Structure and Function in Political Belief Systems

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Different methods of studying attitudes can be likened to looking through a microscope at different levels of magnification. At the most intense levels of magnification—such as provided by highly controlled experimental studies of the information integration rules underlying attitude formation—one can observe the phenomenon in detail. The price of ability to see detail is, however, the inability to see the phenomenon in a broader systems context. At intermediate levels of magnification—such as those provided by laboratory work on cognitive responses to persuasion (Petty, Ostrom, & Brock, 1981) or on defensive avoidance responses to fear appeals (Janis & Mann, 1977)—one gains the ability to monitor complex, naturally occurring psychological processes, but at some cost in experimental control and precision of measurement. Finally, at the least intense levels of magnification—such as provided by archival and interview studies of political belief systems—one can explore context in great detail, but at a very substantial cost in internal validity and ability to observe subsystem detail.

Not surprisingly perhaps, communication across levels of analysis tends to be both difficult and rare. What excites the attention of investigators at one level of analysis may well be invisible at other levels. One can study attitudes at a fundamental information processing level of analysis (e.g., spreading activation networks in memory) without ever referring to work on social or personality functions of attitudes. Conversely, one can study linkages among personality, institutional, and ideological variables without
ever referring to the elementary information processing operations that
underlie these phenomena.

My most general goal in this chapter is to encourage communication
across these traditionally compartmentalized levels of analysis. My research
program on the cognitive structure of policy reasoning illustrates some of the
ways in which such communication can be encouraged. The research
originally focused on a long-standing issue in political psychology: the
nature of the relationship between political ideology and cognitive style.
Are some political groups predisposed to reason in more one-dimensional,
dogmatic, and absolutist ways than other political groups? And, if so, why do
such relationships exist? In the course of investigating this issue, it was
necessary to reformulate the question several times (for the relationships
between the content and structure of political thought depend on a variety
of contextual variables). It was also necessary to draw on a combination of
research methods (including content analysis of archival documents and
laboratory experimentation) in studying these complex relationships. Finally,
the task would have been hopeless if we had restricted the range of
theory-derived hypotheses to only one major intellectual tradition. A
comprehensive account of the data needs to take into account an awkward set of
findings—some of which indicate the existence of fairly stable individual
differences in styles of political reasoning, others of which indicate the
capacity of many people to shift their styles of political reasoning in
response to different issues and features of the social-political situation
confronting them.

This chapter sketches the evolution of my work on the linkages between
cognitive style and political ideology. It begins by describing the traditional
personality perspectives on this issue: the rigidity-of-the-right and ideologue
hypotheses. Although each perspective illuminates important aspects of
the relationship between cognitive style and political ideology (main
effect relationships), each blinds us to other equally important facets of the
relationship between these two classes of variables (in particular, the exist-
tence of ideology-by-issue and ideology-by-political-context interactions
in styles of reasoning). The chapter reviews recent archival and laboratory
research and advances a functionalist framework for organizing the findings
that have emerged from these studies. From this functionalist perspective,
how people think about political issues is only in part the product of
reasonably stable (cross-issue, cross-context) personality dispositions. How
people think about political issues is also powerfully shaped by the fun-
damental values they are trying to advance in particular policy domains, by
the degree of conflict or tension among those values, and by the role and
accountability relationships within which they must work.

EARLY PERSONALITY RESEARCH ON COGNITIVE
STYLE AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

People obviously vary widely in the political views that they endorse. Less
obviously people also vary widely in their styles of thinking about political
issues. For instance, some people rely on a few broad principles or general-
izations in interpreting events, reject inconsistent evidence, and have little
tolerance for alternative viewpoints. Others interpret events in more flex-
ible, multidimensional ways, actively seek out novel or counterattitudinal
evidence, and attempt to develop perspectives on policy problems that
integrate a wide range of considerations and values (e.g. Lasswell, 1948;
Putnam, 1971; Rokeach, 1960; Suedfeld & Rank, 1976; Taylor, 1960; Tet-
lock, 1984).

Psychologists and political scientists alike have shown a great deal of
interest in the interrelations between content and stylistic dimensions of
political thought. Most of this work has been dominated by a "trait" concep-
tion of cognitive style. People, it is assumed, have relatively characteristic
modes of processing political information. The major research task has been
to clarify the relationships between these stable cognitive stylistic attributes
of individuals and the political views that they endorse.

Two points of view have dominated psychological speculation on this
subject: the rigidity-of-the-right and ideologue hypotheses. Both hypotheses
are grounded in functionalist assumptions concerning the usefulness of
particular styles of political reasoning for achieving individual or group
goals.

The rigidity of the right hypothesis derives largely from the path-breaking
work on the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson,
& Sanford, 1950). According to authoritarian personality theory, people
often develop extremely conservative political-economic opinions as means of
coping with deep-rooted psychodynamic conflicts. It is posited, for
instance, that ambivalence toward authority figures motivates people to
project their unacceptable hostile impulses onto out-groups toward whom
they then adopt punitive stances. In this view conservative attitudes fre-
quently serve ego-defensive functions. Individuals who identify with the
sociopolitical right are more likely than their centrist and left-wing counter-
parts to feel threatened by ambiguous or counterattitudinal information that
challenges their political worldviews (information that, by implication, also
challenges the elaborate network of defense mechanisms they have evolved
to cope with unconscious needs and conflicts).

Advocates of the ideologue hypothesis were quick, however, to note the
insensitivity of this analysis to "authoritarianism of the left" (Rokeach, 1960;
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Shils, 1956; Taylor, 1960). Differences in the content of left-wing and right-wing belief systems should not be allowed to obscure fundamental similarities in how ideologues organize and process political information. True believers of the left and right are more likely to view issues in rigid, dichotomous terms than are individuals who take less extreme or polarized political positions. In part, this relationship emerges because persons with simple, dogmatic cognitive styles are naturally drawn to belief systems that offer clear-cut causal analyses of what is wrong with society and clear-cut solutions to those problems. There is a special affinity between the cognitive structure of the individual and the cognitive structure of the political ideology. And, in part, this relationship emerges because extremist groups—in order to maintain in-group cohesion and identity in a hostile world—need to draw sharp ideological and group boundaries. In short, extremist groups need enemies.

Until recently, empirical work on this topic has been limited to the mass administration of personality and attitude scales to survey respondents or college students. Stone (1980) concluded in his review of the literature that the preponderance of the evidence is consistent with the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis and inconsistent with the ideologue hypothesis. He noted that across a variety of measurement instruments and subject populations, right-wing respondents appear more dogmatic, intolerant of ambiguity, and conceptually undifferentiated that their left-wing and moderate counterparts (e.g., Barker, 1963; McClusky, 1967; Neuman, 1981; Wilson, 1973). These findings do not, of course, indicate that there is no authoritarianism of the left (Eyseleck, 1981). They indicate only that in 20th-century Western democracies (e.g., Britain, United States, Sweden) certain cognitive stylistic traits occur more frequently among members of the public conventionally classified as being on the sociopolitical right.

Many of these studies suffered from serious methodological problems. One recurring problem is potential ideological or content bias in self-report measures of cognitive style. A strong case could be made that conservative answers to scales designed to measure dogmatism, moral development, and tolerance of ambiguity lead by definition to lower scores than do liberal answers (e.g., Johnson & Hogan, 1981). The relation between cognitive style and political ideology, from this standpoint, may be a tautology. A second objection concerns the range of political positions represented in most of the samples studied. The far right has typically included advocates of racial segregation, supporters of major restrictions on civil liberties, and radical militarists. By contrast, the far left has rarely included Marxists or doctrinaire socialists. Indeed, the far left has often not extended beyond advocates of welfare state liberalism and social democracy. Finally, a third objection concerns the seriousness of respondents' commitment to the political views that they endorse. Are respondents in mass samples expressing more than vague sympathies or antipathies toward groups and causes? Disconcerting doubts on this score are raised by the substantial impact of question-wording manipulations (Schuman & Presser, 1981) and of response sets (acquiescence and social desirability) on the political positions that people stake out for themselves.

Over the last 10 years, my research group has carried out a series of content analysis studies of the policy statements of political elites—United States Senators, Supreme Court Justices, British parliamentarians, Soviet Politburo members, among others. This line of work avoids many of the methodological objections raised to the personality-and-politics literature. The data analysis techniques employed—integrative complexity coding (Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967) and evaluative assertion analysis (Osgood, Sapiro, & Nunnally, 1957)—allow one to derive cognitive structural indices that are, by definition, independent of the content of the arguments analyzed. It is possible to advance conceptually differentiated or undifferentiated claims and support for opposite positions on the political spectrum (cf. Suedfeld & Bank, 1976; Tetlock, 1983a, 1984, 1985b). And it is relatively easy for archival investigators to access to articulate and influential advocates of a broad range of political positions. Moreover, the individuals under study are clearly not just expressing top-of-the-head questionnaire opinions; they have made major personal and professional commitments to particular ideological stands.

Before describing the results of these archival studies, it is appropriate to describe the content analysis technique most frequently used in the studies: the integrative complexity coding system. This coding system was originally developed for analyzing responses to a semiprojective test designed to measure individual differences in cognitive style (Schroder, Driver, & Streufert, 1967; Streufert & Streufert, 1978). The coding system is, however, a flexible one that can be applied to a wide range of archival documents, including policy statements, judicial opinions, speeches, and letters (Tetlock & Suedfeld, 1988). The coding rules define integrative complexity in terms of two cognitive structural variables: conceptual differentiation and integration. Differentiation refers to the number of evaluatively distinct characteristics or dimensions of a problem that are taken into account in decision making. For instance, a decision maker might analyze policy issues in an undifferentiated way by placing options into one of two value-laden categories: the "good socialist policies," which promote redistribution of wealth, and the "bad capitalist policies," which preserve or exacerbate inequality. A highly differentiated approach would recognize that different policies can have many, sometimes contradictory, effects that cannot be readily classified on a single evaluative dimension of judgment—for ex-
ample, effects on the size of the government deficit, interest rates, inflation, unemployment, the balance of trade, and a host of other economic and political variables.

Integration refers to the development of complex connections among differentiated characteristics. Differentiation is thus a prerequisite for integration. The complexity of integration depends on whether the decision maker perceives the differentiated characteristics as operating in isolation (low integration), in first-order or simple interactions (the effects of A on B depend on levels of C, moderate integration), or in multiple, contingent patterns (high integration). Common examples of integration include references to value trade-offs (e.g., how much unemployment are we willing to endure as a society in order to bring inflation under control?), attempts to explain why "reasonable people" view the same problem in different ways (e.g., which position you take on the abortion debate depends on the stands you take on a mixture of constitutional and medical issues), and recognition of the need to take into account the joint—not just the separate—impact of causal variables on an outcome (e.g., The Federal Reserve Board will be willing to risk recession and raise interest rates only if several unlikely contingencies simultaneously arise: continuing deterioration in the trade deficit combined with new signs of weakness in the dollar and the re-emergence of inflation in the domestic economy). And even then, the Federal Board may not act if it is an election year.

Integrative complexity is measured on a 7-point scale, with scores of 1 representing low differentiation and low integration, scores of 3 representing moderate differentiation and low integration, scores of 5 representing moderate differentiation and integration, and scores of 7 representing high differentiation and integration. Scores of 2, 4, and 6 represent transition points between adjacent levels (e.g., implicit differentiation through use of qualifiers, implicit integration through allusions to interactive causation or value trade-offs).

I summarize the major findings that have emerged from applying the integrative complexity coding system to the policy statements of a number of elite political groups. The first two studies yielded results highly consistent with the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis; the third study yielded results consistent with a modified version of the ideologue hypothesis. The remaining studies yielded results that are difficult to assimilate into either framework—results that reveal the relationship between cognitive structure and political ideology to depend on the social context (political role and accountability demands) and issue context (the types of values brought into conflict by a given policy problem).

EARLY SUPPORT FOR THE RIGIDITY-OF-THE-RIGHT HYPOTHESIS

Tetlock (1981b) reported the first of a series of studies of individual differences among United States senators in the integrative complexity of their policy statements. The primary goal of the study was to test hypotheses derived from McClosky's (1967) influential study of personality correlates of isolationist foreign policy sentiment in the American public. On the basis of three national surveys in the 1950s, in which a large battery of personality and attitude scales were administered, McClosky concluded that isolationists differed from nonisolationists on a variety of dimensions. Isolationists—particularly "jingoistic" ones who sought to insulate the United States from the rest of the world by overwhelming superiority of force—were more intolerant of ambiguity, closed to new experiences, prone to dichotomous (good-bad) forms of thinking, and likely to possess strong positive affect toward in-groups (patriotic Americans) and strong negative affect toward out-groups (foreigners, Communists). McClosky argued that psychodynamic processes similar to those hypothesized to underlie the authoritarian personality (Adorno et al., 1950) shaped the content and structure of isolationist belief systems. For instance, he proposed that the rigidly chauvinistic overtones in isolationism represented means of coping with severe inter-group conflicts and feelings of inferiority.

Tetlock (1981b) tested the generalizability of McClosky's psychological

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1Training coders to assess the integrative complexity of texts reliably is a fairly time-consuming process. Coders typically reach adequate levels of inter-rater agreement (r = .85) only after participating in a two- to three-week training workshop. Integrative complexity coding is, however, considerably less time-consuming than such content analysis systems as cognitive mapping (Axelrod, 1976) and evaluative assertion analysis (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). And integrative complexity scores are quite highly correlated with relevant cognitive structural indices derived from these other techniques (e.g., Levi & Tetlock, 1980; Tetlock, 1979, 1981b).

2A number of methodological precautions need to be taken in this type of archival research—precautions taken in all of the major studies discussed in this chapter. Perhaps the most obvious and elementary precaution is the employment of double-blind coding procedures. Coders should be unaware of the hypotheses being tested, and, to the extent possible, the sources of the materials coded. In scoring controversial material, it is also helpful to include coders in the research team from diverse political viewpoints and to check on potential ideological contamination of coding judgments by planting "test paragraphs" (simple and complex arguments in support of a broad range of political positions). It is useful to remind coders repeatedly that there is no necessary relationship between the structural complexity of an argument and its judgments of its moral or political appropriateness (a key theme of the complexity coding manual). It is not hard to find integratively complex advocates of positions, that, given contemporary political norms, are widely viewed as immoral (e.g., the complex arguments of antabortionists in pre-Civil War America or complex arguments of classical economic theorists in the early 19th century in opposition to aid for starving children). Nor is it hard to find examples of integratively simple statements that now provoke wide moral approval (e.g., simple arguments of those who opposed the appeasement of Nazi Germany in the 1930s or de jure segregation in the American South in the 1950s).
portrait of the isolationist to senators who held office in the 82nd Congress (1951–1952). Speeches of senators were subjected to both integrative complexity coding and a complementary coding technique—evaluative assertion analysis—for measuring the intensity of speakers' attitudes toward ingroup and outgroup symbols (see Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). Tetlock used the coding techniques to analyze randomly selected passages from foreign policy speeches of senators who had been classified, on the basis of Guttman scaling of their foreign policy voting patterns, as isolationist, ambivalent isolationist, and internationalist. The results strongly supported McClosky’s analysis. Isolationists were much less integratively complex than nonisolationists. Relative to nonisolationists, isolationists also evaluated outgroups more negatively and in-groups more positively. Ambivalent isolationists fell between these two groups. Discriminant analysis indicated that the content analytic indicators were powerful joint predictors of isolationist orientation. One highly discriminant function emerged that accounted for 41% of the total variance and permitted correct classification of 66% of the senators in the isolationist, ambivalent, and nonisolationist categories, against a chance accuracy of 37%.

McClosky thus appears to have been correct: isolationist sentiment in the early post–World War II period—among both elites and followers—seems to have been a posture of belligerency in international affairs, one that had “more to do with hostility against foreign nations and disavowal for the well-being of others than with the considered assessment of risks arising from foreign entanglements” (McClosky, 1967, p. 104). The isolationist relies heavily upon “dichotomous thought processes, that lack breadth of perspective and that seek to exclude whatever is different, distant, or unfamiliar” (p. 107).

A second study of senatorial rhetoric (Tetlock, 1983b) explored the relationship between integrative complexity and the overall liberalism-conservatism of senatorial voting records in the 94th Congress (1975–1976). The results were, once again, highly consistent with both the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis and previous work on personality correlates of conservatism. Senators with conservative voting records in the 94th Congress made less integratively complex policy statements ($\bar{X}=1.79$) than their moderate ($\bar{X}=2.51$) and liberal ($\bar{X}=2.38$) colleagues. This finding, moreover, remained highly significant after controlling for a host of potential confounding variables, including political party affiliation, education, years of service in the Senate, and types of issues discussed.

These results converge impressively with personality research that indicates right-wing members of the general public score higher than their moderate and left-wing counterparts on self-report measures of dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, and cognitive simplicity. Nonetheless, two problems complicate interpretation of the results. The first problem stems from the potential confounding effects of political role and the reliance on public policy statements. Conservatives were an out-of-power minority in both the 82nd and 94th Congresses. The lower integrative complexity of conservative policy statements may reflect a rhetorical strategy that legislative minorities use to rally opposition to governing factions (sharp, unqualified criticism—a “give ’em hell” approach). The greater integrative complexity of liberals and moderates may reflect a rhetorical strategy that dominant legislative coalitions use to justify the policies that they are enacting (complex rhetoric that weighs the pros and cons of competing proposals in order to take into account the interests of diverse constituencies).

The second problem stems from the limited ideological range of positions represented in the United States Senate. A defender of the ideologue hypothesis could argue that there were simply not enough representatives of the ideological left to provide a fair test of the hypothesis. In contrast to most advanced industrial societies, there is no influential socialist or communist party in the United States.

Some Support for the Ideologue Hypothesis

Tetlock (1984) conducted a study that provided a stronger test of the integrative complexity/political ideology relationship than the earlier work on senators. The raw data consisted of confidential, in-depth interviews that the political scientist Robert Putnam (1971) conducted with 93 members of the British House of Commons. There is good reason to believe that strategic political motives exerted much less influence on what the politicians said in this setting than in more public settings such as press conferences or in parliament (see Putnam, 1971, for relevant evidence). The politicians interviewed were willing on numerous occasions to criticize their own party and even themselves in the course of the discussions. In addition, the politicians examined in this study represented a wider variety of ideological positions than exists in the United States Senate. The parliamentarians included extreme socialists (who favored nationalization of all major industries), moderate socialists (who favored limited public control of major industries), moderate conservatives (who favored limited deregionalization of industry), and extreme conservatives (who opposed any government intervention in the economy).

Coders rated the integrative complexity of statements randomly drawn from the interviews with the parliamentarians (Tetlock, 1984). The results revealed highly significant differences among the four ideological groups. Moderate socialists ($M=3.07$) discussed issues in more integratively complex terms than extreme socialists ($M=2.17$), moderate conservatives ($M=2.65$), and extreme conservatives ($M=1.97$). Moderate conservatives were more complex than extreme conservatives and extreme...
socialists. Extreme conservatives and socialists, the two groups most dissimilar in the content of their political beliefs, had the most similar levels of integrative complexity. These relationships between political ideology and integrative complexity remained highly significant after controlling for a variety of background variables as well as belief and attitudinal variables assessed in the Putnam research.

In addition to its relationship to political ideology, integrative complexity was correlated with a host of overlapping cognitive stylistic variables assessed in the original Putnam (1971) research. From these correlations emerges a more detailed portrait of the integratively complex politician. The more integratively complex the politician, the more likely he or she was to: (a) de-emphasize the differences between the major political parties, (b) be tolerant of opposing viewpoints, (c) think about issues in relatively nonideological terms, and (d) be unconcerned with assigning blame for societal problems. In short, integrative complexity was associated with a pragmatic, open-minded and nonpartisan world view.

These results appear at first glance to vindicate advocates of the ideologue hypothesis. When the confidential statements of politicians from a broad spectrum of ideological positions were analyzed, we found that extremists of the left and right were very similar to each other in their styles of reasoning, but very different from individuals closer to the center of the political spectrum. The ideologue hypothesis still, however, leaves important questions unanswered. Why is the point of maximum integrative complexity consistently displaced to the left of center? Why are liberals generally more integratively complex than conservatives in the United States Senate? Why are moderate socialists more integratively complex than moderate conservatives in the British House of Commons? The ideologue hypothesis is not explanatory, but rather descriptive. It simply asserts that as one departs from an ill-defined political center of gravity, one is increasingly prone to view issues in simple, dichotomous terms. What determines where this mysterious midpoint lies? Why are liberals and moderate socialists apparently closer to it than conservatives? Why was it necessary to go as far out to the political left as radical socialists to observe a marked decline in the integrative complexity of thought?

A VALUE PLURALISM MODEL
OF IDEOLOGICAL REASONING

Both the rigidity-of-the-right and Ideologue hypotheses assume that it is possible to map multidimensional political belief systems onto a unidimensional left-right measurement scale. Such mapping exercises can, of course, be done, but the price in loss of knowledge is substantial. People try
to achieve a wide range of objectives through political action—objectives that often do not correlate nearly as highly as one would expect if one assumed that people structure their thought along conventional ideological lines (cf. Converse, 1964; Lane, 1973). It is not hard, for example, to identify people (including policy elites) who are liberal on social welfare policy but conservative on defense, conservative on social welfare policy but liberal on defense, or liberal or conservative across the board except, say, on environmental protection and civil liberties issues. Researchers ignore this multidimensional variation at their peril. As we shall see in a later section on ideology-by-issue interactions, the relationships between integrative complexity and political ideology take quite different forms in different issue domains.

Equally problematic, it is often unclear how to define the left-right continuum in non-Western political systems. For instance, Tetlock and Loeb (in press) have noted the enormous problems that arise in applying the rigidity-of-the-right and Ideologue hypotheses to the Soviet Union. They found that reformist Soviet politicians (advocates of at least limited political liberalization and economic decentralization) tended to be more integratively complex than traditionalists (opponents of these measures). This finding could be construed as support for the Ideologue hypothesis. Traditionalists, it could be argued, represent the extreme left, which resists the introduction of market mechanisms and individual incentives into the centrally planned Soviet economy; reformers, it could be argued, represent the right, which is willing to compromise orthodox Marxist-Leninist principles in order to stimulate economic efficiency, entrepreneurial initiative and individual creativity (an effort to achieve some form of mixed economy). As one moves toward the center from the far (rigid-state-control) left, one discovers greater integrative complexity. Alternatively however, this same finding could be construed as support for the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis. It could just as plausibly be argued that Soviet traditionalists, like American conservatives, are more likely to be authoritarian personalities who are deeply committed to traditional in-group symbols and to recent attempts to tamper with fundamental systemic values (e.g., the Protestant or socialist work ethic, law and order, free enterprise or central planning, support for free world or progressive regimes abroad). As one moves from the center toward the right (more ethnocentric, nationalistic, forms of ideology), one discovers less integrative complexity.

To avoid conceptual conundrum of this sort, we need a theoretical model that satisfies three key requirements. First, the model should not force political belief systems into a simple, one-dimensional classification scheme. The model should allow for the possibility that advocates of different viewpoints reason in more or less complex patterns in different issue domains. Second the model should not be limited to descriptive corre-
lational hypotheses (e.g., as one moves in this or that direction on an attitude continuum, integrative complexity of reasoning rises or falls). The model should focus on the underlying social-cognitive processes that shape the complexity of political thought. Third, the model should yield reasonably specific predictions concerning the forms complexity-ideology relationships will take in different issue domains and political systems. The model should, in brief, be simultaneously subtle and falsifiable.

The value pluralism model of ideological reasoning is an attempt to fill this theoretical void. The model can be summarized in the following two general sets of propositions: (a) Underlying all political ideologies are core or terminal values (Lane, 1973; Rokeach, 1973, 1979) that specify what the ultimate goals of public policy should be (e.g., economic efficiency, social equality, individual freedom, crime control, national security). Ideologies vary not only in the types of values to which they assign high priority (Rokeach, 1973), but also in the degree to which high priority values are acknowledged to be in some degree of tension or conflict with each other. In monistic ideologies high priority is attached to only one value or set of values that, it is claimed, are highly consistent with each other. In pluralistic ideologies high priority is attached to values that are acknowledged to be in frequent, even intense, conflict with each other. Important values often point in opposite policy directions (e.g., "I value social equality, but dislike paying for it through taxes," "I want to protect the environment, but don't want to slow economic growth."). (b) Advocates of the more pluralistic ideologies should exhibit more integratively complex styles of reasoning. This prediction is based on Abelson’s (1959, 1968) influential work on the strategies people use for resolving cognitive inconsistency in belief systems. Abelson maintained that, whenever feasible, people prefer modes of resolving cognitive inconsistency that are simple and require minimal effort. (People, in this view, are "cognitive misers"; Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Simple modes of resolving inconsistency are feasible when the conflicting values activated by a policy choice are of very unequal strength. It is then easy to deny the less important value and to bolster the more important one, a process that cognitive dissonance theorists have described as "spreading of alternatives."

By contrast, simple modes of inconsistency reduction are much less practical for advocates of pluralistic ideologies. When conflicting values are of approximately equal strength, denial of one value and bolstering of the other are much less plausible coping strategies (Abelson, 1959, 1968). People must turn to more effort-demanding strategies such as differentiation (e.g., distinguishing the impact of policies on conflicting values) and integration (developing rules or schemata for coping with trade-offs between important values). For instance, in domestic policy debates, liberals and social democrats are most committed to the often conflicting values of social equality and economic freedom (see Rokeach, 1973, 1979). They are therefore under the greatest psychological pressure to take into account the effects of policy proposals on both values as well as to develop guidelines or criteria for finding appropriate compromises between the two values (compromises that may, of course, have to take different forms in different economic and political circumstances).

To summarize, the value pluralism of an ideology determines both the frequency with which people experience cognitive inconsistency and the complexity of the strategies they rely upon to cope with inconsistency. A value pluralism analysis of the complexity-ideology relationship has several noteworthy advantages. It not only helps to explain existing data; it leads to a variety of novel and testable theoretical predictions—a number of which have subsequently been supported.

With respect to existing data, the value pluralism model is well positioned to explain why several studies have found that advocates of centrist and moderate left-wing causes tend to interpret issues in more integratively complex ways than do advocates of conservative causes. Evidence from survey studies of the general public and from content analyses of political writings suggests that advocates of centrist and moderate left-wing causes are more likely to attach high importance rankings to values that often come into conflict in public policy debates. They are likely to value both social equality and economic freedom, economic growth and environmental protection, crime control and civil liberties, and deterring “Soviet encroachment” and maintaining good working relations with that country. From this standpoint, the point of maximum integrative complexity is often displaced to the left of center because that is the point of maximum value conflict, at least on many issues.

The value pluralism model also clarifies how far to the sociopolitical left or right one must go for integrative complexity to decline: to the point where conflict between core values begins to diminish sharply. For instance, in domestic policy debates, one would expect to—and actually does—find a sharp reduction in integrative complexity as one moves from moderate socialists (who, according to Rokeach, 1973, place nearly equal importance on freedom and equality) to extreme socialists (for whom concern for equality seems to dominate concern for individual economic rights). Similarly, one would expect to—and one does—find a reduction in integrative complexity as one moves from moderate socialists to moderate conservatives (for whom economic freedom is a dominant value) to extreme conservatives (for whom economic freedom is the overwhelmingly dominant value).

Although the value pluralism model can account for existing data on ideological “main effects” in integrative complexity, the model strongly implies that traditional trait analyses of the complexity-ideology relationship are of only limited usefulness. We should not assume that certain ideological groups will always be more integratively complex than other
groups; rather, we should expect ideology-by-issue and ideology-by-situation interactions in the integrative complexity of styles of reasoning.

IDEOLOGY-BY-ISSUE INTERACTIONS IN INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY

One key determinant of the feasibility of simple modes of resolving value conflict is the degree to which the policy domain under discussion activates conflicting values of approximately equal strength. And value conflict may well be most intense in different issue domains for different ideological groups. For instance, in the 1980s, American conservatives may experience their most intense value conflicts over such issues as defense spending (e.g., national security vs. fiscal restraint) or compulsory military service (e.g., national security vs. individual liberty). Liberals may experience their most intense value conflicts over such issues as redistributive income policies (e.g., equality vs. economic efficiency).

Two studies have revealed support for ideology-by-issue interaction predictions of the value pluralism model. In one study, Tetlock, Bernzweig, and Gallant (1985) examined the relations between integrative complexity and political ideology among United States Supreme Court justices who served on the Court between 1946 and 1978. The study assessed the integrative complexity of opinions that each of 25 justices authored (or at least put their names on) as well as the liberalism-conservatism of each justice's voting record on civil liberties and economic cases (Tate, 1981). Consistent with past work on senators, justices with liberal and moderate voting records exhibited more integratively complex styles of reasoning than did justices with conservative voting records. However, these relationships between integrative complexity and political ideology were more powerful on cases involving economic conflicts of interest (e.g., labor versus management, business versus government) than on cases involving civil liberties issues (e.g., due process and First Amendment questions). Tetlock et al (1985) argue that civil liberties issues were more likely to activate shared elite values—common to both liberals and conservatives—such as constitutional protections for freedom of speech and press and due process of law (see McClosky and Ill, 1983 for supporting evidence). The competing ideological groups were less likely, therefore, to experience differential value conflict on these issues. By contrast, much less value consensus existed on the economic conflict of interest cases (see Chung, McClosky, & Zaller, 1985). Good reasons exist, moreover, for suspecting value conflict in this policy domain to be more intense for liberals than for conservatives (a policy domain that frequently activates conflicts between private economic interests and redistributive ones).

In a second study, Tetlock (1986) obtained much more direct experimental evidence for the hypothesized role of value conflict in promoting integratively complex thought. Two types of information were collected from a nonelite (college student) sample: (a) subjects' rank order evaluations of the importance of each of 18 terminal values from the Rochach Value Survey (values included national security, natural beauty, economic prosperity, equality, and freedom); (b) subjects' support for six public policy positions and their thoughts on each issue (e.g., redistributive income policies, domestic CIA activities, defense spending). Each of the public policy issues had been selected on the basis of pretest scaling data indicating that the issue clearly brought two values from the Rochach Value Survey into conflict (e.g., the defense spending question was phrased in such a way as to activate tension between the values of national security and economic prosperity). On five of six issues, a significant trend was found for people to report more integratively complex thoughts to the degree the issue domain activated conflicting values that people held to be: (a) important in their value hierarchy; (b) close to equally important. This study reveals that issue-to-issue variation in integrative complexity is not random, but a lawful function of the intensity of value conflict activated by the issue domain.

POLITICAL ROLES AND INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY

Intensity of value conflict is a major, but not the only determinant of the integrative complexity of people's reasoning about a policy domain. For instance, political roles appear to exert an important influence. Some roles seem to encourage integrative complexity; others, integrative simplicity.

A particularly powerful variable in this regard is the distinction between being "in power" (the policymaking role) and "out of power" (the opposition role). Governing a country—developing policies one actually expects to implement—is generally a more integratively complex task than opposing the government. The policymaking role inevitably requires making unpopular trade-off decisions (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Thirio, 1980) that, in most societies, must be justified to skeptical constituencies motivated to argue against the positions one has taken (e.g., explaining to various interest groups why it was not possible to satisfy all of their conflicting demands). Integrative complexity is needed both at the level of private thought (to work out viable compromise policies that at least partly satisfy major constituencies) and at the level of public rhetoric (to develop cogent two-sided appeals that sensitize antagonized constituencies to the complexity of the policymaking role) (see Tetlock, 1983a).
Far fewer pressures exist on opposition politicians to think or speak in integratively complex terms. The mass electorate possesses little knowledge of major policy issues and little motivation to think carefully about political messages or to defend the government (see Kinder & Sears, 1985; Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986). The essence of the opposition role is to rally antigovernment sentiment — a goal that is most effectively achieved not by eviscerating "on the one hand" and "on the other" rhetoric, but rather by constructing easily understood (integratively simple) and memorable attacks on the government. In the opposition role, one is free to fault, to focus selectively on the shortcomings of proposals advanced by those in power and on the advantages of one's own proposals.

Several studies support the claim that the policymaking role encourages integrative complexity. Suedfeld and Rank (1976), for instance, observed that revolutionary leaders (from several nations) made more integratively complex statements after coming to power than before coming to power. Perhaps even more telling, Suedfeld and Rank (1976) also found that revolutionary leaders who retained power in the postrevolutionary period were much more likely to display such upward shifts in integrative complexity than were leaders who fell to retain power. Tetlock (1981a) observed a similar upward shift in the integrative complexity of policy statements that American presidents issued during election campaigns and immediately after coming to power (postinauguration). Most 20th-century presidents apparently have believed that, although integratively simple rhetoric is useful for rallying popular support during elections, it is politically prudent to present issues in more integratively complex terms once they have assumed office. Tetlock, Bernzweig, and Gallant (1985) found evidence for the "in-power/out of power" complexity shift among (life-tenured) justices of the United States Supreme Court. Judicial opinions for the majority (which thus have the force of law) tended to be more integratively complex than dissenting or minority opinions. And Tetlock and Boettger (in press) have recently reported that reformist Soviet politicians have become more integratively complex since Gorbachev and his political allies gained working control of the Politburo and Central Committee of the Communist Party—an event marked by Gorbachev's appointment as First Party Secretary (see also Tetlock, 1988).

Transitions in political roles do not, however, affect all ideological groups equally. Tetlock, Hannum, and Micheletti (1984) examined the integrative complexity of liberal, moderate and conservative senators in five Congresses, three dominated by liberals and moderates (the 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses) and two dominated by conservatives (the 83rd and 97th Congresses). Tetlock and his colleagues found that liberals and moderates were more integratively complex than conservatives in the Democrat-controlled 82nd, 94th, and 96th Congresses, replicating the earlier Tetlock (1983b) findings. However, when the political balance of power shifted in favor of conservatives (e.g., in 1953 and 1981 with Republicans gaining control of both the Senate and the presidency), the complexity-ideology relationship disappeared. No significant differences existed in integrative complexity as a function of political ideology. Interestingly, this pattern was due to sharp declines in the integrative complexity of liberals and moderates in the Republican-dominated Congresses, not to an increase in the integrative complexity of conservatives. Conservatives displayed much more traitlike stability in integrative complexity both within and across Congresses.

In a similar vein, Tetlock and Boettger (in press) found that whereas reformist Soviet politicians increased the integrative complexity of their policy statements upon coming to power, traditionalist Soviet politicians were relatively unaffected by the power transition. Soviet traditionalists, like American conservatives, displayed more traitlike stability in their levels of integrative complexity across time.

These findings suggest an important qualification to the value pluralism model's prediction of greater integrative complexity among advocates of pluralistic as opposed to monistic belief systems. Advocates of pluralistic belief systems may present issues in more integratively complex terms only when they are forced, so to speak, by their political role to confront the tensions between basic values inherent in their ideological outlooks. Advocates of monistic belief systems, with their more internally consistent value systems, are relatively unaffected by shifts in political role. There is less potential value conflict that they can be forced to confront.

It should also be noted that the archival evidence on links between political roles and integrative complexity is highly consistent with recent experimental evidence on the effects of accountability on complexity of reasoning. The policymaking role is a high-accountability role. One can be called upon to justify what one has done by a variety of constituencies. One is, moreover, potentially accountable not only for the short-term consequences of one's policies, but for the (more unpredictable) long-term consequences as well. The opposition role is a low-accountability role. One has the rhetorical freedom to focus single-mindedly on the flaws in the position of the other side. Experimental data suggest that the types of accountability created in policymaking roles are indeed likely to promote integratively complex reasoning by subjects on policy issues (see Carnevale, 1985; Tetlock, 1983a, 1983c, 1985b; Tetlock & Kim, 1987). Accountability, especially to unknown or multiple constituencies, encourages subjects to engage in "preemptive self-criticism" in which they try to anticipate objections to the policy stands they have taken. This flexible cognitive response can be viewed as an adaptive strategy to protect one's self or social image as a competent, thoughtful being ("I'm no fool. I may believe this, but I'm aware of these counterarguments"). By contrast, subjects in low accountability roles tend to rely on integratively simple pro-
cessing rules that permit them to make up their minds quickly, confidently and with relatively little mental effort. The price of cognitive economy can, however, be steep. Subjects in low accountability roles are much more susceptible to judgmental bias. They are too quick to make personality attributions on the basis of fragmentary and inconclusive evidence (Tetlock, 1985d), too slow to revise their opinions in response to new evidence (Tetlock, 1983c), and excessively confident in the correctness of their factual judgments and predictions (Tetlock & Kim, 1987).

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE NEED FOR A FLEXIBLE FUNCTIONALIST FRAMEWORK

The data reviewed in this chapter can be viewed from a wide range of theoretical perspectives. There is something for almost everybody. Advocates of authoritarian personality theory can point to the frequently replicated and powerful relationship between integrative simplicity and political conservatism. They can also point to the greater traitlike consistency of conservative thought. Advocates of the ideologue hypothesis can note the cognitive stylistic similarities between extreme conservatives and socialists in the British House of Commons. Role theorists and symbolic interactionists can note that how people think about political issues depends on the institutional role they occupy and the political balance of power. Advocates of the value pluralism model can note that how people think about political issues depends on the degree to which issues bring important values into clear conflict with each other.

Given the range of findings reported here, it is tempting to agree with McGuire's (1983) radically contextualist perspective on theory-testing in social psychology. All hypotheses, he argues, are under some conditions true. Research is a "discovery process to make clear the meaning of the hypothesis, disclosing its hidden assumptions and thus clarifying the circumstances under which it is false" (McGuire, 1983, p. 7). From this standpoint, work on the links between cognitive style and political ideology has been successful in illuminating boundary conditions for the applicability of the rigidity-of-the-right and ideologue hypotheses. Both hypotheses highlight certain interesting empirical regularities but blind us to others—in particular, to the impact of value conflict, political role, and accountability demands on political thought. Many people (although not all) display styles of political reasoning that are much more responsive to situational demands than these personality-trait perspectives led us to expect.

What kind of theory can explain all of the data? My current nomination would be for an updated version of the classic functionalist theories of Smith, Bruner, and White (1956) and Katz (1960). From a functionalist perspective, the key theoretical question is: Of what use to a person is a particular pattern or style of political reasoning? It is possible to organize existing research findings by invoking a fairly small number of functionalist postulates:

1. All other things being equal, people generally prefer integratively simple styles of political reasoning. Integratively simple reasoning requires relatively little mental effort (people are assumed to be "cognitive misers"), and makes few emotional demands (it does not require acknowledging painful value trade-offs). These straightforward assumptions help to explain why integrative complexity scores tend to be so positively skewed (it is not unusual for 50% or more of the assigned scores to be at the lowest scale value).

2. People can be motivated to think in integratively complex ways. Integratively complex reasoning is especially useful in coping with intrapsychic, interpersonal and political conflict. The value pluralism model, for example, suggests that complex reasoning is a quite common coping response to policy problems that clearly bring important values in conflict (e.g., lives vs. economic growth, liberty vs. crime control). Work on political roles and accountability suggests that complex reasoning is quite common when people expect to be held personally responsible for the consequences of their actions or when people need to justify their actions to constituencies with unknown or conflicting policy preferences.

3. Individual differences exist in thresholds for the activation of integratively complex coping responses. Some individuals—in both archival and experimental settings—show remarkably little variability in the integrative complexity of their political reasoning. These highly consistent individuals also tend to have low average scores on the scale complexity and to be extremely conservative. Other individuals show a great deal of variability in the integrative complexity of their reasoning. These individuals modify (whether consciously or not is unclear) the complexity of their reasoning in response to the value conflicts activated by the policy problems they confront and in response to the political demands of the roles they occupy.5

5These findings obviously raise as many questions as they answer. Do psychodynamic theories help to explain the apparent cognitive rigidity of extreme conservatives (e.g., insecure individuals feel particularly threatened by ambiguity and hence rely on integratively simple coping responses)? Or are more parsimonious sociocultural or information-processing explanations available? Do impression management theories (e.g., work on self-monitoring) help to explain the strategic ease with which many centrists and moderate reformers adjust the integrative complexity of their rhetoric? Or are these findings better explained by noting the complexity of the belief and value systems of such individuals and the often intense role conflicts with which they must cope? Much work clearly remains to be done.
The list of functionalist themes invoked here is by no means exhaustive. Other motives—for example, concern for cognitive mastery or for protecting one's self or social image—undoubtedly play important roles in shaping how people think (Tetlock, 1985a). The various functional goals also come into conflict with each other. Minimization of mental effort quickly collides with the goal of finding integratively complex solutions to policy problems that satisfy opposing internal values or external constituencies. Maintaining psychological equilibrium in an authoritarian personality may often make it difficult to accept the accommodations and trade-offs necessary to achieve other personal or social goals. It is certainly reasonable to expect a functionalist theory of political thought to be both more comprehensive in specifying motives and more precise in specifying interrelations among motives than I have been here. I have simply sketched the general form that a functionalist explanation of the data will probably have to take.

Finally, it is appropriate to close with a warning. McGuire's contextural perspective reminds us not to grow too attached to our theories. The first-order interactions of today can easily become the second- or higher-order interactions of tomorrow. Research to date has revealed that the complexity-reduction relationship depends on the intensity of value conflict activated within an issue domain and on one's social-political role. Future research may well show that increased integrative complexity of thought is by no means the only possible coping response to intense value or political conflict. Some people may respond by rigid, defensive bolstering, denial or procrastination (Janis & Mann, 1977; Tetlock, 1985c). Future research may reveal that in some political contexts, extremism is associated with greater cognitive flexibility and multidimensionality than centrism. And future research may reveal that in some political contexts, opposition factions display more integratively complex patterns of reasoning than do ruling factions. The functionalist perspective per se is not testable. It is possible to generate post hoc functionalist explanations for any finding. The functionalist perspective is, however, heuristicly provocative—it leads to new ways of thinking about the content, structure, and adaptability of political thought. And, perhaps most important, the functionalist perspective is sufficiently flexible to accommodate the complex, context-dependent relationships that so frequently emerge in this line of inquiry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Preparation of this chapter was assisted by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health (RO1 MH139942A) and the MacArthur Foundation.

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