

# 11 Liberal and conservative approaches to justice: Conflicting psychological portraits

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Political philosophers have advocated a wide range of interpretations of justice: from the extreme libertarian to the extreme egalitarian to various compromise or value pluralism positions (e.g., Ackerman, 1980; Barry, 1989; Buchanan, 1975; Nozick, 1974; Rawls, 1971; Walzer, 1983). The prescriptive conclusions these writers reach often depend on the psychological assumptions from which they start. Rawls (1971), for example, sees the just society as one in which the maximin principle (maximize the living standards of the worst off) guides policy – as long as this egalitarian objective does not violate the essential liberty of individuals. He arrives at this conclusion by arguing that people in the hypothetical “original position” (in which they know nothing about themselves or their future life prospects) would be extremely risk averse and would agree to enter into any social contract only if they were sure that society was committed to the maximin principle. People, in this view, want to be absolutely certain that they are not assigned to the bottom rung of a social order that is indifferent or hostile toward their fate. By contrast, Nozick (1974) sees the just society as a libertarian one in which the powers of the state are limited largely to protecting individual rights and enforcing contracts. He arrives at this conclusion by positing the primacy of Lockean property rights and personal freedom – self-evident truths, to paraphrase the authors of the U.S. Constitution. People, in this view, want a social order that allows them to keep what they earn (through legitimate transfers of wealth) and to dispose of their holdings as they choose. Free individuals should be allowed to pursue their self-interest in free markets.

Psychological researchers tend to have humbler, more positivist, objectives than their philosophical colleagues. The goal has been not to lay down the ethical foundations for a just society, but rather to describe and explain

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how ordinary people reason their way through problems of social justice – problems such as how to allocate wages or public resources, how to remedy past injustices, or how to design fair procedures for resolving disputes. At first glance, this division of labor looks natural enough, with the political philosophers assigned to prescriptive tasks and behavioral scientists assigned to empirical and explanatory tasks. We shall argue here, however, that this division is far from airtight. Indeed, we fear that psychological approaches to justice may turn out to be as dependent on political assumptions as political philosophical approaches are dependent on psychological ones. The empirical conclusions that research psychologists draw may reflect – in no small measure – their own normative and political preferences. From this perspective, we should not be surprised that psychologists who subscribe to Kantian moral philosophy find Kohlberg's (1984) hierarchy of moral development quite persuasive (a scale in which rights-based reasoning is cognitively and morally superior to the trade-off reasoning of British utilitarianism) whereas psychologists who subscribe to utilitarianism reject the Kohlbergian approach. We should also not be surprised that liberals (mostly egalitarians in twentieth-century America) are more easily convinced than conservatives of the merits of unflattering psychological portraits of conservatives (and vice versa). In short, behavioral research on justice runs the risk of becoming an extension of the political struggle between left and right, a struggle waged with the conceptual and methodological weapons of scientific psychology.<sup>1</sup>

Our chapter explores this disturbing possibility by focusing on potential sources of political bias in justice research. Our argument consists of three parts:

(1) Initial assumptions in justice research are, for an assortment of reasons, profoundly influential.

(2) Most researchers are politically liberal and have explored the empirical implications of a politically quite circumscribed set of premises about human nature and the functioning of society.

(3) Our long-term scientific credibility hinges on our ability to give fair consideration to psychological hypotheses about justice that we find morally or politically objectionable.

As a corrective to ideological tunnel vision, we propose a taxonomy that highlights the wide range of political psychological assumptions from which testable hypotheses can be derived. Productive researchers could devote their entire careers to testing hypotheses drawn from each of the eight "psychological portraits" in the taxonomy: flattering and unflattering cognitive and motivational characterizations of liberals and conservatives.

### Initial assumptions matter

Science is supposed to be self-correcting. One deduces hypotheses from a theory, designs a study to test the hypotheses, and revises the hypotheses

in light of the data. This textbook account of the hypothetico-deductive method is, however, incomplete in many ways. Which hypotheses do we consider worth testing? Where do they come from? What methods do we adopt to test these hypotheses? What counts as a fair test? What alternative interpretations do we consider when unexpected data emerge? And when do we decide to reject not just a hypothesis, but the entire theoretical framework from which it was derived?

We agree with those philosophers of science who argue that initial assumptions play a key role at each of these choice points (e.g., Lakatos, 1970; Suppe, 1977). We also believe that behavioral research on justice is, if anything, especially vulnerable to the influence of initial assumptions. Most researchers come to the field with strongly held political convictions; these convictions generally favor egalitarian and social democratic causes; the professional review process has, on notable occasions, displayed a bias in favor of liberal perspectives on social controversies (for many examples, see Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1991); and finally, given the lack of standardized, widely accepted research methods and given the difficulties of replication in "soft psychology" (Meehl, 1978), there are plenty of opportunities for unintentional biasing of results at the level of the individual study. In brief, there are many reasons for expecting one's assumptions to exert an unusually strong influence on one's conclusions in this empirical domain.<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to generate concrete examples of how one's normative assumptions and preferences can influence the research process. In some cases, the influence is overt and heavy-handed. Sears and colleagues, for example, advance the theoretical argument that opposition to policies designed to increase racial equality (e.g., busing, affirmative action) is the product of hostility toward minorities that has been cloaked in the conservative rhetoric of self-reliance, law and order, and economic individualism (Kinder & Sears, 1981; Sears & Kinder, 1985). They call such opposition "symbolic racism" and typically operationalize the concept with attitude scales that assess support for government programs to assist minorities in various ways. As Sniderman and Tetlock (1986a) note, if one responds to these scales in an ideologically principled conservative or libertarian manner (i.e., opposes government programs), one is automatically labeled a symbolic racist. By operational fiat, conservatism becomes racism (we will later classify symbolic racism theory within our taxonomy as an unflattering motivational portrait of conservatism).

Initial assumptions can also influence empirical work in subtler ways. Considerable research in social cognition suggests that people, in a variety of settings, tend to exaggerate the importance of dispositional causes of behavior and to underestimate the controlling power of the situation (Jones, 1979; Ross, 1977). Drawing on this research literature, some justice researchers have suggested that one explanation for the conservative emphasis on individual responsibility for economic outcomes is the greater sus-

ceptibility of conservatives to the "fundamental attribution error". There is nothing tautological about this hypothesis; it is a testable proposition. As we shall see, however, it is not a straightforward matter to test this hypothesis in a value-neutral manner. To call a response tendency an error presumes that one knows what the true state of the world is (in this case, the relative importance of dispositional and situational determinants of poverty). To call a response tendency an error also presumes that one knows what people were trying to do when they made judgments of a particular sort. Conservatives may, for example, prefer dispositional explanations not because of cognitive shortcomings but because they fear the consequences of one type of attributional error (failing to hold people responsible for outcomes under their control) much more than the consequences of another attributional error (holding people responsible for something not under their control). This theoretical possibility has, however, been almost completely overlooked and we return to it later.

Political preconceptions can influence not only the hypotheses one considers, but also the research procedures one chooses to test those hypotheses. The judgments people make about the fairness of public policies are notoriously sensitive to how questions are posed (Tourangeau, Rasinski, Bradburn, & D'Andrade, 1989). What qualifies, however, as a neutral way of assessing people's attitudes toward taxation, income redistribution, affirmative action, or abortion? Should the question make salient the sacrifices required or the suffering attenuated? Whose sacrifices? Whose suffering? Should arguments and counterarguments be presented? If so, how should they be "calibrated"? There are obviously no right answers to these questions (Sniderman & Tetlock, 1986b). Suffice it to say that the best we can hope for is to sample in reasonably unbiased fashion from the "conceptual universe" of possible issue framings and arguments/counterarguments. What, however, does this conceptual universe look like?

### Toward a taxonomy of initial assumptions

If normative assumptions do influence justice research, and if most researchers show a preference for egalitarian and liberal assumptions, what can be done to restore theoretical balance in the field? Our proposed remedy is dialectical. We do not believe it is possible to eliminate the influence of initial assumptions, but we do believe that it is possible to balance one set of influences against another.

In this section of the chapter, we sketch eight possible sets of assumptions from which behavioral research on justice might proceed. These eight possibilities can be organized into a  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  contingency table: flattering and unflattering cognitive and motivational perspectives on liberalism and conservatism. We shall show that it is possible to construct radically different psychopolitical portraits of liberals and conservatives by drawing selectively on theoretical concepts and empirical findings in the psychological

and social science literatures. For instance, one could argue that the conservative emphasis on individual responsibility is due to the greater susceptibility of conservatives to the fundamental attribution error (an argument that we will classify as an unflattering cognitive portrait of conservatism). Or, one could argue that liberal concern for the poor reflects the greater capacity of this group for emotional empathy (a flattering motivational portrait of liberalism) or a greater tendency to envy the well-off (an unflattering motivational portrait).

Our goal is not, of course, to praise or stigmatize particular points of view, but rather to draw attention to the full range of psychological premises to be explored in studying justice. We also seek to highlight the moral and political implications of psychological explanations: Labeling conservatives as symbolic racists or as especially prone to the fundamental attribution error, for instance, implies the need for correction. Have we so conclusively eliminated alternative explanations that we feel comfortable equating conservatism with either a cognitive defect or social pathology? If we value our collective integrity as a science, we should be explicit about the logical and empirical justifications for attaching value-laden theoretical labels to political points of view (Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1991).

In categorizing initial assumptions, we not only distinguish sharply between liberalism and conservatism, we also treat "cold" cognitive and "hot" motivational processes as independent. Although the two categories of processes are best thought of as interdependent (Dweck & Legget, 1988; Sorrentino & Higgins, 1986; Tetlock & Levi, 1982), there is still heuristic value in distinguishing between them. It is also useful to distinguish between flattering and unflattering psychological portraits. Most of us would rather be viewed as rational and altruistic than as irrational (error prone or biased) and selfish. But even this seemingly straightforward distinction blurs on close inspection. Many policy positions that are superficially selfish or irrational can be plausibly presented in exactly the opposite light if we tamper with basic assumptions about individual motives or beliefs about the political workings of society. The same intellectual exercise can be put into reverse to challenge conventional thinking about policy positions that, on their face, are altruistic or rational. With these qualifications in mind, we present the psychopolitical portraits.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Flattering liberal portraits*

*Cognitive.* Liberals better understand the structural limits on upward mobility and control over one's fate and thus are less prone to commit the fundamental attribution error (cf. Ross, 1977; see also Pettigrew, 1979, on the "ultimate attribution error"). Liberals are also better able to put themselves in the place of the disadvantaged (cognitive empathy) and to see the pressures to turn to crime in a social system that simultaneously limits opportunities for economic advancement and places enormous cultural value

on material achievement (cf. Merton, 1968). Moreover, liberals do not rely excessively on simple heuristics such as representativeness and availability in making attributions for poverty: (1) They do not equate downtrodden or impoverished status with inherent unworthiness or inability; (2) they go beyond the most readily available attribution of individual responsibility for failure and make more complex and nuanced causal claims; (3) their judgments are less likely to be dominated by salient stimuli than those of conservatives. (See Fiske & Taylor, 1991, for detailed discussion of these cognitive mechanisms.) Finally, liberals have a deeper understanding of the long-term positive externalities of welfare measures: We all ultimately benefit when people are rescued from lives of crime, drug addiction, hopelessness, and dependency. Life need not be a zero-sum game.

Shifting from a primarily theoretical to a primarily empirical argument, there is both survey and content analytic evidence that liberals rely on more integratively complex cognitive strategies in reaching policy conclusions than do conservatives (Tetlock, 1989), suggesting liberals may be more tolerant of cognitive dissonance and willing to acknowledge that policymaking requires making painful trade-offs (e.g., crime control vs. liberty, efficiency vs. equality). There is also evidence from personality research that liberals receive higher scores on measures of tolerance of ambiguity and intellectual flexibility and lower scores on dogmatism (Stone & Schaffner, 1988).

*Motivational.* Liberals are more emotionally empathic than conservatives (Tompkins, 1962, 1963; see Stone & Schaffner, 1988). They experience the distress of the disadvantaged especially intensely and hence are especially motivated to help them. Moreover, liberals possess a greater sense of social responsibility to care for the less fortunate (see Berkowitz, 1972, on the norm of social responsibility). As a result, liberals will be primarily "altruists" or "cooperators" in interdependent settings (see Stone & Schaffner, 1988, who cite evidence that liberal ideology is "prosocial" and that the parenting styles of liberals foster prosocial behavior; see also McClintock, 1972; Messick & McClintock, 1968; for a relevant typology of social motives). Finally, liberals are more tolerant of deviant opinions and life-styles and willing to stand up for the basic democratic rights of widely disliked groups (McClosky & Brill, 1983; Sniderman, Tetlock, Gleser, Green, & Hout, 1988).

In a nutshell, liberals are less selfish and more empathic and tolerant than conservatives. Their fear of aiding the undeserving is outweighed by their fear of not helping the truly needy. And this emphasis on increasing equality and helping others is the result of humanitarian concern rather than fear of falling (risk aversion) or envious desire to bring the wealthy down (leveling). Liberals do not need to bolster their self-esteem by living in a stratified society in which they can claim superiority over this or that group; in social identity terms, liberals place all Americans – sometimes all

of humanity – within their in-group and try to improve the lot of lower status group members (cf. Lane, 1959) (or alternatively, group identities are simply of little concern to liberals, and they are a conspicuous exception to the generalization that people discriminate against out-groups; cf. Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1982). Finally, liberals do not blame the victim (Ryan, 1972) or make defensive attributions (cf. Shaver, 1970) that would lead them to conclude that the world is a just place where people deserve what they get and get what they deserve (Rubin & Peplau, 1975). Liberals acknowledge that fate can be capricious and that bad things can happen to good people (and vice versa).

*Flattering conservative portraits*

*Cognitive.* Conservatives understand not only the limits to advancement but also the possibilities of advancement. Conservatives realize the importance of incentives and that no, or little, aid is often the best help of all (i.e., welfare is a disincentive to taking responsibility for oneself; Murray, 1984; Wiseman, 1986). The conservative response to social problems avoids the simplistic first response of treating the symptom by creating a new and expensive government program. Indeed, the liberal “social welfare” cure is actually an example of the representativeness heuristic in that people with fewer resources are simply given more rather than addressing deeper causes. Conservatives appreciate that reactions to help are complex rather than uniformly positive and that help sometimes evokes resentment and feelings of incompetence (cf. Broll, Gross, & Piliavin, 1974; Depaulo & Fisher, 1980), and they do not fall prey to emotionally charged but often unrepresentative vivid information (i.e., they are less stimulus bound; see Nisbett & Ross, 1980) that would bias responses toward giving the quickest but perhaps not most effective form of aid. Furthermore, conservatives understand that although you will never be able to eradicate inequality (Hirsch, 1976), you may be able to improve the absolute standard of living for all; rather than worry about trading off equality and efficiency, you should look for ways to increase both. The best way to do this is by stimulating economic growth through market mechanisms (“a rising tide lifts all boats”), not political means that tend to decrease efficiency (conservatives understand the negative externalities of bureaucratic and political intervention on market operations) or legal means that are often slow and ineffective. Conservatives are aware that legislators often spend money carelessly and are motivated less by concern for the public good and more by concern for purchasing the goodwill of powerful special-interest constituencies who can advance their political careers (see Buchanan & Tullock, 1962; Friedman, 1962). In these senses, conservatives are more integratively complex than liberals because they understand how often well-intentioned political reforms have unintended consequences or perverse effects (see Hadari, 1989a,b; Hirschman, 1986).

Conservatives also appreciate the extraordinary resourcefulness of the individual. Ingenuity and determination can overcome enormous obstacles; entry into the marketplace by motivated workers will usually result, sooner or later, in socioeconomic progress (cf. Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Lane, 1959). Moreover, the marketplace rewards individual actions whereas the polity emphasizes group outcomes and will usually not acknowledge individual achievement (i.e., group members are equals) (see Lane, 1983, 1986). Political redistribution from an advantaged to a disadvantaged group does not ensure that the "right" people in the respective groups will be hurt or helped (i.e., the poorest of an advantaged group may lose the most and the poorest of a disadvantaged group may gain the least) (Beer, 1991).

Finally, conservatives understand how free markets work. Whereas liberals reflexively disapprove of the profit motive (a manifestation of greed), conservatives recognize that the invisible hand of free market competition leads in the long term to incentives to produce goods at levels of quality and quantity that satisfy effective demand for those goods. The alternatives of direct state control (central planning) or government regulation create perverse incentives that often simultaneously impede efficiency and exacerbate inequities (e.g., collectivized agriculture, rent control). This understanding of markets, moreover, increasingly cuts across national boundaries. Conservatives have become the principal (and principled) supporters of free trade among nations. Although one might conclude from superficial analysis that one weakens one's country by permitting "cheap imports" (arguing that it leads to unemployment, abandoned factories, and so on), conservatives can see beyond the obvious. In the long run, the concept of comparative advantage tells us that free trade reduces inflation (by allowing consumers access to lower-cost goods) and encourages the disappearance of uncompetitive domestic industries and their replacement by industries that are capable of succeeding in the global marketplace.

*Motivational.* Conservatives are willing to let the disadvantaged suffer temporarily in order to motivate them to do what is necessary to improve their lot in the long run. They are willing to think in a broad time frame when assessing the fairness of resource distributions within society. If reducing poverty is the common goal, then conservatives can delay their need for this type of gratification longer than liberals can (see Mischel, 1974, on correlates of capacity to delay need gratification). Also, conservatives are concerned that progressively greater reliance on political services will interfere with efficient market forces and seriously reduce the living standards of future generations. This reluctance to redistribute stems from a greater respect for the achievements and property rights of others ("they earned it, they should dispose of it as they see fit"). Conservatives, quite appropriately, believe in a "just world" (cf. Lerner, 1980; Rubin & Peplau, 1975): In general, people do get what they deserve in the economic realm;

to think otherwise is to place too little faith in individual control of circumstances. Conservatives relish the challenges of self-reliance.

*Unflattering liberal portraits*

*Cognitive.* Liberals rely on the representativeness heuristic in their misguided search for societal solutions to individual problems. They practice, in effect, a kind of social homeopathic medicine that treats symptoms rather than underlying causes (if people need money, housing, or medical care, then cure the need by giving it to them – cf. Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Unfortunately, liberals are oblivious to fundamental facts about the workings of political and economic systems (see Lipsett & Raab, 1978). Government programs rarely solve the problems they were intended to solve and invariably create a whole new set of problems that take on a life of their own. Once one creates a bureaucracy to serve a constituency (e.g., the bureaucracies that administer farm price supports, research grants, and welfare subsidies), two consequences follow: The constituency immediately develops a strong sense of entitlement (any programmatic cuts will be perceived as losses and protested vociferously) and the bureaucracy acquires a strong interest in perpetuating and expanding the program. It follows that it will be much easier to add than to subtract government programs. Liberals, however, are too shortsighted to appreciate the long-term societal consequences of proliferating programs designed to satisfy one “need” after another. They fail to take into account the growing burden on the economy and the perverse incentives that dependency on public programs creates.

Liberals may also be susceptible to mirror images of the cognitive biases of conservatives. They may be too quick to see people as victims of circumstance (chronically exaggerating the power of the situation and setting the stage for self-fulfilling prophecies of failure). It may often be adaptive (from both an individual and societal perspective) to be optimistic about one’s control over one’s destiny and one’s chances of success (Seligman, 1990; Taylor, 1990). Liberals may also be too slow to change their minds about the efficacy of government and prone to both theory-driven and wishful thinking when they argue that the more money one spends on public programs, the greater the collective benefits.

Liberals not only exaggerate the efficacy of government; they underestimate the creativity of the free market. Many liberals mindlessly condemn capitalism as a culture of greed and ignore the power of the market to stimulate hard work, investment, and entrepreneurship. They don’t think through the systemic implications when they evaluate the fairness of market transactions. To draw on the research scenarios of Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1986), liberals fail to see the useful economic-signaling functions served by allowing the merchant to raise the prices of snow shovels after a blizzard (encourages other stores to build up inventories next season to satisfy surges in demand), by allowing an employer to cut wages in response to a labor surplus (encourages people to go into other lines of

work where they are more needed), or by allowing a landlord to increase rents in response to a tenant surplus (encourages building of more rental units). Liberals can't see beyond the evidence of greed and the (temporary) suffering it produces.

*Motivational.* There is a kernel of truth in the "bleeding heart" stereotype. Many liberals base their policy recommendations on highly vivid and emotional, but not particularly representative or even informative, stimuli. Liberals' perceptions of inequity in society represent not veridical assessments of how the distribution came about but rather emotionally charged preconceptions about capitalism and meritocracy (which they consider exploitive, heartless, and so on). One should be careful, however, not to exaggerate the role that excessive emotionality and sympathy play in shaping liberal responses to social issues. Not all liberals are bleeding hearts. Many liberals are motivated less by compassion for the poor and more by a combination of self-interest and animus toward the rich. It is no coincidence in this view that liberals are overrepresented among net beneficiaries of government largesse (the poor, government employees, academics, and more) and government regulation (unions). To appreciate how shallow the liberal commitment to the poor is, we need only consider the position that many liberal elites take on free trade. As soon as imports from poverty-stricken Third World nations threaten well-paying American jobs, they rally to support protectionist policies that will plunge those nations into even deeper misery. The driving motive behind many liberal positions is the desire to bring the wealthy down a notch or two, and to achieve this goal, liberals must speak of structural constraints and inequities that need to be redressed by redistribution.

Just as psychodynamic explanations for conservatism have received careful attention (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), so perhaps such explanations should receive equally careful attention for liberalism. For example, external attributions for failure in society may serve an ego-defensive function for liberals, protecting their self-esteem whenever they themselves experience failure (cf. Tetlock & Levi, 1982). In a similar vein, social and economic insecurity may motivate an emphasis on governmental welfare programs (Who will take care of me if I fall?). Liberalism, in this view, is a reflection of the widespread "psychology of dependency" in which government, by transference, takes on the role of the nurturant, powerful parent (Etheredge, 1989). A government that fails to take care of its people (i.e., children) has abdicated its most fundamental responsibility, and liberals react with bitter disappointment and anger.

#### *Unflattering conservative portraits*

*Cognitive.* Here we discover a formidable list of judgmental shortcomings. First, and most important, conservatives do not understand how prevalent situational constraints on achievement are and thus commit the fundamen-

tal attribution error when they hold the poor responsible for poverty. Simplistic use of judgmental heuristics underlies this error. Even if lack of initiative and marketable skills are the proximal causes of poverty, systemic forces (e.g., high unemployment, institutional racism, poor education) have produced these conditions and so are the true distal causes of poverty. Conservatives rely on a superficial analysis of the causes of social outcomes (see Baron & Hershey, 1988 on the "outcome bias"). Second, conservatives overgeneralize: From a few cases of poor persons who exploit the system, they draw sweeping conclusions about all poor persons; in this case welfare is erroneously seen as the problem, not the solution for the majority of the poor (cf. Nisbett & Ross, 1980). Third, by placing so much faith in individual effort and ability, conservatives evince the illusion of control (cf. Langer, 1975); chance happenings play a much greater role in success or failure than conservatives realize. People often do not control their destinies. Accidents, misfortunes, and disease strike down even the most deserving. Fourth, conservatives are too prone to engage in zero-sum thinking (either I keep my money or the government takes it). They fail to appreciate the possibility of positive-sum resolutions of societal conflicts. Fifth, conservatives fall prey to the omission bias (cf. Spranca, Minsk, & Baron, 1991; Baron, personal communication) that justifies the laissez-faire "minimal-state" view that, although we have a moral obligation to refrain from hurting others, we have no obligation to help others. Conservatives cling to the comforting moral illusion that there is a sharp distinction between allowing people to suffer and making people suffer. Finally, conservatives fail to recognize that even if each transaction in a free market meets their standards of fairness (exchanges between competent adults who have not been coerced or tricked into contracts), the cumulative result could be colossally unfair. Some people will acquire enormous power over others. Our judgment of the fairness of the systemic whole should not be reduced to the individual transaction parts. Freedom for big fish is tyranny for little fish.

*Motivational.* Conservatives react with anger and contempt toward the poor whom they blame for their predicament (see Tompkins, 1962, 1963; cf. Weiner, 1980). These feelings lead conservatives to be punitive and stingy toward the disadvantaged (Skitka & Tetlock, 1992). Conservatives are selfish, competitive, and individualistic in their social motives (cf. Kuhlman & Marshello, 1975). They don't want to give up what they have and they certainly do not want their former possessions "redistributed" to people they consider to be either incompetent or lazy (free riders) or even evil. Conservatives do not identify the disadvantaged as members of their in-group and derogate the poor as members of an out-group, thereby promoting their own self- and social identities as superior (cf. Tajfel, 1982). Conservatives fear demands for equality because of the implications of those demands for their own standing and status (Lane, 1959).

The tendency of conservatives to distance themselves psychologically from the poor occurs even in ethnically and racially homogeneous societies. The tendency is all the stronger, however, when the poor are ethnically or racially "different." As a result of early socialization (emotionally cold and repressive family environment), conservatives are much more likely to have a lot of repressed hostility that they "displace" or "project" onto low-status out-groups. The more dissimilar the out-group, the more psychodynamically attractive it becomes for status-starved "authoritarian personalities" to devalue and stigmatize them (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981; Greenstein, 1975). Beyond such blatant old-fashioned prejudice, conservatism may also be deeply implicated in new, more subtle, forms of racism. Conservative values may "fuse" with resentment of minorities (to create "symbolic racism" – Kinder, 1986, or conservative values may merely mask or serve to justify hostility toward disadvantaged minorities (McConahay, 1986). Either way, conservatism and compassion are antithetical. Conservatives disparage the disadvantaged in order to justify the economic and psychodynamic status quo.

#### About the taxonomy and its purposes

##### *To illustrate the range of explanation*

We do not assume that these psychopolitical portraits are equally valid. Some portraits may capture the thoughts and feelings of only relatively few people, and then only under special conditions. The primary purpose of the taxonomy is to highlight the range of possible explanations, not to argue for any particular position. We also do not assume that most people can be easily pigeonholed into our taxonomic categories. Very few of us make judgments of fairness in a rigid syllogistic style in which we begin with a major ethical premise (maximize liberty or equality), apply that premise to a concrete situation (equality requires progressive taxation or liberty requires a flat-rate system of minimal taxation, and deduce a policy consequence (see Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock 1991). Most of us have a plurality of intuitions about fairness that can be primed by particular attributes of the proposals and evidence confronting us (Tetlock, 1986, on value pluralism). Accordingly, our judgments are highly sensitive to the particular context in which they are studied and to how they are studied (Tourangeau et al., 1989). As situational goals and relations shift, so do distributive norms (e.g., Fiske, 1990; Hochschild, 1981; Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1976; Prentice & Crosby, 1987; Schwinger, 1980). Minor alterations in research design can dramatically alter the acceptability of different distributions of wealth (Mitchell, Tetlock, & Mellers, 1991; see also Harris & Joyce, 1980, on the importance of research design in distributive justice research).

Elsewhere, we (Mitchell et al., 1991, p. 23) have proposed that judgments of social justice have a cybernetic component that leads to "predict-

able shifts in distributive strategies as different beliefs about justice and governance are primed" (cf. March & Olsen, 1989). In this view, people know they have had enough of a particular approach to distributive justice (e.g., egalitarianism or libertarianism) only when they have had more than enough. Each approach inevitably entails excesses that trigger public backlash (cf. Schlesinger, 1986, on the long cycles of American politics). As political conditions evolve, one would expect different aspects of justice to be emphasized and different psychological processes to be activated. One would also expect that, at various times and in various contexts, each portrait of justice sketched here should capture some significant slice of reality. For instance, unflattering portraits of liberals may be especially descriptive in the final stages of an egalitarian political-economic cycle (when those on the political left spend much of their time defending increasingly inefficient state programs that benefit increasingly narrow and not especially needy constituencies). Conversely, unflattering portraits of conservatives may be especially descriptive in the final phases of a laissez-faire political-economic cycle (when those on the political right spend much of their time trying to explain away massive inequalities). This line of argument suggests a rich array of micro-macro linkage hypotheses for future testing.

Of course, to argue that judgments of justice are context sensitive is not to argue they are completely context dependent. There are limits to the malleability of judgments of justice. People strongly object, for example, to income distributions that allow the poor to fall below the "poverty line," regardless of whether those at the bottom are there for reasons within their control (Alves & Rossi, 1978; Mitchell et al., 1991; Rossi & Nock, 1982; see also Scitovsky, 1986). Consider also that procedural fairness is a consistent concern across legal (Tyler, 1984, 1990), political (Tyler & Caine, 1981; Tyler, Rasinski, & McGraw, 1985), and managerial (Alexander & Ruderman, 1987; Folger, 1987; Folger & Bies, 1989; Folger & Konovsky, 1989) contexts. Thus, we are not arguing for the radical contextualist position that, given the proper set of circumstances, any conception of justice can be made to dominate. Again, our goal is to draw attention to the range of possible hypotheses, in the process encouraging caution in positing value-laden explanations that indiscriminately mix psychological theory and political preferences.

*To illustrate the political nature of the work*

In addition to highlighting the empirical complexity of justice, a further purpose of the taxonomy is to draw attention to the political nature of the study of justice. By dividing the psychological portraits along ideological and evaluative dimensions we can demonstrate that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to avoid political and moral issues in justice research. The difficulty is especially great, in part, because of the passions evoked in the investigators and, in part, because of the causal ambiguity and complexity

that shrouds key issues. For example, the questions of how best to fight poverty and to cope with the spillover effects of doing so have been topics of intense debate for centuries and do not at the moment appear close to resolution (Jencks & Peterson, 1991). As Himmelfarb (1991) notes, nineteenth-century Victorians argued just as vehemently as twentieth-century Americans over the comparative roles of structural factors and personal conduct as contributors to a large urban underclass. When the evidence comes from badly confounded natural experiments (the interpretation of which hinges on complex counterfactual conjectures: What would have happened if we had done X or Y instead of Z?), there is great leeway for both theory-driven information processing and self-fulfilling prophecies. The control groups "exist" only in the imaginations of the investigators. Under such conditions, many justice researchers have wisely decided that their task is not to evaluate the substantive validity of various beliefs but rather to map out these beliefs and their apparent effects.

Evaluating the rationality, morality, and accuracy of political positions is profoundly problematic. It places psychologists in the presumptuous role of claiming to know the true state of the political world. What are the causes of poverty, inequality, and tyranny? What goals should we individually and collectively strive for? What weight should we place on values that (at least sometimes) conflict: social equality versus economic efficiency and personal liberty versus state control? What are the likely long-term consequences of pursuing egalitarian policies (alleviating suffering, reducing class and racial tensions, oppressive regulations, stagnant economy . . .) or libertarian policies (squalor and deprivation for those who lack marketable skills, a surge of creativity and self-initiative that stimulates prosperity for all)? For our part, we do not believe psychologists have the answers to these questions.

Psychologists who claim to possess answers (at least implicitly by their value-laden characterizations of particular viewpoints) have in our view gone "too far." In part, they have gone too far by supposing that fundamental puzzles concerning the causes of poverty and prosperity have been solved, and solved in favor of the diagnosis preferred by egalitarians. They suppose that people who attribute poverty to personal attributes of the poor have made a mistake and that people who oppose government aid to minorities must be motivated by racial animus, not ideological conviction.

Even, however, if largely external attributions for poverty were shown to be correct (and the evidence is decidedly mixed – Jencks & Peterson, 1991), the evaluative labels attached to conservative positions would still be premature. Such labels would be premature for the simple reason that existing research has failed to explore what people perceive to be the moral and societal consequences of making particular attributional judgments. Liberals and conservatives may differ not only in their perceptions of poverty, but in the values they place on the logically possible attributional "hits" and "misses." Liberals may set a high threshold for holding some-

one responsible (fully culpable) for their conduct because they find the Type I error of incorrectly blaming someone much more distasteful than the Type II error of incorrectly exonerating someone. Conservatives may set much lower thresholds of proof because they hold the mirror-image values. Each side may justify its choice of threshold by invoking both factual claims that could, in principle, be tested (e.g., people can be motivated to work harder if they believe a stern state has little tolerance for situational excuses) and value-based claims that are not testable (e.g., it is morally right to hold people strictly accountable). By failing to test carefully the hypothesis that the conservative attributional style is rooted in moral preference, not cognitive defect, investigators who accuse conservatives of a fundamental error have themselves erred.

A much more egregious example of how political values can contaminate psychological research on justice is, as noted earlier, the symbolic racism tradition. Here, conservatism became racism by operational definition. If one opposes higher taxes or affirmative action to help minorities, or believes that minorities should rely less on government and more on themselves, one is, *ipso facto*, racist. This approach is methodologically suspect. By mixing conservative and racial themes in symbolic racism scales (a virtue in Kinder's, 1986, opinion), it becomes impossible to disentangle ideological and racist determinants of policy preferences (as, for example, Sniderman, Piazza, Tetlock, and Kendrick, 1991, have done in a series of experiments embedded in representative-sample surveys). Equally important, however, this approach raises the prospect of the complete politicization of the psychological research process. If researchers can advance an unflattering motivational portrait of conservatives by labeling conservative policy preferences as symbolically racist, then by the same epistemic ground rules, researchers can advance unflattering motivational portraits of liberals by labeling liberal policy preferences (support for government regulation of the economy, opposition to military intervention against left-wing insurgencies) as symbolically Marxist. The specter of such ideological warfare is perhaps the strongest argument for making serious efforts to distinguish sharply between psychological facts and political wishes. The big loser in this war would be our collective scientific credibility.

#### *To facilitate research*

This chapter has had a cautionary theme, emphasizing the threats of tunnel vision and political bias. The consistent refrain has been: "Be careful not to allow your normative preferences to restrict the hypotheses you consider or to influence the standards of evidence and proof you use in accepting or rejecting those hypotheses." We sketched relatively extreme psychological portraits both as a role-reversal exercise (How does it feel to see one's own political viewpoint subjected to psychological attack?) and

as an illustration of how political preconceptions can color initial judgments of the reasonableness of psychological hypotheses.

Yet on a more positive note, it should be recognized that the psychopolitical taxonomy can be a useful research tool. The taxonomy offers a scheme for organizing research and generating testable hypotheses (many of which we have laid out in particular portraits). One especially promising area of research is disentangling the perceptual/cognitive and motivational/affective roots of disagreement between liberals and conservatives illustrated in the taxonomy. Some generalization of the signal detection paradigm offers a means to differentiate these psychological processes across the political groups. One may conceive of the distribution process as a dichotomous choice of giving or not giving resources to a group. Four outcomes are possible in this distributive matrix: Resources are given to those who should receive them (either because of merit, need, or however the researcher operationalizes deservingness), resources are given to those who should not receive them (a Type I error), resources are withheld from those who should receive them (a Type II error), and resources are withheld from those who should not receive them.

One's response threshold along a deservingness continuum will depend on (1) one's aversions to the different types of errors (is a Type I error worse than a Type II error?) and (2) one's perceptions of the likelihood of the different errors. By manipulating the costs of the various errors, and the base rates for different states of the world, or by measuring dispositional aversions to errors and perceptions of base rates, one can assess how these components interact to affect distributive outcomes. Moreover, one can compare the distributive strategies of liberals and conservatives on these dimensions to judge how motivational and cognitive factors contribute to their respective distributive strategies and to differences across groups in distributive outcomes. Do conservatives and liberals differ primarily in their perceptions of how likely Type I versus Type II errors (subjective base rates) are or in the values they place on avoiding one or the other category of error? Are there distinctive subgroups within each ideological camp? Are error tolerance and subjective base rates causally connected? How do error tolerance and subjective base rates shift as one moves from one issue domain to the next (criminal justice, corporate liability, affirmative action, trade, taxation, and others)? It is worth emphasizing that one can answer such questions – and model political belief systems in rigorous ways – without taking any stand on the correctness or moral soundness of liberal versus conservative points of view.

In conclusion, the taxonomy can direct and facilitate research as well as remind us of the plurality of normative perspectives on justice. The two functions, moreover, are intertwined. As a group, psychologists are disproportionately (if not overwhelmingly) liberal and appear drawn to flattering portraits of liberals and unflattering ones of conservatives. This intellectual attraction is understandable but has unfortunate consequences.

Researchers have explored the empirical implications of some psychopolitical portraits much more thoroughly than others. Such selective sampling of starting assumptions may ultimately turn out to be a relatively harmless error. There may be little merit in the unflattering portraits of liberals and the flattering portraits of conservatives. We, however, are skeptical. What one finds in psychological research often hinges on what one is looking for and how hard one looks.

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#### Notes

- 1 Douglas and Wildavsky's (1982) cultural theory of political ideology leads us to expect psychological research on justice to become sharply politicized. This theory distinguishes four cultural world views that provide sharply discrepant answers to basic questions about human nature, the natural world, and the appropriate goals of social institutions. These answers, moreover, serve primarily to justify culturally prescribed ways of living: "Advocates of each way of life seek to develop views of human nature compatible with their preferred pattern of social relations" (Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990, p. 12). Individualists who uphold the invisible hand of free markets view people as unalterably self-centered. Only competitive markets can constructively channel this selfishness to promote the general good. Egalitarians who advocate aggressive government measures to redistribute wealth view people as fundamentally decent, but corrupted and perverted by repressive institutions, hence the need for radical transformation of those institutions. Hierarchists who favor an active societal role in perfecting human nature maintain that people are born bad (cognitively shortsighted, greedy, lustful, impulsive, lazy, etc.) but can be improved by creating institutions for monitoring and controlling social conduct (churches, courts, vanguard parties). Fatalists who are deeply skeptical of social engineering schemes of any sort view human beings as diverse and unpredictable.

If Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) are right, there will be a powerful temptation for psychologists to apply different standards of evidence and proof to findings that challenge rather than reaffirm their preferred cultural form of life. Insofar as psychologists are dispro-

portionately egalitarian (distrustful of capitalism) and hierarchist (believe that they know how to design institutions that will "improve" how people think and act), cultural theory suggests that a biased, even self-serving, view of human nature will emerge from their research.

- 2 Although we emphasize how starting assumptions can guide inquiry, we do not support extreme subjectivists who view scientific inquiry as just another cultural way of knowing. Some approaches to generating knowledge are manifestly superior to others. Heart transplants would never have been possible in a voodoo medical culture; genetic engineering, never possible in Lysenkoist biology; space travel, never possible in Aristotelian physics. Our quarrel is not with the scientific method or its extraordinary accomplishments; it is with biased, sometimes self-serving, applications of the method in behavioral and social science work on justice.
- 3 We seriously oversimplify the complexity of possible political positions by positing a liberal-conservative dichotomy in which (1) liberalism denotes support for state regulation of the economy (to protect the environment, consumers, victims of discrimination, workers, tenants, and more) and an active government role in redistributing income (through a combination of progressive taxation and social welfare programs); (2) conservatism denotes support for the principles of free-market economics (a reluctance to support government regulation) and a willingness to accept the social inequalities that arise from the operation of those principles (a reluctance to tax and to transfer wealth from one group to another). By these definitions, liberalism is moderate egalitarianism and conservatism is moderate individualism. A more nuanced and differentiated classification system would allow (1) continuous variation between liberal and conservative approaches to distributive justice; (2) identification of internal disagreements within the liberal and conservative camps. Such classification systems do exist. We could classify political viewpoints on the two continuous, roughly orthogonal, dimensions of personal liberty (subsuming such diverse issues as economic freedom, religious freedom, and sexual freedom) and social equality (subsuming such diverse issues as taxation, welfare spending, and affirmative action). Political advocates who value both liberty and equality might be labeled liberals or social democrats (egalitarians constrained by concern for liberty); advocates who value equality but not liberty might be labeled doctrinaire socialists; advocates who value liberty but not equality might be labeled libertarian conservatives; advocates who value neither liberty nor equality might be labeled authoritarian conservatives (cf. Rokeach, 1973; Tetlock, 1984, 1986). This classification system would allow us to identify different, perhaps qualitatively different, types of liberals and conservatives (e.g., radical egalitarians who are prepared to pursue equality no matter what the cost in liberty versus moderate egalitarians who seek integratively complex compromise solutions; libertarian conservatives who oppose all restrictions on the choices of mutually consenting adults and authoritarian conservatives who oppose most restrictions on markets but support state regulation of sexual or religious practices).

For ease of exposition, we rely in this chapter on the simpler dichotomous classification scheme (the difference between an 8-cell versus a 16-cell contingency table). We do believe, however, it will prove fruitful to look for distinctive psychological markers of moderate versus extreme egalitarianism and authoritarian versus libertarian conservatism.