue of judgement about the quality of particular socio-political environments, a *Fingerspitzengefühl* for the occasions when psychological influence is likely to become not merely an accident of events but systemic. To say this implies the methodological utility of *Verstehen*,<sup>9</sup> of insightful 'understanding'. (The German term has a strong connotation.) The obligatory character of 'understanding', for the social scientist, is very general, and has to do with the presence of 'meaning' in the social world as opposed to the natural order investigated by scientists. It has been well put by Schutz.<sup>10</sup>

The world of nature, as explored by the natural scientist, does not 'mean' anything to the molecules, atoms and electrons therein. The observational field of the social scientist, however, namely the social reality, has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, acting and thinking therein. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene, whose behaviour the social scientist has to observe and to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science.

---

*Science Review*, 52 (1958), pp. 27–45.

<sup>7</sup> F. I. Greenstein, 'The Impact of Personality on Politics: An Attempt to Clear Away the Underbrush', *American Political Science Review*, 61 (1967), pp. 628–41.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> The most well-known analysis of this is that of T. Abel, 'The Operation Called *Verstehen*', *American Journal of Sociology*, 54 (1948), pp. 211–18.

<sup>10</sup> A. Schutz, 'Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences', *Journal of Philosophy*, 51 (1954), pp. 266–7.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13645-7 - Psychology and the Political Experience

Alan Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: psychology and politics*

The behavioural scientist will, and in my view should, try to test hypotheses derived from human insight by empirical procedures, e.g. by operationalizing the constructs and measuring them and their correlations in a sample. But whether or not he does so, comprehension and a socio-political situation must extend beyond formal knowledge, reducible to numerical or linguistic expressions, to at least a momentary communion with the meanings of the situation in the minds of the actors therein, i.e. *Verstehen* of individual feelings; and also of the human implications for the culture, perhaps in judging what is foreseeable, i.e. cultural *Verstehen* also.

The acceptance of the meanings of situations as seen by their actors, and still more of the 'cultural implications' of empirical findings, multiplies the data of social research in a manner unnerving to the more simplistic proponents of attitude scale technology, since nomothetic generalization, or even the *construction* to be placed on described social situations, becomes difficult. The principle of parsimony, which is a fundament of science, is more difficult to apply when data of these kinds are admitted. If the concept of *intention* is also admitted, as I think it should be, the stockade containing the babbling horde of data groans and bulges under the stress. Nevertheless, since it is the explication of social reality and not some (illusory) convenience for social commentators which is the primary concern of social science, it follows that what is said in a general way about the data must be said very carefully, after looking in every direction. A difficulty in verifying a complex proposition does not reduce its epistemological status. Lafitte,<sup>11</sup> in arguing 'the simple proposition has no special status' remarks:

That an intense narcissistic need for personal approval is typical of the schizoid character may be hard to verify not only because of the complexity of the work involved but also because specifying the operations is rendered difficult by the terms of the proposition. 'Narcissistic need', 'schizoid character' and even 'personal approval' do not have self-evident meanings.

The *principle* of parsimony, of applying the most economical construction to the available data, is not, of course, endangered by this argument. What is being pointed out is that its *application* may be extraordinarily difficult.

It will be obvious that the methodological orientation of this work

<sup>11</sup> P. Lafitte, *The Person in Psychology: Reality or Abstraction* (London, 1957), p.41.



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13645-7 - Psychology and the Political Experience

Alan Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Psychology and the political experience*

is anti-reductionist, or 'contextualist', to use Greenstein's<sup>12</sup> term. But not only must the overt behaviour and sometimes dormant dispositions or attitudes of the political actors be understood within their context; *intended actions*, which usually, but not necessarily, involve a value orientation must also be taken into account. It is argued here that some phenomena are political *per se*, and have few sociological or psychological correlates. The fact that most workers in this field now acknowledge the independence of political behaviour in many of its aspects is one of the main reasons why political psychology is now more reputable. The recognition of the many factors which may be at work in shaping events is exemplified in Smith's<sup>13</sup> schematic map for the analysis of personality and politics, especially in his complex Figure 2, where not only feedback but the engagement, or disengagement, of dispositions and attitudes are accommodated. This may be contrasted with the work of earlier theorists, particularly Eysenck,<sup>14</sup> whose approach was, by implication, heavily reductionist. Figure 17 in his book<sup>15</sup> is an early counterpart of that of Smith, and implies a loose governance by ideology of attitudes, and, in their turn, of habitual opinions and specific opinions. Although Eysenck's argument is more sophisticated than his diagram might suggest, there is a dearth of discussion of politics *qua* politics everywhere in his work.<sup>16</sup>

This kind of work may bring the whole body of psychological research into politics into disrepute, and, I fear, did so. The main ground of the feeling against such research in the 1950s was that it tended to be simplistic and reductionist, and, indeed, derisory of politics: in other words, it was felt that it made a puerile and mis-

<sup>12</sup> F. I. Greenstein, 'The Need for Systematic Enquiry into Personality and Politics', p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> M. Brewster Smith, 'A Map for the Analysis of Personality and Politics', *Journal of Social Issues*, 24 (1968), pp. 15–28, esp. p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> H. J. Eysenck, *The Psychology of Politics* (London, 1954), chs. 4 and 8.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>16</sup> In advancing the conception of 'tough–tender-mindedness' as the principal dimension governing opinions on social issues apart from a *single* 'radical–conservative' political dimension, Eysenck omits (i) to describe anywhere the technical features of the factor analysis on which the conception is based; (ii) conjures up a construct validation based on James's discussion of temperamental types which is at unacknowledged and possibly unseen variance with his own: James's 'tenderminded' type is 'monistic' and 'dogmatical' as opposed to 'pluralistic' and 'sceptical'. The whole analysis reeks of confusion between larger and smaller issues: 'Abolish abortion and licensing laws' is the cryptic label attached to two points of his diagram 23 (see his pages 130–1).



Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13645-7 - Psychology and the Political Experience

Alan Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: psychology and politics*

guided attempt to diminish the human stature in the political domain.

This was not true of the work of Adorno and his colleagues, and it is principally to them, and those psychologists who followed up their work, and engaged the sympathetic attention and, indeed, the admiration of political scientists, that we owe the present burgeoning interest in the bearing of psychological dispositions on political attitudes. The difficult birth of the psychology of politics is, in one way, no cause for surprise, for it is a peculiar creature, having the features of both art and science. Possibly the Germans were right in giving that psychology which practises *Verstehen* and is idiographic in inclination one of their improbably long but evocative titles: *geisteswissenschaftliche Psychologie* (literally, cultural science psychology). As practised in this research, political psychology is not of this type, since it has a nomothetic intent; but it is deferential to it. 'Statistical research', said Collingwood,<sup>17</sup> 'is for the historian a good servant but a bad master. It profits him nothing to make statistical generalizations, unless he can thereby detect the thought behind the facts about which he is generalizing.' This is true also for the student of the psychology of politics. But it is not merely the 'thought' of the actors to which we wish to penetrate; it is to their unconscious or half-aware motivations. The measurement of psychological dispositions makes this possible. Moreover, statistical research has the great virtue of putting a distance between the analyst's prejudgements and the eventual outcome of his analysis: it makes it easier for him, in Collingwood's own phrase, 'to work against the grain of his own mind'.<sup>18</sup>

**1.5. A central idea: the 'alienation triptych'**

This book advances towards various conclusions in the method and substance of looking at psychology in politics. Since it is not a mystery story, there is no need to delay to the reader one main finding of the empirical work. On the contrary, it is better to advance it immediately, as a guide to a better understanding of the complexities to be explored later on. A 'triptych' is a three-part panel painting, each panel forming part of a whole. The expression here is used to describe a tripartite system of dispositions. Alienation is the centre-piece. Following from it is irrational hostility, often 'targeted' upon

<sup>17</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London, 1946), p. 228.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

Cambridge University Press

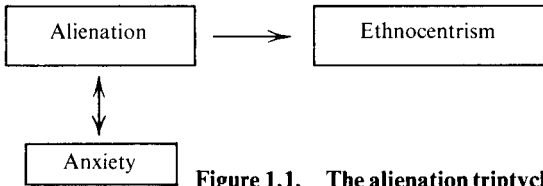
978-0-521-13645-7 - Psychology and the Political Experience

Alan Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Psychology and the political experience*

out-groups. When hostility finds this form of expression, it is called 'ethnocentrism'. The third disposition, anxiety, is caused not only by threatening circumstances, but also by alienation itself. In turn, it may reinforce alienation, because, at high levels, it reduces 'drive', renders the individual a psychological cripple, and deprives him of the strength to combat the social frustrations which help create a felt alienation. This system of sentiments is illustrated in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1.** The alienation triptych

Alienation is a term used variously. Here, it is used to refer to an enduring *sentiment* of separation from the larger and smaller social environs of the individual, involving frustration, mistrust, and doubt about commonly accepted social verities. It can be both malignant and creative: the social scientist, for example, has, as part of his business, a duty to be sceptical of even what most people regard as axiomatically true. In doing so, he takes up a burden: for most people, it is a burden thrust upon them. Most generally, frustration and mistrust result in irrational hostility. Frustration often leads to misdirected aggression; and mistrust is a close cousin of hostility.

Irrational hostility may be general, or, frequently, focussed upon out-groups, such as ethnic minorities. The 'out-group', of course, may be ethnic, communal, or otherwise: capitalists, communists or probation officers. As with air pollution, which often creates visually interesting twilights, it is possible to imagine beneficial side-effects. A shared resentment of a common enemy can be a basis for fraternity. One has only to reflect on war experience to see this. On the other hand, it is as well to be sure that the 'enemy' is, in fact, 'shared'. That is why conversations dealing in bigotry often begin in a guarded fashion.

No independent relation was found between anxiety and ethnocentrism, possibly because retreat and the avoidance of combat are as common as hostility in anxious people. This would lead to the null relation. However, *repressed* anxiety, which may not reveal itself on the anxiety scale used here, may be at the root of the 'authoritarian