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## A CULTURALIST THEORY OF POLITICAL CHANGE

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*The most telling criticism of political culture theory is that it has coped very inadequately with political change. There is a good reason for this: the assumptions of the political culture approach in fact lead to the expectation of continuity. But continuity can be reconciled with changes, though only changes of particular kinds. The nature of political changes consistent with culturalist assumptions and with the culturalist expectation of continuity are here specified by hypotheses about (1) the effects of changes in social context, whether "normal" or involving abrupt discontinuity, and (2) the effects of attempted revolutionary transformation.*

The political culture approach to building positive political theories and to political explanation has been with us since about 1960, and has been much described abstractly and much applied to concrete cases. The seminal works are Almond and Coleman's (1960) and Almond and Verba's (1963). Applications of the approach are covered comprehensively in a retrospective on the influence of their work by Almond and Verba (1979). Explications of it as a contender for paradigmatic status in political science, so to speak, occur in numerous works (e.g., Bill and Hardgrave 1973; Dawson and Prewitt 1969; Merkl 1970; Putnam 1973; and Pye and Verba 1965). My own use of the concept of culture, which I consider more precise than that of others, is discussed in the Appendix.

Political culture theory may plausibly be considered one of two still viable general approaches to political theory and explanation proposed since the early fifties to replace the long-dominant formal-

legalism of the field—the other being political rational choice theory. Indeed, determining which of the two modes of theorizing and explaining—the "culturalist" or the "rationalist"—is likely to give the better results may be the single most important item now on the agenda of political science (Eckstein 1979a).

Whether or not it is advisable to take the culturalist road to theory depends above all on the ability to produce a cogent culturalist theory of political change: a theory consistent with the assumptions (postulates) of the approach and confirmed by experience. Criticisms of culturalist political theories certainly have emphasized the occurrence of certain changes in political structures, attitudes, and behavior and culturalist accounts of their occurrence in order to impugn the approach. Rogowski (1974), for example, has argued that political culturalists have been very offhand in dealing with change—that they have tended to improvise far too much in order to accommodate political changes into their frame-

work. They have done so, he writes, to the point that they no longer have a convincing way to treat political change at all. His argument is directed at culturalist theory in general, but he singles out Almond's work with Powell (1966) as especially indicative of the sins that culturalists commit.

This argument—and others to similar effect—strikes me as cogent criticism of how culturalists have in fact dealt with political changes. Furthermore, difficulties accounting for change in general and for certain kinds of change especially seem to me inherent in the assumptions on which the political culture approach is based.

Difficult, however, does not mean impossible, nor implausible. It is quite possible to deduce from these assumptions a logically cogent account of how political change, and every kind of such change, occurs. My purpose here is to provide such an account, as remedy for the "ad hocery" Rogowski rightly criticizes.

### The Postulates of Culturalist Theories and The Expectation of Continuity

The basic reason why a culturalist account of change is intrinsically difficult to construct (hence, why culturalists have in fact tended to waffle in explaining political change) is simple: the postulates of the approach all lead to the expectation of political continuity; they make political continuity the "normal" state.

### The Postulates of Culturalism

To see why this is so we must first make explicit the fundamental assumptions from which culturalist theory proceeds—its "axiomatic" basis, so to speak. These assumptions unfortunately have been left implicit in culturalist writings. It is neces-

sary to make them explicit if one is compellingly to specify what experiences are "normal" in a culturalist world and what conditions culturalist theory can and cannot accommodate.

The touchstone of culturalist theory is the *postulate of oriented action*: actors do not respond directly to "situations" but respond to them through mediating "orientations." All else either elaborates or follows from that postulate. What exactly, then, does the postulate assert?

"Orientations to action" are general dispositions of actors to act in certain ways in sets of situations. Such general dispositions pattern actions. If actors do not have them, or if orientations are ill formed or inconsistent, actions will be erratic: patternless, anomic. The idea of "orientations to action" follows a particular psychological stimulus-response model: not the simple "single-stage" behaviorist model in which nothing "subjective" intervenes between the experience of situations and responses to it (actions) but "mediational" models in which responses to stimuli (actions in situations) are considered results both of the experience of objective situations and actors' subjective processing of experience. "Orientations" do the processing. We may call them, as did Bentley, soul-stuff, or mind-stuff. The critical methodological task of studies based on such models is, of course, to penetrate reliably and with validity into the subjective.

Orientations are not "attitudes": the latter are specific, the former *general*, dispositions. Attitudes themselves derive from and express orientations; though attitudes may, through their patterning, help us to find orientations. If orientations frequently occur in collectivities they may be called "culture themes," as by Mead and Metraux (1954). Pye (Pye and Verba 1965) has distinguished four sets of such "themes" that he considers useful for making cultural comparisons on the societal level: trust-distrust, hier-

archy-equality, liberty-coercion, parochial-national identifications. Putnam (1973) considers the theme of conflict or its counterpart, harmony, critical for cross-cultural analysis. These "themes" exemplify how "orientations" are general dispositions that pattern sets of actions and sets of specific attitudes. It is conventional to regard orientations as having three components: cognitive elements that, so to speak, decode experience (give it meaning); affective elements that invest cognition with feelings that "move" actors to act; and evaluative elements that provide goals toward which actors are moved to act (Pye and Verba 1965).

The assumption of oriented actions would be vacuous without the addition of a second postulate, which we might call *the postulate of orientational variability*: orientations vary and are not mere subjective reflections of objective conditions. The significance of this postulate lies particularly in this: if the processing of experiences into actions were uniform—if it were fixed at the biological level or if it always involved "rationalist" cost-benefit calculation—then mediating mind-stuff could simply be left out of theory. In Hempel's terms, we would only need to know "initial conditions" (situations, structures) to explain actions, since we already know the universal covering law needed to complete an *explanandum*. No doubt ingenuity is required in relating conditions to actions via uniform orientations: the rational choice theories we have provide more than enough cases in point. But this does not alter the logic of the argument that without orientational variability we remain in a strictly behaviorist world. Similarly, if actions are merely "superstructural," we manifestly need only to know situations to explain actions. In that case, only the explanation of deviant cases (like false class consciousness) would require the use of mediating variables.

If orientations are not inherent in actors

but variable, then something that is variable must form them. And if orientations are not simply subjective reflections of varying objective situations, then the variable conditions through which they are formed must themselves be cultural. Orientations are not acquired in some automatic way; they must be learned. Thus, a *postulate of cultural socialization* must hold if the first and second assumptions hold: orientations are learned through the agency of external "socializers." The repertoire of cognitions, feelings, and schemes of evaluation that process experience into action must be imparted by the socialized carriers of culture. The process can be direct, by "teachers" who are culturally variable actors; or it can occur indirectly simply through the experience of variable cultures.

"Rationalist" theorists do not, of course, reject the notion of political socialization. That would be silly. What divides culturalist and rationalist theorists here involves the issue of late-in-life learning, or resocialization.

In regard to that matter, culturalists proceed from a *postulate of "cumulative" socialization*. This means two things. First, although learning is regarded as continuous throughout life (which is not likely to be questioned) early learning—all prior learning—is regarded as a sort of filter for later learning; early learning conditions later learning and is harder to undo. Second, a tendency is assumed toward making the bits and pieces of cognitive, affective, and evaluative learning form a coherent (consistent, consonant) whole.

The postulate of cumulative learning provides the culturalist account of how two fundamental needs of actors in societies are satisfied: the need for economy of action and the need for predictability in interaction. Life would hardly be bearable, even possible, if one had to think out every action, taking into ac-

count all pertinent information and lack of information. Orientational schemata thus save virtually all decision costs. Social life, similarly, would hardly be possible without reliable preknowledge of others' actions and of the effect of one's own actions on those of others. Without such preknowledge social life would tend to be entropic. As Crozier (1964) has cogently argued, "uncertainty" of action also begets power—arbitrary power.

Both economy of action and predictability in interaction are diminished to the extent that individual orientations are inconsistent and that early learning may readily be undone. These conditions have effects similar to a lack of orientations to actions and of socially shared orientations altogether. They lead to erratic, incoherent behavior by individuals and in social aggregates: anomie in the former; the absence of anything like a stable *conscience collectivif* in the latter.

It should be pointed out that the culturalist solution of the problems of economy of action and social predictability is not a unique solution, however plausible it may seem. Thus, in the rationalist perspective, economy of action is provided by "ideologies" or by the sensible delegation of decision-making powers (Downs 1957). The fixity required for predictability in social life follows from the very fact that rational choice is considered a fixed disposition. If this is so, one can anticipate the actions of others and adjust one's own behavior to the anticipation. Social predictability may also be achieved through rationally formulated and enforced contractual arrangements or general legal rules. (It should be apparent that the two accounts of economy of action and social predictability provide a good basis for evaluating the relative power of culturalist and rationalist perspectives.)

To summarize, "cultural" people process experience into action through general cognitive, affective, and evaluative pre-

dispositions; the patterns of such predispositions vary from society to society, from social segment to social segment; they do not vary because objective social situations or structures vary but because of culturally determined learning; early learning conditions later learning and learning involves a process of seeking coherence in dispositions. And this is so in order to "economize" in decisions to act and to achieve predictability in social interactions.

### The Expectation of Continuity

When the postulates of the political culture approach are made explicit, it should be evident why political culture theorists *should* have difficulties in accounting for political change. The assumptions of culturalist theory manifestly lead to an expectation of continuity, even in cases of changes in the objective contexts of political actions.

The expectation of continuity in aggregate (and individual) orientations follows most plainly from the assumption that orientations are not superstructural reflections of objective structures, but themselves invest structures and behavior with cognitive and normative meaning.

Cultural continuity also manifestly follows from the assumption that orientations are formed through processes of socialization. To the extent that socialization is direct (by precept), generational continuity must occur, the socializers being formed, "cultural men." To the extent that socialization is indirect (by experience), generational continuity still follows; experience with authority occurs first in the family, then in schools, where unformed children encounter formed adults. In either case, what is true of one generation should continue substantially to be true in the next. This applies as much to cultural divisions in a society as to more general culture types and themes—if any exist in the first place.

This, incidentally, makes the political culture perspective quite compatible with the finding that political regimes typically are short-lived (Gurr 1974).

The expectation of continuity in political cultures follows, most obviously, from the assumption of orientational cumulateness, namely, that earlier learning conditions later learning and that actors tend to seek orientational consonance. The first allows some room for adult socialization and resocialization—but not much. The second makes unlikely the internalization of piecemeal orientational change that might increase dissonance.

But if change in culture patterns and themes were categorically excluded, political culture theory must immediately be thrown out as obvious nonsense: changes happen, including cultural changes. The saving grace of culturalist theory here is that continuity is, so to speak, an ideal-typical expectation—one that holds in an *abstract*, parsimonious cultural world. It is an expectation akin to that of inertia in the Galilean conception of motion. Physical inertia does not rule out changes of direction or rest, acceleration, and deceleration. It does make such phenomena depend on contingent factors that may or may not impinge on objects in motion. Continuity is the inherent (lawful) expectation and so, therefore, is resistance to change of motion: exceptionally great forces are needed to induce great changes in direction or velocity. The notion of continuity as inertia in motivations (the psychological counterpart of physical motion) thus opens the door to culturalist accounts of change.

Through that door, however, the tendency toward improvised, post hoc accounts of political change may enter—may be bound to enter. If one's preferred theoretical approach implies a strong bias toward the continuity of culture or resistance to cultural change, then it is always tempting to extemporize theory-saving

“special” conditions, or adjustments in concepts or theory to handle occurrences of change—especially major change. If, say, theoretical difficulties arise from emphasizing early socialization, then why not just relax that emphasis and assign more scope for late socialization or adult resocialization? If the assumption of a tendency toward orientational consonance makes it awkward to explain certain observations, then why not simply posit more toleration for dissonance? Or why not redefine consonance? In that way, however, one is likely to end with the term continuity meaning nothing more than “not completely (or instantaneously) changeable”—which drains the term of all reasonable meaning. This is exactly the point of Rogowski's criticism of how culturalists have in fact accounted for political change.

The remedy is to develop an explicit general culturalist theory of change, consistent with culturalist assumptions, in order to prevent ad hoc tinkering with culturalist postulates and their implications. Such a theory should state, prior to explanations of specific changes, the characteristics of change that the political culture approach can logically accommodate and those that do not fit its constraints.

To formulate such a theory, I will consider two broad types of cultural changes: those arising “naturally” from changes in situations and structural conditions and those that result from “artifice”—deliberate attempts to transform political structures and behavior.

### Situational Change

#### Pattern-Maintaining Change

Actors must often face novel situations with which their dispositional equipment is ill suited to deal. The world changes or presents us with experiences that are un-

familiar for other reasons (say, the penetration of peasant societies by market forces). The unfamiliar is encountered routinely in maturation, as one proceeds from family to school, from lower schools to higher ones, and from schools to participation in adult institutions. At the level of society and polity, novel situations arise from internal "development," however development may be conceived. Novel situations also arise from socially internal discontinuities (economic crises or political disruptions, like those caused by governmental instability or collapse, or from changes brought about by protest movements), or from externally imposed changes. Immigration brings actors into unfamiliar situations. So does internal migration and social mobility. The encounter of novel situations will, no doubt, occur much more frequently among individuals than on the macro level, but it also occurs in groups and societies.

Novel situations may be short-lived results of ephemeral upheavals. In that case no cultural adjustments are needed, nor are they likely to occur. What, however, should one expect if such situations persist?

If cultures exhibit inertia then it should be expected that changes in culture patterns and themes will occur so as to maintain optimally such patterns and themes; that is to say, changes in culture are perfectly consistent with culturalist postulates if they occur as adaptations to altered structures and situations and if the function of change is to keep culture patterns in existence and consonant. "Pattern maintenance" (Parsons' concept) can take that form just as well as strict cultural continuity.

The French have a half-facetious adage for this sort of pattern maintenance: The more things change, the more they remain the same. The saying no doubt fits (used to fit?) France. The pragmatic masters at pattern maintaining change, however, have been the British. Tory concessions to

British working class voters and interests are the usual case in point. Their function—sometimes "latent" but in the case of Disraeli's Tory democracy quite explicit—was to maintain Tory hegemony in the face of considerable sociopolitical change through the maintenance of as much as possible of what the Young England Circle considered the feudalistic virtues: the disposition to defer to one's betters and action by the betters on behalf of the lower orders. The point applies to reforms of the suffrage and also to the less well known role of the Tories in the evolution of the British welfare state, which Tory governments not only have kept virtually intact but much of which they pioneered.

An alternative to pattern-maintaining change is to subject unfamiliar experience to procrustean interpretation in order to obviate cognitive or normative change. "Perceptual distortion" has turned up frequently in experiments on how individual cognitive dissonance is handled (see Brehm and Cohen 1962). We know at least a little about the same way of dealing with the unfamiliar on the political macro level. To give just one example: party political elections in Northern Nigeria were initially regarded as a version of long-familiar elections to chieftaincy, in which the "candidates" were a small number of ascriptively defined eligibles (Whitaker 1970). The extent to which perceptual distortion can be adaptive to unfamiliar experience no doubt is highly limited. However, where institutions like elections to chieftaincy exist in traditional cultures, the adaptation of dispositions to other kinds of elections should be easier than in other cases.

### Change Toward Flexibility

Highly modern societies have traits that make it especially likely that actors and aggregates of actors will frequently con-

front novel situations. Social mobility, vertical and horizontal, is the most obvious cause. Because any changes in dispositions are costly (dysfunctional) in the culturalist perspective, one should expect as a correlate to the expectation of pattern-maintaining cultural change, that the more modern societies are, the more the elements of their cultures will be general, thus flexible. No doubt there are considerable limits upon how general and flexible orientations can be and still perform their functions of making experience meaningful, actions economical, and interactions predictable. In more modern societies one should not expect culture to change as readily as situations and structures. Situational and structural change tend to occur with great frequency and rapidity in modern societies, and the assumption of orientational inertia postulates resistance to frequent, swift reorientation. Rather one should expect that the rigidity of cultural prescription will relax, so that culture can accommodate much social fluidity.

The tendency toward cultural flexibility can be regarded itself as a way to maintain cultural patterns and themes. As societies become more changeable, the elements of culture increasingly become "forms" that can subsume a variety of "contents." It is probably no coincidence that some sociologists early in the twentieth century (especially Simmel [1950]) adapted the Kantian distinction between form and content to social analysis. Durkheim argued much the same point directly. In early societies, he wrote, "the collective environment is essentially concrete . . . [and] the states of conscience then have the same character." ("Culture" is not a bad translation of his notion of a *conscience collectif*.) As societies develop, the "common conscience" is obliged to rise above diversity and "consequently to become more abstract. . . . General ideas necessarily appear and become dominant" (Durkheim 1960, 287-91).

I want to make three other points pertinent to the expectation that cultural abstractness and flexibility will grow with social development. First, the disposition to act "rationally" introduces just the kind of general and flexible culture trait that inherent social fluidity requires. (Durkheim [1960] already associated rational attitudes and behavior with the abstractness of thought necessary in highly developed societies.) The rationalization of modern life—which Weber considered to be its governing trait—thus may be an accommodation to structural conditions rather than, contra Weber, their underlying cause.

Second, the obviously difficult problem of finding a proper trade-off between two warring imperatives in modern societies, that of cultural flexibility and that of cultural fixity, is bound to be a practical difficulty, not just a theoretical one. Reconciling fixity with flexibility, abstractness, and formality may be a crucial element in what has widely been perceived as growing malaise in highly modern societies. Anomie will follow not only from lack of internal guides to action but from guidelines too general and loose to serve in the relentless particularity of experience. Highly modern society thus may be intrinsically acultural and, for that reason, transitory or susceptible to *surrogates* for culture—including cults and dogmas.

The expectation of cultural flexibility, finally, should apply to *all* highly modern societies. It thus pertains to polities initially based on rigid dogma (like communist societies) that have successfully pursued modernization. In such societies, the first expectation, that of cultural inertia, should hold. Old culture should resist new dogma. The expectation of pattern-maintaining change (or perceptual distortion) should hold as well. So one should expect also that as culture changes in such societies, it will change toward greater flexibility—and therefore to reinterpret-



tions of dogma that make it increasingly pliable.

### Cultural Discontinuity

Contextual changes can be so considerable or rapid or both that neither pattern-maintaining changes nor changes that gradually relax cultural rigidity to deal with social fluidity are possible. Rapid industrialization is the case in point usually cited. Changes resulting from war or from the formation of new polities also generally involve upheavals in social contexts. Such upheavals may result as well from economic traumas like the great inflation of 1923 in Germany (which led to far greater social disruption than the Great Depression—or possibly even the Black Death). And traumatic change sometimes strikes special segments of society rather than the whole.

We must deal, therefore, with social discontinuity, as well as “normal” change. Culturalists have tended either to avoid the matter or, worse, to treat cases of social trauma simply as “deviant cases” in which the theoretical constraints of their perspective are off—not least, the expectation of cultural inertia.

Obviously, traumatic social discontinuity will have cultural consequences different from contextual stability or less rapid, less pervasive change. Even in such cases, however, we may not simply improvise. If the assumptions of culturalists are correct, then traumatic social discontinuity should have logically expectable consequences, no less than other change.

The one consequence of social trauma absolutely precluded by culturalist assumptions is rapid reorientation. Social upheaval may overcome cultural inertia, but if so, actors should be plunged into a collective infancy in which cognitions that make experience intelligible and normative dispositions (affect, evaluative schemes) must be learned again, and learned cumulatively. No culturalist may

expect, for instance, a democratic political culture to form, in a few short years, in a society like Germany after World War II, or “national” orientations to form rapidly in postcolonial tribal societies. Instead, changes in political cultures that occur in response to social discontinuity should initially exhibit considerable formlessness. For *formlessness* one may substitute other terms, like Durkheim’s *anomie* or Merton’s *deinstitutionalization*. The essence of the matter is that culture loses coherent structure. It becomes highly entropic.

The idea that rapid, large-scale contextual changes are personally disorienting and culturally disruptive is hardly new. Lipset (1960) argued a generation ago that rapid economic development is associated with political “extremism” (“anomic protest movements” like anarchism and syndicalism), despite the fact that high levels of such development are related to political stability. Huntington (1968) later made much the same point, and Olson (1963) has probably developed it most cogently.

To say that formlessness under conditions of socioeconomic discontinuity should be “considerable” is not mere hedging. Cultural entropy can never be complete. If it were, no patterned action or interactions would be possible at all. In any case, social discontinuity never is total—intimate social units, like the family, survive the greatest upheavals (may, indeed, be strengthened by them, as refuges of predictable order); so too do structures that are supposedly merely instrumental—for example, bureaucracies. As well, if learning is cumulative, older people should exhibit a good deal of orientational inertia even when traumatic socioeconomic change occurs. We may surely suppose that the more ingrained orientations are and the more they are consonant systems, the less susceptible they are to “disorientation”—the more mechanisms like perceptive distortion will

be used to invest experience with accustomed meaning.

Governmental authority will, of course, survive cultural discontinuity. In fact, it is likely to become more powerful to the extent that internalized dispositions cannot govern actions and interactions. How then do people act politically if political culture is highly formless?

We can get useful clues to answers from the growing literature on an analogous experience: how children adapt to novel situations that they enter in highly discontinuous ways: going to school, for instance, or going from one to another type or level of schooling. Much of the literature on this subject (like Wakeford 1969 and Woods 1979) has been informed by Merton's (1949) path-breaking study of the bases of deviant behavior, which dealt in general terms with behavior under more or less "anomic" conditions.

Under conditions of cultural discontinuity, conformity with authority is still likely to occur, but it will tend to have certain characteristics. In Merton's technology, it will tend to be *ritualistic* or else *self-serving* (opportunistic and of dubious morality, as general culture defines morality). Ritual conformity is compliance without commitment. One does what the rules or rulers prescribe, not for any discernible reason but (quoting from a lower-class British pupil interviewed by Woods) "because I behave meself . . . I just do what I'm told . . . [I] ain't got much choice." Conformity of this sort may be supposed to occur frequently in cases in which the former political cultures and subcultures prescribed high compliance ("subject cultures," as Almond and Verba called them). Self-serving, opportunistic conformity bends norms and rules for private advantage—including that of getting ahead in the competition for political power. Charles Dickens observed a lot of that sort of behavior in his travels in America as he reports them in his *Ameri-*

*can Notes*. Thus, in regard to a very successful businessman, " 'He is a public nuisance, is he not?' 'Yes sir,' . . . 'And he is utterly dishonest, debased, and profligate?' 'Yes, sir.' 'In the name of wonder, then, what is his merit?' 'Well, sir, he is a smart man' " (1957, 246). I mention Dickens because one should especially expect "smart" conformity in immigrant societies or immigrant segments of society, where (as in schools) discontinuity occurs through movement into an unfamiliar but intact culture. Perhaps one should expect it even more in cultures greatly unsettled by upheaval. Thus, Burke presciently remarked (in 1790) that when cultural constraints are off, "the worst rise to the top" (1923, 45).

More commonly than conformity, one should expect what Merton called *retreatism* under conditions of cultural discontinuity. Retreatism involves withdrawing from the "alien" larger society into the smaller, more familiar worlds of family, neighborhood, village, and the like. In Almond and Verba's scheme of concepts, it should show up as increased "parochialism." In the small worlds of schools, retreatism tends to involve self-imposed isolation—for instance, into remote places and daydreams or what Woods calls removal activities—"unserious pursuits which are sufficiently engrossing . . . [to make participants] oblivious for the time being of [their] actual situation"—or both.

Rebellion against, and intransigent resistance to, authority are also likely responses to the experience of cultural decay. A voluminous literature links social, economic, and political discontinuities to political violence—from Marx to Moore and Skocpol. Rebellion and intransigence, however, are always likely to be costly and call for much energy; retreatist behavior into parochial worlds or ritualistic conformity are thus more likely, especially where governing power—if not authority—is strong.

What should follow over time from contextual and cultural discontinuity? If economy of action and predictability indeed are imperatives in individual and collective life, one should expect new culture patterns and themes to emerge. But if dispositions are formed by cumulative learning, they should emerge only slowly (over generations) and, in the transitional period, at great costs resulting from raw power, withdrawal, and (because of withdrawal) forced mobilization and rebelliousness against it. Thus, the process of reformation of political cultures should be prolonged and socially costly. This is all the more likely to be the case if parochial units remain intact refuges from discontinuities in society, economy, or polity.

The expectation is logical also if older people, as is likely, cling to long-fixed dispositions even in face of strong forces that might unsettle inertia. We might thus posit as a general expectation that in the process of cultural reformation considerable age-related differences should occur. In fact, age, in cases of pronounced discontinuity, might even be expected to be a major basis for subcultural differentiation. If indeed this were found to be so, the cultural perspective upon theory would be enormously strengthened over alternatives. Empirical work pertinent to the expectation, however, is oddly lacking; and as culturalists have built adult learning increasingly into their approach in order to accommodate ill-fitting facts, the incentive to inquire into age-related cultural differences, in both established and transitional contexts, has regrettably declined.

I want to make another point about the reformation of dispositions and culture patterns, more briefly. As the young should be more susceptible to reorientation than the old, so one should expect to find in social macrostructures particular segments that have traits especially conducive or susceptible to reorientation. By

"conducive traits" I mean structural or dispositional traits readily accommodated to new culture patterns or, indeed, anticipations of them. In Western traditional societies, for instance, there always existed a large island of achievement in a sea of ascription—the celibate clergy, which hardly could be ascriptively recruited. The clergy, in fact, played a considerable role in the emergence of modern political institutions—despite its stake in the distribution of traditional privileges. Similarly, socially "marginal" groups—groups that occupy the fluid interstices of established cultures—should be highly susceptible to reorientation, thus "vanguards" in the reorienting of unsettled societies. There is a good deal of literature making the case that this is indeed so (e.g., Rejai and Phillips 1979 and Wolf 1973).

### Political Transformation

By *transformation* I mean the use of political power and artifice to engineer radically changed social and political structures, thus culture patterns and themes: to set society and polity on new courses toward unprecedented objectives. Transformation, typically, is the objective of modern revolutions. It can also be the objective of military conquerors and of nation builders or other modernizers. Revolutions, however, provide the most unambiguous and dramatic cases. I will therefore confine my remarks to them—though what is said about them should also apply to transformation attempted in other ways.

Hannah Arendt (1963) undoubtedly was right in arguing that attempts at revolutionary transformation are distinctively modern—that revolutions as we think of them (not mere rebellious attacks on authorities or their actions) begin with the French and American revolutions. As long as political and social structures were considered divinely ordained, or natural,

or simply the ways of a folk, the idea of their deliberate transformation hardly could occur. "History" then could only be endless repetition or an intrinsic progress toward a preordained end. Societies and politics could no more be "transformed" than the heavenly bodies set upon new orbits. One of the decisive traits of modern societies then is the belief that a "new beginning"—a felicitous and not redundant expression—could be made in political and social life.

Initially, making a new beginning did not seem to call for much artifice—no more, perhaps, than a proper constitution. Achieving liberty or equality throughout society simply called for setting politics and societies on their inherently right course—right, given human nature. For reasons not necessary to sketch in the age of the "God that failed," *really* making revolution—not seizing power but the accomplishment of transformation—came increasingly to be seen as a task, and a difficult task, for political artificers. Unfortunately, systematic studies of that process are few, although the exceptions often have been notable: for instance, Massell's study of Soviet attempts to bring Soviet Central Asia into modernity (1974) and Kelley and Klein's study of the effects on inequality of the Bolivian Revolution of 1951 (1981). Inquirers into revolution still are hooked on the issue of their etiology.

Since revolutions are themselves major discontinuities and since they generally occur in periods of social or political upheavals, not least governmental breakdown (Edwards 1927; Brinton 1965), the expectations listed in the preceding section should apply to transformation. But I want to state here some expectations that follow from the culturalist perspective especially for processes of revolutionary transformation. Intrinsic interest and contemporary relevance aside, these processes seem to me especially critical for evaluating culturalist theories and their

bases. After all, transformative processes involve not only adjustment to necessity but also the deliberate engineering of great change, and they are typically backed by great power and control.

As a first expectation we may posit that revolutionary transformation is strictly impossible in the short run. Revolutions certainly bring upheaval. They may also be expected to bring about movement in the direction of their professed goals by readily accomplished actions—instituting wide suffrage, kicking out the landlords and redistributing land, ending feudal privileges and obligations, and the like. But if discontinuity begets "formlessness" of culture, then revolutionaries can hardly do much to reorient people in the short run (say, in a generation or so). Reorientation is, of course, the less likely the more intact is the prerevolutionary culture: the more it provides parochial refuges from transformative power or institutional centers of resistance to it. But even if revolution only reflects discontinuity instead of engendering it, the expectation stated still should hold.

If the conventional norms and practices of political life are disrupted by revolution, what can be put in their place? We may posit the answer that revolutionary transformation will initially be attempted by despotic or legalistic means. What, after all, can "order" societies and politics in place of conventional, internalized culture? Only brute power, or else the use of external legal prescriptions as a surrogate for internal orientational guides to behavior. "Revolutionary legalism" was in fact a device used early after the Bolshevik seizure of power, and it overlapped a good deal (even before Stalin) with attempts to "storm" society (especially its more backward parts) with head-on "administrative assault." Neither, according to Massell (1974), accomplished much toward the realization of transformation; responses to it, he writes, included "avoidance," "selective

participation," "evasion," "limited retribution," and "massive backlash."

"Legalism," it might be noted here, is likely to be a general response to massive cultural disruption, whether revolutionary or situational or both. Indeed, it can become, in highly unusual cases, a persistent surrogate for normative culture—indeed, a culture form. I have argued this elsewhere (1979b), defining "legalist" cultures as cultures in which legal rules are widely known, such rules are widely used (instead of justice or prudence) to justify political standpoints or decisions, legal actions are the normal mode of dealing with conflicts and disputes, and therefore laws deal in highly detailed—if possible comprehensive—ways with social interaction and tend to be punctiliously adhered to. Durkheim (1960) argued the even more general, related proposition that in the course of development civil law (which regulates social interactions) constantly grows, while criminal, or restitutive, law declines. His argument makes sense if indeed development "loosens" normative cultural prescription, as I argued, and lessens cultural similitude, as Durkheim argues.

The case I used to make this argument is contemporary West Germany. That, we should note, also is the case Rogowski (1974) mainly relies on to argue that reorientation *can* occur rapidly—the crucial point in his critique of culturalist theory. Rogowski seems to me to miss the real import of "deviant cases"—that through their very abnormal characteristics they can be used to shed light upon the factors that condition typical cases.

What of the long-run prospects of revolutionary transformation? I suggest the expectation that the long-run effects of attempted revolutionary transformation will diverge considerably from revolutionary intentions and resemble more the prerevolutionary condition of society. The expectation is not that little change in "content" will occur: in who

holds power, gets privilege, and so on. No inevitable Thermidorean Reaction is posited. The argument is somewhat less categorical: reconstructed culture patterns and themes will diverge widely from revolutionary visions and will tend to diverge from them in the direction of the patterns of the old society and regime. The degree to which the expectation holds obviously depends on the extent to which the old culture was already in disarray.

Several points made earlier lead to this expectation. Culture must still be learned on a comprehensive scale, as in all societies; and although revolutionary teaching can no doubt play a considerable role in shaping the young, it can hardly replace socialization in small parochial units. Nor are teachers or role models likely to be, extensively, the sort of marginal individuals who are steeped in revolutionary dogma as a surrogate for convention—or people for whom the revolutionary vision has much meaning at all. Sheer cultural inertia will also play a role in the process of revolutionary decay; so will the tendency toward turning change into pattern maintenance—perhaps by a progressive transformation of revolutionary visions into mere revolutionary rhetoric; so—to the extent that the new rulers succeed in modernizing—will the tendency of modern cultures to be general, abstract, and (especially pertinent here) flexible; so will "retreatist" and "ritualist" responses to discontinuity; and so will the tendency of opportunistic conformists to get ahead, by scheming or approval, in unfamiliar contexts.

In fact, it may well be the case that the short-run effects of attempted transformation are greater than the longer-run effects. More can be done in upheaval than when life again acquires fixity. Kelley and Klein (1981) have argued precisely this point, on the basis of generalizing the case of the Bolivian Revolution of 1951.

Whether all this also entails the expectation that in the longer run incremental

change will accomplish more than attempts at radical transformation we can perhaps leave an open question here. But note that the rulers of the Soviet Union came increasingly to view the achievement of cultural change as a matter for what they called "systematic social engineering" for—as Massell (1974) describes it—"a pragmatic commitment to relatively patient and systematic social action, wherein at least as much time and effort would be devoted to the building of bridges to traditional society . . . as to actual and direct confrontation with the traditional system."

### Conclusion

It may well be the case that the political culture approach has been used to explain political changes in the sort of ad hoc and post hoc manner that saves—and thus weakens—theories rather than testing and strengthening them. Culturalists hardly have a monopoly on such theoretical legerdemain—certainly not when compared to rational choice theorists—when discomfiting facts confront them. But I have tried to show here that culturalists must have a strong propensity toward improvised theory saving when dealing with political change, since their assumptions lead, necessarily, to an expectation of cultural continuity—at any rate in a "pure" (abstract, ideal-typical) cultural world, where all matters falling under "ceteris paribus" are in fact "equal."

Nevertheless, it should be evident that a cogent, potentially powerful theory of political change can be derived from culturalist premises. The theory sketched here specifies that changes in dispositions, in response to contextual changes, should be pattern-maintaining changes or—if the contextual changes involve modernization—changes toward normative generality and flexibility; that in response to abrupt social discontinuities cultural dis-

positions should, for a considerable period, be "formless"—incoherent in individuals and fragmented in aggregates; that in such cases retreating into intact parochial structures occurs, while conformity should become ritualistic or opportunistic; that revolutionary artifice cannot accomplish cultural transformation in the short run; that such transformation will be attempted by despotic power or (mainly hopeful) legal prescriptions; and that, in the longer run, attempts at revolutionary transformation will tend to be regressive or at least have quite unintended outcomes. Note, however, that nothing here rules out engineered change, so to speak—attempted structural reforms of politics. In the modern world, political tinkering, on small or grand scales, is endemic. The theory simply states what should result from such tinkering.

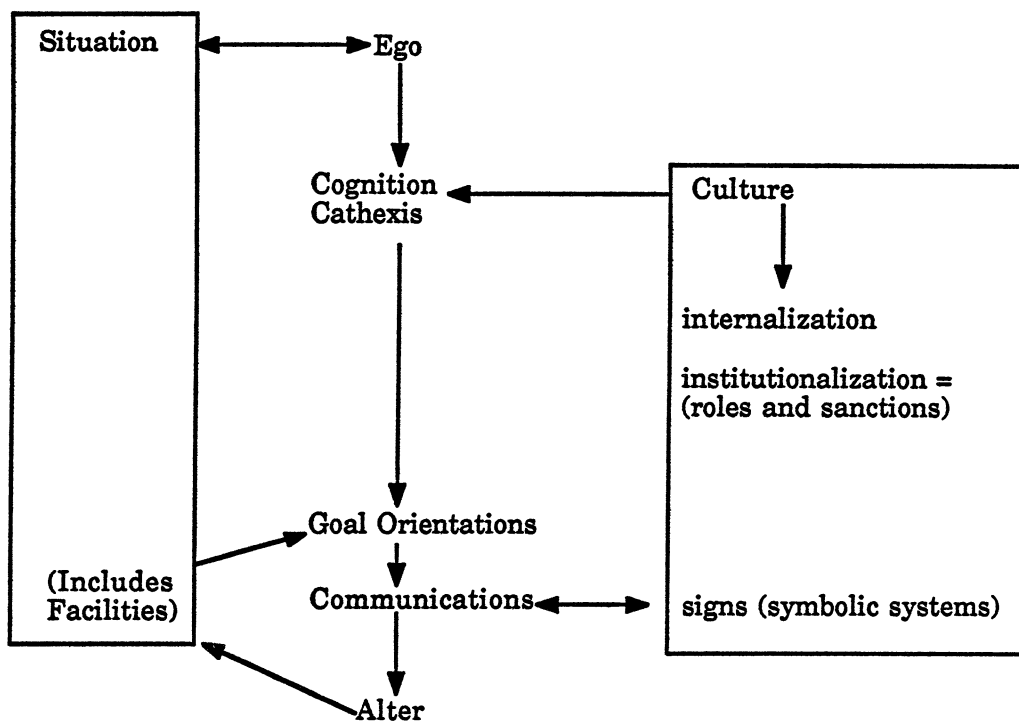
The problem of testing the theory against experience obviously remains, as do problems of operationalizing concepts for that purpose. But obviously theory comes first.

If the power of a culturalist account of political change is to be compared with that of different approaches to political theory and explanation, then general accounts of change, derived from non-cultural postulates and similar to that presented here, are needed. Political-culture theories, admittedly, have not heretofore met the challenge of developing a general theory of change; but neither have others.

### Appendix: Culture

The term *culture*, unfortunately, has no precise, settled technical meaning in the social sciences, despite its centrality in them. The variable and ambiguous use of key concepts generates unprofitable arguments that are merely definitional. Hence I append a note that places my use of the term, as sketched in the first section, in its conceptual context.

**Figure A-1. Interaction in the Action Frame of Reference**



My use of the term *culture* tries to make explicit, at the axiomatic level, what is implicit (occasionally almost explicit) in the works of Almond and his various collaborators (Coleman 1960; Powell 1966; Verba 1963; Verba 1979). Their use of the concept seems to be based squarely on Talcott Parsons' "action frame of reference." Parsons first worked out that "frame of reference" as a way of synthesizing four apparently diverse, all highly influential, early modern social scientists: Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim, and Weber (Parsons 1937). He and collaborators developed action theory in a large series of works, the most useful of which probably is the multiauthored book, *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Parsons and Shils 1951).

The action frame of reference is based, at the microlevel, on Parsons' notion of an interaction, societies being complexes of interactions (some earlier sociologists called them acts of "sociation"). The notion is depicted on Figure A-1. In brief translation, (1) ego (an actor) is in a "situation"—an objective context; (2) ego cognitively decodes that context and invests it with feeling (cathexis)—thus the context comes to have meaning for the actor; (3) the manner of investing situations with meaning is acquired through socialization, which consists mainly of early learning—this imparts the modes of understanding and valuing prevalent in societies or subsocieties or both. In aggregate, these may be called a society's "culture"; (4) socialization leads to the in-

ternalization of cognitive and affective meanings (viz., the cultural becomes personal) and their institutionalization (the definition of expected behavior in social roles and that of sanctions in case of deviation from expected behavior—these make smooth and regular patterns of interaction possible; (5) cognitions and affective responses to them define goals and ways to pursue them; (6) cognitions, feelings, and goals are communicated to alter (another actor) through the use of “signs” (symbolic expressions of culture that make ego’s actions intelligible to alter)—but actions also depend on objective facilities that are part of any actor’s situation and that independently affect the choice of goals; (7) alter responds, changing the situation in some respect, so that the process resumes.

Note especially that the action frame of reference emphasizes neither subjective nor objective factors but rather how the two are linked in interactions. Culturalists focus on the matters in the box on the right, but they should also bring that on the left into interpretation and theories. This I have tried to do throughout this essay, emphasizing how culture conditions change in varying contexts of objective change.

Alternatives to the notion of culture I use come chiefly from cultural anthropology. I use the plural intentionally, because the meanings of culture vary a great deal in that field. One can probably subsume these meanings under four categories: (1) culture is coterminous with society: it is the whole complex of the ways of a “folk,” of human thought and action among particular people—Park (1937) comes close to that view; (2) culture is social life in its subjective aspects: the knowledge, beliefs, morals, laws, customs, habits of a society—one finds this meaning (and these illustrative words) in the seminal work of Tyler (1871) and, later, Benedict (1934) and Kluckhohn (1962); (3) culture is what differentiates

societies from one another, for the purpose of idiographic description but also for theorizing through comparisons and contrasts (agreements and differences)—I take the seminal work here to be Malinowski’s (1944); (4) culture is the distinctive, variable set of ways in which societies normatively regulate social behavior (Goodenough 1968; Sumner 1906).

The fourth set of meanings comes closest to that used here. My use of the concept of culture here seems to be justified by usage in political science and, more important, by its suitability to testing theories through the catholic deduction of unknowns once it postulates are explicitly stated. Anyway, my version of the concept is that about which theoretical conflicts have thus far occurred in political inquiry.

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