

Introduction

Across time far greater than humankind's recorded history huge mountains reared their noble spires. Slow and stately in their growth, their rise was accompanied by rivers of fire, sudden cleavages, and shocks that left those who lived on the slopes in ruin and desolation. So also has it been with new forms of social, political, and economic life. There is, indeed, a specter that haunts contemporary man – it is nothing less than the creation of a new world.

The great tide that raises some and destroys others has no boundary. Change in the modern world is uneven, to be sure, but it is also inexorable and universal. Dikes can be built, levees to protect the privileges of the favored, but they have nowhere held. New institutional forms, novel ideas, and an explosion of aspirations all ceaselessly overwhelm those who cling to the past.

Explanations of change

There is no easy way to summarize the great variety of studies about change, for different thinkers have addressed a multiplicity of problems. For Machiavelli and Hobbes the question was how to maintain order and extend power. Locke and Marx, poles apart otherwise, both focused on ownership or control of property. For Locke the free use of property was the key to political participation, whereas for Marx class struggle, between groups whose identities were determined by their relationship to the control of the means of production, set the stage for political change. Max Weber studied the development of new institutional forms and the formal rationality that characterizes modern bureaucratic operations. Sigmund Freud revealed how the unconscious affects decision making and how great myths become the totems and taboos of civilized life.

In answering questions about change there has been a persistent effort, dating from the classical Greeks, to type societies. Among the better-known modern designations are Ferdinand Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*;

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Sir Henry Maine's status and contract; Herbert Spencer's militant and industrial; Charles H. Cooley's primary and (implicitly) secondary; Emile Durkheim's mechanical and organic; Robert Redfield's folk and urban; and Howard Becker's sacred and secular.¹ The echo of these typologies in contemporary times is found in Mao Zedong's comments about first-, second-, and third-world countries. In constructing typologies thinkers have focused on the individual, the family, the workplace, the market, government, and society. How these various levels are linked and the styles of authority exercised within and among them (e.g., persuasion, fiat, and exchange) are often the basis for the typological distinctions.

Recognizing that individual motivation is often crucial for understanding change, different theories have employed various models. Harry Eckstein has suggested that these fall into two broad categories, the culturist and the rationalist.² Culturists focus on collective constructions of meaning. Individual dispositions are aggregated into social level norms and these delimit the possibilities of, and the constraints on, both individual and social action. For rationalists uniformity is in terms of individual motivation. Assuming individual rational calculation of means and ends, rationalists have developed models that purport to explain choices in situations as diverse as policymaking and voting. In dealing with motivation, therefore, the culturist and rationalist positions impose uniformity at two different levels of analysis. In both cases the rich possibilities that exist when a range of psychological inputs are considered are eschewed in the interest of parsimony. Eckstein feels that a resolution of this difficulty is foremost on the agenda of political science.

In the post-World War II era one of the most promising approaches in comparative politics came to be called "political culture." Culturist in orientation, political culture was a union of anthropology, political science and psychology. From anthropology it borrowed the idea that values, cognitions, and feelings, aggregated as generalized dispositions, are crucial variables for understanding behavior. From political science came the idea that the relationship of values to authority is a significant one for understanding political action. From psychology a social learning model was borrowed that helped explain, through socialization studies, how values, cognitions, and feelings are acquired and with what strength and consistency.

Although few doubt that understanding values is important for political analysis, political culture has declined as a dominant paradigm, replaced by

¹ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Society*, trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis (New York: Harper & Row, 1963). From the Introduction by John C. McKinney and Charles P. Loomis, p. 12.

² Harry Eckstein, "A Culturist Theory of Political Change," *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 3 (September 1988):789.

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rationalist models that provide greater empirical rigor in areas such as policy analysis. A lack of stability over time in value orientations, difficulties in linking complex behavior patterns in diverse areas (e.g., the family and society), and an inability to pinpoint the most crucial socialization influences have all been cited, among others, as reasons for the failure of political culture to achieve its early promise. As a consequence, political culture has become a residual category, something that everyone knows is important but is referred to only to fill in the gaps that remain after harder analysis.

Requirements for a theory

Long ago Sir Francis Bacon pointed out that our knowledge is shaped more by the questions we ask than the theories we propose.³ In beginning an inquiry into political culture it is appropriate first to frame general questions and the ways to answer these before proposing any specific theory. Mustering empirical data to support the theoretical argument is the last step. The paramount and overriding requirement is how to organize knowledge in such a way that it commands the hidden potential in the issue at question.

Is there an underlying dimension to political culture? Should we focus on a concept such as power, which Bertrand Russell suggested is fundamental to political analysis?⁴ Or should we search for a dimension that is less tied to political science, one that applies more generally to all the social science disciplines? Power, for example, may help us to understand the exercise of authority, but except in its most naked aspects it is less useful for understanding obedience. Still less does it tell us about reciprocal exchange, an issue of importance in politics but even more so in economics.

This book focuses on ethical concerns as central to political culture. This is hardly a novel proposition, however, being as it is a point of view developed by Aristotle many centuries ago. How, then, can we hope to say anything new? A reasonable question, therefore, is whether there have been advances in areas of knowledge, or changes in the nature of societies, that justify a continuing search along these lines.

Two developments of the past hundred years are significant. At the individual level psychology as a discipline has become increasingly sophisticated in its explanations of cognition and motivation. We now have a body of theoretical and empirical data that provides greater understanding regarding the wellsprings of human behavior. At the same time, separate analytically from the individual level of analysis is the emergence in social life of giant, complex organizations. As sociologists have long pointed out, such institutions

³ William J. Chambliss, "Toward A Radical Criminology," in *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*, ed. David Kairys (New York: Pantheon, 1982), p. 230.

⁴ Bertrand Russell, *Power, A New Social Analysis* (New York: Norton, 1962), p. 9.

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have radically altered the ways people relate to each other. Their existence has required novel justifications for elite legitimacy and fresh explanations for group solidarity.

Is political culture, however, equivalent to psychological or social factors, a reflection either of inner psychological processes or of sociological influences? Reductionism is not necessarily the evil that some portray, but it is an important issue to consider in the development of theory. In this book I eschew a reductionist approach. It is more reasonable and fruitful, I believe, to analyze both the motives of individuals and the nature of social institutions and to derive a concept of political culture from the interaction between them.

Causal thinking, especially about human beings, is extremely difficult. The data needed for testing theory are often incomplete. Historical material, whose use in examining virtually any subject has been in vogue since the days of Hegel, is often subject to alternate interpretations. Survey data appear hard in comparison and can be subjected to statistical manipulation. Yet they, too, are rarely complete. Even when they are sufficient from a mathematical standpoint, aggregated data give no clue about specific individuals and are often unhelpful as indicators of future variation.⁵

Some of these difficulties are partially overcome by the use of ideal types. This approach mirrors that of scientific endeavor generally in its attempt to construct simple models that, although they do not replicate the real world, are nonetheless complex enough to serve as explanatory models for the phenomena under consideration. Ideal types abstract the essential features of a situation considered as a whole and organize them into a coherent explanation. Although deficient as a tool for understanding particular preferences or specific relationships, they provide general schemes that are assumed to be probabilistically relevant. These assumptions are then matched against historical or other data for confirmation or disconfirmation.

Constructing ideal types is thus a perfectly valid scientific method for pursuing knowledge. They, too, however, are burdened with qualifications. If intruded upon by pretheoretical assumptions (e.g., racial or gender superiority), the usefulness of ideal types is severely degraded, if not completely obviated. Some absolute prior conditions may be assumed in the construction of an ideal type, but the condition must be bedrock and not spurious. Positing a capacity for moral development, for example, is not the same as a statement that all men and women seek to do good. The former is the basis for constructing a general theoretical model of ethical judgments. The latter assumes a particular type of motivation; it thus restricts theoretical development to a model of causality formulated on the basis of an unexamined assumption.

⁵ Shawn W. Rosenberg, *Ideology, Reason and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 40–41.

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Ideal typification must also avoid the danger of overinclusiveness, of assumptions, implicit or explicit, that there is any complete theory of human behavior. This problem is most severe when a complex reality is dealt with in terms of only two or three categories. The solution, however, is not to leap in despair into the thicket of configurative analysis. Complete description with the aim of avoiding oversimplification runs as much risk of creating confusion as does the model that describes complex variations in dichotomous or trichotomous terms. The balance lies somewhere in between, in the development of ideal categories that direct attention away from inessentials yet are themselves sufficiently textured that they can deal with multiple levels of causation.

Ultimately, and finally, every theory must have at its core a set of assumptions about the roots, ingredients, or elements of behavior. Failure in this area is not trivial. Many theories in the social sciences have lots of sail but no mast. At the heart of the human condition is a human being, and whether that person is said to be motivated by a priori knowledge, by libidinal drives, or by a withering alienation from the products of his or her own labor, that human must be explained. The goal is nothing less than to replace a sense of bewildering diversity with one of far-reaching uniformity, of the particularity of experience with what is truly universal.

Plan of the book

This volume is divided into four parts; the first two deal with theoretical issues while the last two examine and interpret these issues in terms of historical and contemporary data. The goal is to return political culture to a position of central consideration. There is no assumption here that this book completes the task or that its propositions are beyond disconfirmation. The object, rather, is to show how a redirection of attention can enrich our understanding of social life.

Part I contains just one chapter, in which I briefly develop a set of ideas showing how political cultures stabilize the institutional processes of societies. Stabilization is related to elite legitimacy, which, in turn, is a function of institutional form and of property relations. Political culture, I suggest, is synonymous with a concept I label “compliance ideology.” Such ideologies reduce institutional transaction costs and thus stabilize institutional arrangements. They are a critical link between the individual and the social environment.

Part II is composed of three chapters that expand the understanding of compliance ideology by examining its psychological and sociological parameters. Neither, I suggest, is reducible to the other; rather, they interact. Chapters 2 and 3, therefore, explore psychological growth and the development of social values. These two developmental patterns are not mirror

images, nor do they follow the same dynamic. Disjunctions between the two processes are fostered by changes in institutional forms and technological capabilities and by a continuous process of social discourse. When disjunction occurs it is the source of an interactive effect that influences both individual development and social values. Chapter 4 is directly concerned with this interaction. Although compliance ideologies follow no uniform pattern of development, the diversity we recognize is not unstructured. Rather, compliance ideologies develop, and can only develop, in ways that are appropriate for group interaction in given historical conditions and that do not violate the psychological limits of the human personality. They can thus be categorized in terms of these two limitations.

Part III shifts attention to the historical record of various societies and to the different ways in which compliance ideologies have changed with the development of large, complex organizations. Chapter 5 studies the traditional pattern and the early phase of transition to the modern period. It points out how traditional agricultural techniques and rural family organization corresponded to a generally lower level of ethical development in both the psychological and social areas. As Chapter 6 points out, however, development away from this pattern was highly disjunctive. Compliance ideologies diverged, leading to social tension, revolution, and war.

Part IV is a conclusion, but not in the sense of a summary; rather, it is a discussion of future possibilities. Chapter 7 presents material showing why changes in compliance ideologies have been difficult but also why such ideologies are continuing to change in the contemporary world. Chapter 8 continues this argument, showing the limits of future change and the possibilities for eventual convergence.

Throughout this work a particular definition of political culture will apply, and it is appropriate at this point to state it. Political culture is a set of values that stabilize institutional forms and hierarchical social relationships in terms of ethical constructs; over time these values reflect developmental changes in individual psychology and in social norms of legitimation; they evolve as a consequence of the interaction between them. The definition offered is not a simple one, but by tracing its various components it can serve as the starting point for the development of comprehensive theory.

Concluding comments

It is fashionable to speak of the end of ideology. Such talk supposes that ideological considerations are no longer the engine of world politics. I disagree. As in times of great religious differences, the world today is riven by ideological confrontation. Conflict in many parts of the globe testifies eloquently to a clash of ideas and values.

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A desperate scramble has begun for an understanding that will combine our knowledge of the human condition with our hope for a progressive politics. The history of genocide, of bureaucratic encroachment on freedom of dissent, of affluence next to starvation – to name but of few of the ills of our time – deprives us of any easy belief that mankind is rational and free and able to construct nonrepressive cultures. Indeed, men and women are both irrational and unfree and have nowhere ever created a culture free of repression. But if this is so, they nevertheless have one gift that holds out hope, not for a perfect world but for a better one. It is knowledge, not of ultimate ends but of the processes that govern our lives.

Should the societies of today pass successfully through this age of potential Armageddon, there is the possibility of a vastly different world. It will not be one where all people are uniformly alike for each part of the world will bear the stamp of its own unique heritage. It will, however, be a world where major categories of consideration are shared to a degree that renders meaningless the present sources of conflict. Part of the reason for this will surely be a greater shared prosperity. As important, however, will be transformations in the values that define compliance. Such shifts will reflect changes in technology, in work environments and work patterns, and in understandings of social relations. From these, in a continuous process of interaction, flows the possibility for the transformation of societies to higher and better forms.

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Compliance ideologies

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Political culture as ideology

Social life is given meaning from individual interpretations of it that are made in terms of a collective standard. Culture is the beliefs, values, and definitions that make up that standard. Although individuals are different, their particular beliefs and values are said to have relative interpersonal consistency and mutual intelligibility through reference to common cultural definitions.¹

A focus on shared values and beliefs is as old as social analysis itself. Although the manner of this sharing is now being subjected to reevaluation,² some set of commonly recognized objective standards seems clearly requisite for the stable functioning of societies. In the broadest sense this collective standard has been called a civil religion; more analytically, it has been referred to as publicly common ways of relating.³ When narrowed to the domain of politics, this standard has been defined as “the system of empirical beliefs, expressive symbols, and values which defines the situation in which political action takes place.”⁴ Political culture, as it was traditionally formulated, had at its core the assumption that every collectivity has a set of orientations that are used by its members in authority contexts to make choices, resolve dilemmas, and accept particular resolutions as valid.

Investigating the beliefs, symbols, and values that are relevant in authority contexts has proven not to be easy. Because power and responsibility are features of almost all human interaction, the research task is overwhelming

¹ Shawn W. Rosenberg, *Reason, Ideology and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 3, 5.

² Ibid.

³ W. Lance Bennett, “Invitation, Ambiguity, and Drama in Political Life: Civil Religion and the Dilemmas of Public Morality,” *Journal of Politics* 41, no. 1 (February 1979):111. Stephen Chilton, *Defining Political Development* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1988), p. 14.

⁴ Sidney Verba, “Comparative Political Culture,” in *Political Culture and Political Development*, ed. Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 513.

without further specification. Political socialization developed as a major area of research in order to deal with this problem. Those cognitions, feelings, and schemes of evaluation that are important for cultural continuity generally and political behavior specifically are said to be formed in a learning process where already socialized carriers of culture impart their knowledge to younger generations.⁵ Socialization studies, however, were only partially successful in fulfilling the task allotted them. Questions arose over which cognitions, feelings, and schemes of evaluation are important for explaining specific adult political behaviors and, indeed, whether orientations acquired early in life persist to later periods.

A major failure of the political culture approach, in my view, has been an overconcentration on values and behavior per se at the expense of other variables. We may, for example, agree that the stability of authority systems requires a belief in the legitimacy of leaders along with supportive values of loyalty, trust, and the like. But this does not tell us very much. Social systems have particular forms of organization and it is within these groupings that significant political behavior occurs. We must ask, therefore, what these forms are and what maintains them. Political culture, I suggest, is part of the answer.

If political culture is concerned with subgroups, how shall these be defined? Are they, as Marxists would insist, social classes, historically shaped, that contend in a context where the ideas of the ruling class are the major ideas in society? Or are they, as I argue, more concrete entities, the productive organizations of society? Although broad classifications of have and have-not may surely be discerned in any society, it is actual institutional contexts that tell us about the nature of hierarchy, the needs of elites and subordinates, and the nature of social contention. In these contexts, especially, political culture is vital and immediate. It stipulates the meaning of relationships and defines the purposes of individual and institutional existence.

The meaning of institution

Subgroups can be classified by a number of terms including “family,” “class,” “association,” “organization,” “subsystem,” and “institution.” Some, such as organization, are thought of as relatively fixed and formal, whereas others, such as kinship, are more elastic. Although the bureaucratic organization is an exceptionally important subgroup in modern times, its current centrality as a social institution has no analogue in traditional experience, even bearing in mind the great historical bureaucracies of the Chinese and the Byzantines. As a consequence, I primarily, and in a general sense,

⁵ Harry Eckstein, “A Culturist Theory of Political Change,” *American Political Science Review* 82, no. 3 (September 1988):791, 792, 802.