

Revitalizing Political Psychology

The Legacy of Harold D. Lasswell

William Ascher
Barbara Hirschfelder-Ascher



Revitalizing Political Psychology

The Legacy of Harold D. Lasswell

This page intentionally left blank

Revitalizing Political Psychology

The Legacy of Harold D. Lasswell

William Ascher

Barbara Hirschfelder-Ascher

Claremont McKenna College

 Psychology Press
Taylor & Francis Group

New York London

Psychology Press
Taylor & Francis Group
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016

Psychology Press
Taylor & Francis Group
27 Church Road
Hove, East Sussex BN3 2FA

© 2005 by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC
Psychology Press is an imprint of Taylor & Francis Group
Originally published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
Reprinted in 2010 by Psychology Press

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
International Standard Book Number-13: 978-1-84872-892-9 (Softcover)
Cover design by Sean Trane Sciarone

Except as permitted by U.S. Copyright law, no part of this book may be reprinted, reproduced, transmitted, or utilized in any form by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying, microfilming, and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without written permission from the publishers.

Trademark Notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ascher, William.

Revitalizing political psychology : the legacy of Harold D. Lasswell / William Ascher, Barbara Hirschfelder-Ascher.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-8487-2892-1 (p. : alk. paper)

1. Political psychology. 2. Lasswell, Howard Dwight, 1902—

I. Hirschfelder-Ascher, Barbara. II. Title.

JA74.5.A77 2004

320'.01'9—dc22

2004046928

Visit the Taylor & Francis Web site at
<http://www.taylorandfrancis.com>

and the Psychology Press Web site at
<http://www.psypress.com>

In honor of Lisa Heumann Hirschfelder

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

	Preface	ix
	Acknowledgments	xii
Chapter 1	Introduction	1
Chapter 2	The Displacement Hypothesis	22
Chapter 3	Symbols, Personality, and Appeals: Lasswell's Contribution to the Political Psychology of Propaganda	39
Chapter 4	Democratic Character	67
Chapter 5	Political Psychology and the Risks of Leadership	95
Chapter 6	Political Climate, Mood, and Crisis	116
Chapter 7	Integrating Lasswell's Contributions: Brief Applications	139
Chapter 8	Conclusion: The Role of the Political Psychiatrist	162
	Endnotes	167
	References	177
	Author Index	187
	Subject Index	191

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

This book grew out of two concerns. First, for the past quarter century political psychology has largely neglected the roles of affect, psychological needs, and the psychodynamic mechanisms that are crucial for understanding the full complexity of political behavior. Second, the connections between political psychology and the study of public policy seem increasingly tenuous. With notable exceptions, political psychology has focused predominantly on explaining individual or collective political behavior rather than trying to guide policy decisions that would be greatly aided by insights about how people react to symbols, how psychological needs shape their perspectives and predispositions, and how crises can undermine the defenses against destructive behaviors. These dimensions can be recaptured by explaining, defending, and extending the contributions of Harold D. Lasswell, who was unquestionably the dominant figure in developing political psychology in mid-20th-century America. Trained in the fields of pragmatist social science in America and psychoanalysis in Europe, Lasswell was the foremost figure in applying psychodynamic theories to politics. His framework and theories provide the best grounding for revitalizing political psychology. Yet, his framework also accommodates cognitive processes and social interactions ranging from communications (his model is still a prominent paradigm in journalism schools) to the policymaking process (his social process model is the heart of the policy sciences framework). This enables Lasswell's contributions, if properly understood, to resist the rejection of psychodynamic theories that has hampered contemporary political psychology.

In one respect, Lasswell's work is experiencing a renaissance, as witnessed by the republication of 10 of his books since 1990 as well as numerous articles, the posthumous publication of his 1,600-page magnum opus, *Jurisprudence for a Free Society* (1992), and the establishment of the Society for the Policy Sciences to further the applications of the Lasswellian framework. At least four organizations offer Harold D. Lasswell prizes: the American Political Science Association, the International Society for Political Psychology, the Policy Studies Organization, and the Society for the Policy Sciences. However, as Eulau and Zlomke (1999) pointed out, many who invoke Lasswell do so rather superficially. The use

of Lasswell's framework and theories in political psychology, as well as in conventional public policy analysis, occurs far less often than one would expect in light of all the accolades. It is one thing to honor a pioneer as a historical figure, but quite another to recognize the continued relevance of the pioneer's contributions. This would be understandable if Lasswell's work had simply been eclipsed by advances in political psychology. However, this is not the case. Mainstream academic psychology has largely abandoned the crucial psychodynamic dimensions elegantly developed in Lasswell's work in favor of preoccupations with easily testable but rather narrow aspects of cognitive processing. Contemporary political analyses in the psychoanalytic tradition often neglect the socioeconomic and political factors that Lasswell so skillfully integrated with the psychodynamic considerations. As we demonstrate in this book, Lasswell's framework still provides an unexcelled guide for the analysis of current policy and political issues, while allowing for elaborations to expand and deepen his theories. Lasswell's incorporation of psychodynamic mechanisms within a broad social interaction framework avoids the reductionism and narrowness of early psychoanalytic theorizing. We hope that our review of Lasswell's configurative approach can help restore the status of psychodynamic functional theory to contemporary political psychology, which in recent years has largely rejected the utility of such theory. Lasswell's theories and our extensions demonstrate that these theories can be reintroduced within a framework that avoids the pitfalls of earlier Freudian efforts.

In this volume, we also show that Lasswell's pragmatist orientation offers an alternative conception of behavioral sciences to the dominant positivist paradigm in academic psychology. Thus, although this book focuses on Lasswell's contributions, we use his contributions and the debates over his epistemology as a window to examine broader issues in the behavioral sciences, such as the tensions between psychoanalytic approaches and contemporary academic psychology as well as those between pragmatism and scientific positivism.

In Chapter 1, we introduce the thesis that current political psychology has made progress in bringing more cognitive psychology into the study of political behavior, but has neglected the question of how a systematic evaluation of psychodynamic functional theory can add insight. We specify how Lasswell's work contains the seeds for a reinvigorated psychodynamic political psychology.

In Chapter 2, we explore Lasswell's seminal work on the displacement of emotion and beliefs from one object or target to another, and extend his theory to account for attributions of blame and shifts in value orientations and identifications. This chapter presents Lasswell's powerful framework for understanding the structure of belief systems, and addresses the role of the concept of the unconscious in accounting for displacements.

Chapter 3 reviews Lasswell's theories of the cognitive and emotional impact of political symbols and the dynamics of propaganda. It shows how Lasswell adapted the psychoanalytic distinction of id, ego, and super-ego to understand the multiple appeals of political and policy symbols.

Chapter 4 links personality and character analysis to democratic practice, showing how Lasswell's conception of democratic character is linked with the values and expectations necessary to maintain the discipline that democratic practice and fair dealing require. These concepts go far in clarifying Lasswell's often misunderstood normative commitment. As the source of the concepts of the "garrison state" and the "military industrial complex," Lasswell's work on democratic character is crucial for understanding civil-military relations and the risks of militarization and the contraction of civil liberties.

In Chapter 5, we assess the burgeoning field of leadership studies by examining the key issues through the lenses of Lasswell's theories of elite behavior and democratic leadership. Our analysis critiques the field of leadership studies, based on Lasswell's concerns over the risks to democratic accountability posed by the current preoccupation with strengthening the roles of charismatic and transformational leadership.

Chapter 6 focuses on political behavior in times of crisis, when the baseline character of leaders and the public often becomes distorted. Because the political climate in crisis situations frequently reflects the erosion of self-restraint and therefore the risks of destructive behavior, Lasswell presented approaches to preempt and discharge these destructive impulses.

Chapter 7 presents original applications—case studies and multicase applications—of Lasswell's political psychology and our extensions of his framework, in order to address contemporary political issues and to emphasize the open-ended nature of Lasswell's framework. Five of the applications diagnose intergroup conflicts around the world and the psychodynamic explanations that can help to guide strategies to reduce the potentials for violence and the disruption of democratic practice. Other applications look at U.S. domestic issues: how the debate on nuclear energy is shaped by the symbolic linkages of the term *nuclear*, and how the accountability of labor union leadership affects labor relations.

Finally, Chapter 8 clarifies the role of the political psychiatrist as one who brings insight to the public and leaders about their own behavior—especially, why they often approach public policy issues with distorted expectations, priorities, and affects—rather than as a manipulator out to control politics and policy through the arcane knowledge of political psychology. This reinforces the appropriate interpretation of Lasswell's contributions as a profoundly democratic theorist.

It is our hope that this book will help political psychologists to rediscover the psychodynamic roots of political predisposition. Lasswell's framework and the extensions that we present should assure them that they can reintroduce psychodynamic explanations without having to accept the reductionism that plagued the earlier psychoanalytic efforts to scale up to the political and societal levels. Policy scientists, as well as political and policy strategists, will benefit from greater familiarity with Lasswell's theories of why particular political leaders or policies have compelling appeal, how symbolic politics plays a role in these appeals, and how the political and policy processes can maintain democratic and accountable practices.

Lasswell's warnings about the pitfalls of certain leadership styles should be heeded by experts and students in leadership studies and civil-military relations, and his foundational work on symbols and propaganda needs to be reinforced in the field of political communications. Certainly, students in courses on social psychology, political psychology, organization theory, and public policy studies would greatly benefit from exposure to the legacy and potential of Lasswell's general approach, as would students trying to master the scope and methods of political science.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project owes much to the continued commitment of the members of the Society for the Policy Sciences to understand and apply the extraordinarily rich framework that Lasswell and his many collaborators have developed since the late 1920s. The stimulating discussions under the auspices of this Society have focused on key aspects of Lasswell's political psychology as well as the policy sciences. We are indebted to many Society members, and in particular to Steven R. Brown, Ronald D. Brunner, Rodney Muth, Toddi Steelman, and Andrew Willard for invaluable guidance. Such guidance was also provided by our Claremont McKenna colleagues, John Farrell and Jay Martin, from both sides of the debate over psychoanalytic approaches. Several leaders in the field of political psychology, most notably Tom Bryder and Fred Greenstein, also provided penetrating reactions. We thank the readers for Erlbaum who provided additional insights on how to strengthen the book—Doris Graber, University of Illinois at Chicago, and Kenneth Hoover, Western Washington University. We also thank Emily Acevedo for her able research assistance.

We would additionally like to celebrate the virtue of having adult children—we prevailed upon Diana, Julie, and David incessantly to brainstorm on psychology and politics, always to excellent effect. Finally, we are grateful to Storm Ascher for demonstrating that psychological principles can be expressed in clear-cut and compelling ways. As an 8-year-old, her response to our explanation of the triple-appeal principle and the distinctions among id, ego, and superego was to note that it boils down to the devil on the one shoulder and the angel on the other.

Introduction

THE UNFINISHED BUSINESS OF POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Political psychology is in need of revitalization to recapture its capacity to incorporate the emotional and psychodynamic roots of political behavior. To be sure, the field has made considerable strides over the past quarter century. First, as an interdisciplinary field that strives to understand the psychological bases of political behavior, it has strengthened its commitment to linking theory to issues of normative importance by focusing on such issues as citizenship responsibility, democratic commitment, inter-ethnic tolerance, and willingness to engage in peaceful conflict resolution.¹ This commitment transcends the misguided “value-free” approach of some earlier research agendas.

Second, great theoretical progress has been made in accounting for how people process information and reconcile new information with preexisting perspectives (Alsolabehere & Iyengar, 1993; Ferejohn & Kuklinski, 1990; Lau & Sears, 1986; Ottati, 2002; Ottati & Wyer, 1993; Torney-Purta, 1989; Wyer & Ottati, 1993). Theories of “political cognition” have sharpened our understanding of how people cope with incomplete and inconsistent information about politics and policies. In the subfield of political socialization, which focuses on the development of political attitudes and predispositions among children and young adults, theories of cognitive and moral development have enriched our understanding of how political orientations change as individuals’ cognitive and ethical capacities mature (Cook, 1985, 1989; Torney-Purta, 1989, 2000). “Political communication” has been analyzed far more systematically today than in previous eras. The theory of heuristics, developed by cognitive psychologists, helped to anticipate the simplifications that people use to understand complex politics and policies when confronted with uncertainty and limited analytic capacity (Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982).

The study of political cognition has been undertaken through careful surveys, “laboratory” simulations, content analysis of political communi-

cations, and other empirical approaches. Except for the rare longitudinal study,² these tests, by their very nature, predominantly focus on current attitudes and only those antecedents that have currently measurable manifestations. As an essential element to understanding how life conditions affect political behavior, contemporary research strongly emphasizes identifying individuals' socioeconomic characteristics and linking them to beliefs and predispositions to action. Many of these studies meet the standard scientific conventions of explicit measurement, replicability, and statistical analysis.

Yet these accomplishments have come at a cost. A sound political psychology must be more than just a normative commitment and an understanding of political cognition. In order to link the full range of economic, sociological, and political conditions to political predispositions, a framework must be able to account for the impact of long-standing, deeply seated predispositions. In many circumstances, determining how individuals perceive the political situation is only part of the challenge; it is often far more difficult to determine why they have particularly strong affects in relation to the relevant actors and objects. Consider the often surprisingly positive reactions to clearly power-hungry, hyperaggressive leaders with questionable ethics and weak commitment to accountability. Consider also the acute animosity and associated stereotypes targeted toward ethnic groups with whom an individual has had little actual contact. To some degree these beliefs may be "learned," but often other forces must be at play to account for the intensity of these beliefs. These forces are distinct from the cognitive processing that is currently emphasized in theory and research, even if the cognitive processing is involved in shaping the resultant beliefs and predispositions. Richard Wyer and Victor Ottati noted:

Although there have been many advances in our understanding of the cognitive aspects of political judgment, certain important considerations have been neglected. In particular, social judgments and decisions are often greatly influenced by affective reactions that are elicited by the people or objects being judged or by the information presented about them. The importance of taking these reactions into account is supported by evidence indicating that cognitive and affective process mechanisms are interrelated, with one often influencing the other. . . . However, the role of these affective mechanisms in political decision-making has rarely been investigated. . . . (1993, p. 296)

However, Wyer and Ottati's recommended research agenda is confined to survey-based correlations and "innovative experimental approaches," with no mention of approaches to distinguish the impact of affects originating from long-standing psychological needs, let alone to account for such affects (Wyer & Ottati, 1993). A decade later, George Marcus (2003) noted that the deficiency in accounting for the emotional or affective component of political belief systems persists. Even if theories of cognitive processing begin to account for the *results* of particular affects (assuming that

the affects can be identified), they cannot fully account for the *origins* of affects. Therefore, they cannot identify which affects may have peculiar properties (e.g., rigidity or emotional exaggeration) due to connections with psychological needs quite apart from the immediate issue at hand.

This state of affairs came about because contemporary political psychology has largely eschewed efforts to model the internal dynamics that connect psychological needs to political predispositions.³ *Psychodynamic functional theories*⁴ focus on how internal psychological needs develop and shape attitudes, predispositions, and overt behavior. Some (although not all) of these needs are remote from the current and prior circumstances directly related to the political issue at hand. For example, an individual may hate a particular politician because of mental associations with hated teachers or relatives. Psychodynamic functional theory is indispensable for accounting for the drives and affects that both underlie these perspectives and explain why some predispositions are resistant to accommodation. How do these drives arise and get channeled in particular ways? How do personal histories generate the wide variations in political perspectives, apart from the typical considerations of economic and social standing or political experience? Psychodynamic functional theories presume that the impact of these earlier events or conditions is embodied in deeply seated psychological needs that become engaged in the current situation. Psychodynamic functional theory is necessary to understand why the same external stimuli, whether concrete events and conditions or political symbols, trigger different associations and, hence, different reactions from different individuals.

The functionality of psychodynamic theories does not necessarily mean that the attitudes or predispositions are beneficial or functional overall for either the individual or the polity. Psychodynamic functional theories are often employed to understand behavior that may relieve immediate psychological distress but is destructive to the individual and others in the larger sense. For example, blaming others may relieve a painful sense of guilt, but in the long run it may shape hostile attitudes that damage both the individual and the target of blame.⁵

Without psychodynamic functional theory, the models of sociopolitical linkages deteriorate into stimulus-response hypotheses that particular conditions produce particular responses in obvious, commonsense ways. If both stimulus and response are easily measurable, the weight of some relationships can be assessed through straightforward research designs. Yet, without psychodynamic functional theory we cannot fathom the idiosyncrasies of the political misfit, the abrupt shifts in political mood, the political manifestations of personal insecurities, the allure of political symbols that have no personal resonance to external observers, or the clinging to self-destructive beliefs and practices that have no apparent instrumentality. These require understanding the internal, preexisting psychological pressures impinging on specific individuals or segments of the population.

The Scope of Psychodynamic Functional Theory

Let us clarify the scope of psychodynamic functional theories that are in such short supply in contemporary political psychology. These theories encompass the processes that shape affects, meanings, associations, levels of attention, or predispositions in the service of drives or needs that are at some remove from the political situation at hand (Katz, 1960; Lane, 1959; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Following is a partial list of possible mechanisms:⁶

- Affect flows from one object to another, not because of the straightforward generalization from one like thing to another but rather because they are associated by overlapping symbol labels, serve some emotional function, or both. The function may be to fulfill a drive or to relieve anxiety. For example, a key component of Adolf Hitler's propaganda was to invoke the emotionally compelling symbol of "moral purity" and connect it to the Nazi agenda to preserve the supposed "purity of the racial stock."⁷
- Predispositions or beliefs may reduce internal conflicts. We are angry with A, but this uncomfortable anger is redirected to B; we had an urge to do X, which somehow threatens our self-image, and thus block out this urge or even develop a strong sentiment condemning X. Hence, the repertoire of possible psychodynamic functional processes encompasses, but is not confined to, the classical set of ego-defense mechanisms proposed by Anna Freud (1936/1966): compensation, displacement, emotional insulation, fantasy, identification, intellectualization, introjection, projection, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, repression, sublimation, and undoing.
- Holding particular attitudes may express values with which the individual wishes to be associated, to enhance either self-respect or standing among others (Katz, 1960). In some of these cases, the resulting attitude may be inconsistent with other political attitudes. For example, individuals who want to express their tough-mindedness may develop bellicose attitudes toward particular "antagonists" that cannot be explained on the basis of generalization, learning, or interests.

We use the term *dynamic* in a broader sense than its usage in Freudian theory. In psychoanalytic theory, *dynamic* (as opposed to *static*) relationships pertain to the "conflict of opposing mental forces" (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973, p. 126). We can use the term *psychodynamic functional theory* to denote the broader conception of predispositions at the service of internal drives as well as of the management of internal difficulties such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and so on.

Many psychodynamic functional theories invoke the *unconscious*. The unconscious can refer to the mental material outside of awareness or

consciousness at a given moment. Alternatively, the unconscious as a system or set of dynamics can mean the processes (e.g., repression) that prevent material from coming into the individual's awareness at the conscious level. Therefore, the individual cannot act on this material with conscious deliberation, or report its existence to a researcher (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973). Freud's evolving conceptions of the unconscious and those of various offshoots of psychoanalytic theory do not preclude that formerly unconscious material can come into consciousness—that is the essence of psychoanalytic treatment—but they presume that without special intervention, unconscious material exists in many or even all individuals.

WHY HAS PSYCHODYNAMIC FUNCTIONAL THEORY BEEN NEGLECTED?

We have asserted that psychodynamic functional theory is lacking in contemporary political psychology, but we have yet to explain why it is absent. Nor have we addressed the question of whether its absence is a necessary cost for achieving some other goal.

The Positivist Underpinnings of Contemporary Political Psychology

The neglect of psychodynamic functional theories by many political scientists and psychologists reflects the fact that exploring such theories does not fit within the still rather dominant paradigm of positivist research. The positivist dream is to discover true and certain general law theory,⁸ approached through definitive empirical testing according to the conventional conception of the "scientific method." The goal is to discover *the* correct general theory through empirically based hypothesis testing that disconfirms alternative, false theories (hence it is often labeled *falsificationism*).⁹ Parsimony is regarded as a great virtue; the continuing existence of contending theories and hypotheses is a sign of the incompleteness of the scientific project. Definitive hypothesis testing is so important that contemporary positivism has no tolerance for constructs that cannot be confirmed through direct observation. Equally importantly, the relationships that can be tested are limited in complexity and time frame. It would be a Herculean task to find definitive, confirmable, statistical evidence of a theory that links life history events to basic character qualities, these qualities to political predispositions, these predispositions to beliefs that emerge in particular political circumstances, and finally these beliefs to political actions under specific external political conditions.¹⁰

The commitment of mainstream political psychology to the positivist project is deep and pervasive. The most telling reflection of the restricted positivist mindset of much of contemporary political psychology is Richard Merelman's (1989) assessment of the state of political socialization.

He emphasized both critical tests and general law theories in no uncertain terms:

Interest in political socialization among political scientists might reemerge more rapidly if proponents of these hotly debated paradigms recognize that research in political socialization offers them *crucial tests of their theories*. . . . It would be more satisfying to use political socialization research to help establish a single political theory, or at least to settle upon a single psychological theory of political socialization itself. *We all feel the lure of parsimony*. (p. 37; emphasis added)

Stanley Moore echoed this sentiment in the very title of his 1989 article, "The Need for a Unified Theory of Political Learning." Moreover, any perusal of *Political Psychology*, the flagship journal of the International Society for Political Psychology, would clearly reveal the predominance of research attempting to find and confirm *the* correct theory. The archetypical article begins with a description of a political issue and the related political behavior, cites two or more theories that have been invoked to explain the behavior, and then presents empirical findings to support one of the theories. Typically, this exercise links observable and current traits with observable and current beliefs and predispositions.

It should now be clear why psychodynamic functional theories are at a severe disadvantage in the eyes of researchers who hold to this positivist outlook. If theories must be definitively tested, those featuring nonobservable constructs representing internal psychodynamics do not qualify. Psychodynamic functional theories are complicated, and generally invoke mechanisms that cannot be proven through cut-and-dried empirical research. In particular, theories invoking the operation of unconscious processes and the impact of repressed material are inaccessible to the standard paradigm of the subject reporting to the researcher. When clever ways of eliciting possible effects of unconscious material are implemented, the skeptical reaction is that the materials emerge only because they are not truly unconscious, as demonstrated by their emergence.¹¹ Surveys, simulations, and other laboratory experiments cannot tap into the long-term development of basic psychological predispositions, nor can complex theories be easily tested by correlations of the variables accessible through these approaches. From a positivist perspective, psychodynamic functional theories are at a severe disadvantage.

The Disrepute of Psychoanalytic Theory

This problem is exacerbated by the disfavor of psychoanalytic theory and its offshoots in most contemporary circles of psychologists.¹² The well-known critique of psychoanalytic theory as untestable and unfalsifiable, especially because of the central role played by unconscious dynamics, is one prominent reason for its rejection (Erwin, 1996; Grünbaum, 1984) but so too is the doctrinaire stance of the most prominent variants of psychoanalytic theory. Insofar as each Freudian, Adlerian, Kleinian, Lacanian,

Jungian, or other psychoanalytic offshoot claims to be the true and certain theory, outsiders are likely to be skeptical of all of them. The pragmatist view that each approach should be valued for its insights, whether or not it is fully valid, is a dramatically different perspective.

The Pragmatist Alternative: Back to the Future

Sacrificing the insights of psychodynamic functional theory is unnecessary if we acknowledge the validity of the pragmatist approach to the development and application of theory. Today, we typically label the apparently new waves of philosophy of science with such terms as *postpositivist* or *postmodern*, inasmuch as their development followed the flourishing of the positivist applications of the past half-century. However, pragmatism already exhibited the insights shared with postpositivism that are crucial for justifying the status of psychodynamic functional theory: the recognition that ultimate certainty is unattainable and concepts are constructed and temporally bound, skepticism toward universalistic generalizations, and continued preoccupation with the ways in which seemingly straightforward language can mislead.

Let us compare contemporary positivism with the pragmatist approach that animated the remarkable developments in political psychology from the 1930s through the 1960s. This pragmatism also calls for empirical research, but the conception of developing, applying, and appraising empirically based theory differs greatly from that of contemporary political psychology. For the pragmatists, sets of propositions—or hypothesis schemas—are developed by learning inductively from experience. For William James, propositions were useful “leadings”; he maintained that knowledge consisted of working hypotheses rather than universal truths.

The core premise of pragmatist science is that theories are validated by their instrumentality in use (Farr, 1999; Rorty, 1982), not by the conventional scientific method. Theory is evaluated in terms of its contribution to effective practice. Therefore, we ought to subject hypotheses to empirical exploration in order to hone our capacity to know how they can be applied, but pragmatism is highly skeptical of the universalist claims of positivist science and rejects the possibility of a decontextualized, certain science. Instead, theory consists of a repertoire of insights, each of which will prove to have greater or lesser relevance for any given context. However, the relevance of each can only be determined as the specific context is explored, not in any *a priori* way that settles on certain propositions abstracted from specific contexts.

For the sake of the efficiency of this exploration, it is useful to determine which propositions have been prevalent in apparently similar cases, but propositions should not be discarded simply because they are disconfirmed by a test in a particular context. Instead, each proposition that is promising in terms of providing insight would prompt further probing in the particular case to determine how much credence the proposition deserves as a guide to addressing that case. Consider the proposition that

rigid political attitudes may reflect a brittle adjustment to internal psychological tensions. This proposition may provide very useful insights into how to predict whether such attitudes are held by particular individuals and how to relate to them, yet this rigidity may instead reflect an unusually strong drive, or simply an uncompromising negotiating strategy. By the same token, an individual may cope with internal psychological tensions in ways that do not result in rigid political attitudes, but this does not diminish the utility of the availability of the proposition to explore in particular cases.

The pragmatist approach is particularly compatible with a postpositivist political psychology intended to guide policymakers and the public in pursuing the common interest in effective and democratic ways. Although positivist testing through controlled experiment, simulation, or survey can demonstrate the limitations of broad hypotheses, it cannot definitively confirm general laws guaranteed to hold in the specific applications at hand. Without one dominant assured law, the pragmatist comes equipped with multiple possibilities. Insofar as recognizing the importance of life histories, internal psychodynamics, and the plasticity of the political manifestations of psychological states is crucial for understanding political psychology, the positivist approach and its theoretical reductionism become insufficient.

Consider how some of the hard-learned lessons of political psychology from previous eras seem to have been lost. First, the insight that psychological drives can result in very different political predispositions, depending on contextual details, should discourage the efforts to try to cast correlations linking economic, political, and social conditions to political behavior as if they were meaningful generalizations. Yet this is the major research thrust of much of today's political psychology.

Second, another insight reached many years ago is the plasticity of both the meanings and content of attitudes and actions that carry the same label over time. Despite the impressive innovation that has gone into developing methods to understand meaning and tracing the changes in meaning over time,¹³ many contemporary political psychology studies still treat political attitudes as if they were fixed. The self-defined conservative of today is not necessarily the conservative of 10 years ago; the willingness to engage in a political demonstration has different significance as the risks of participation change over time; any given depiction of racial attitudes will have different meaning as populations become more globalized and multi-ethnic.

A third lesson, learned with great difficulty, is that fundamental political predispositions, such as the willingness to uphold democratic practice, are manifested differently according to levels of deprivation and stress. The practice of ignoring this lesson is illustrated by the huge controversy that raged over the construct of the authoritarian personality. The initially promising approach of tying the personality type defined as "authoritarian" to undemocratic attitudes and behaviors has been widely rejected because survey and experimental simulation evidence has not shown the