CHAPTER 3

The Cultural Setting of Policy Analysis

The last two chapters have examined the values implicit in the concept of policy analysis, in roles the analyst plays and in the techniques the analyst employs in his or her work. Also mentioned was the importance of the values the analyst brings to the workplace, as a citizen and as a person. These are mirrored in or contradicted by the values of clients. And they are embodied in or opposed to ways in which the policy issues are defined for the analyst. They also find their way into the studies an analyst produces.

An examination of those values indicates that they reflect the complexity of American society and its past. They are a paradoxical structure of notions put together under the name "American political culture." Sometimes they appear to be a mere potpourri, but there is an underlying order to them, the structure of which can be delineated.[1] This takes the form of a patterned political culture and systematic ethical systems that mirror that culture.

Gilbert and Sullivan sang that "everyone who's born into this world a-live is either a little *lib*-er-al, or else a Con-ser-va-*tive*." Today, the choices in America are more varied: old-fashioned welfare liberal, cultural conservative, economic conservative, Yuppie libertarian, neoconservative, left-leaning liberal, communitarian, various Marxist tendencies, and more. One of the more remarkable things about this motley array of ideological positions is that they all tend to contain more or less the same vocabulary, though the words are differently nuanced and positioned in the various theories, weighted differently, and differently combined. Also, when one moves away from that small group of intellectuals whose chief employment is to define and defend ideological positions and from political and economic leadership circles into the general public, it becomes difficult to discover groups of people who subscribe to thought-out, coherent ideological positions, as well as ideological groups that are stable over time.

Whatever combination of values an analyst brings to his or her desk, it will be, in part, a mixture attributable to a number of environmental influences. They include having been born in a family with a particular tradition, having a particular social status, hailing from a particular region of the country, and having been raised during a particular period of time, being employed by a particular agency. But the analyst's value ideas will also have uniqueness; they will be the values of a particular person who has had unique experiences. In this chapter it is necessary to concentrate on central themes and concepts that constitute the general—on the cultural materials out of which individuals in America fashion their world views and arrive at their ethical judgments.

Liberty and Equality: The Politics of Conscience and the Politics of Interest

Two concepts form the core of American political culture: the ideas of liberty and equality. Each has been variously defined over the years, sometimes in ways that support one another, other times in antagonistic fashion. Both have been focused on the individual and have been expressed in terms of individual rights. Each has also played a role in two sets of ideas and attitudes that have dominated American thought over the years: a politics of conscience and a politics of interest.

The politics of conscience manifested itself for the first time in American life in the Puritan "New Jerusalem" of colonial Massachusetts, a "city built upon a hill." In this society, whose structure mirrored in salient ways the theocentric organicism of premodern Europe, the good of the individual was realized in fulfilling God's law, which was identified with the common good. Service of this objective good was also declared the substance of civil liberty. This was a liberty "to that only which is good, just, and honest . . . exercised in a subjection to authority."[2] With this view of liberty was paired a concept of the equal worth of all men and women in the eyes of God. Ralph Barton Perry has called this "generic equality" and explained it as

> the idea that beneath the clothes they wear, and the status or occupation which organized society has bestowed upon them, all men are men, with the same faculties, the same needs and aspirations, the same destiny, and similar potentialities of development. . . . No one will deny it, once the question is raised in this form.[3]

The politics of conscience in Puritan times also displayed a concept of individual liberty rather different from the one just characterized, a concept that has frequently come into conflict with the notion that liberty must be defined in relation to a publicly sanctioned standard of morality. It was represented in the antinomian stance of Anne Hutchinson, who asserted that God's will can be revealed directly to the individual, apart from authoritative interpretations of Scripture by church ministers supported by public authority. Her insistence on personal autonomy eventuated in Anne Hutchinson's persecution by the leaders of the Bay Colony and eventually in her banishment. The pluralist society of today has worked out the antinomian conception of freedom in great secular detail and embodied it in laws that give wide protection to individual freedom of choice in life style. It is also represented in the concept of patient autonomy in the face of the paternal authority of the physician, as well as in disputes about a woman's right to control her body.

The politics of interest has also been part of American political culture from the earliest days. But in this frame of reference, liberty and equality receive a very different definition and are differently related to one another. In the politics of interest, liberty is understood as security and as the right to accumulate private property. It is a politics of material well-being. Its terms of reference were fashioned in the seventeenth century out of the rising commercial culture of that time and eminently given voice by James Harrington, a classical republican political theorist schooled in the egoistic political philosophy of Niccolò Machiavelli.[4] But it was not Machiavelli of *The Prince* but the republican enthusiast of the *Discourses* upon whom Harrington drew for inspiration. Politics in this framework is conceived as a realm of strategic maneuver and rational calculation among self-interested individuals who wish to win in the great game of life. As a republican theory, it envisages the competition of individuals taking place within a system of rules that break up concentrations of power and limit its exercise through institutional balance. Harrington saw economic self-interest rather than generalized selfishness as the dominant human motive. C.B. Macpherson has pointed up evidence of his "awareness of and acceptance of market motivations and relationships."[5] Harrington also joined freedom to acquire with the work ethic, which Puritanism had bred deeply into American life, in observing that property is gained by industry, not by mere ambition. He also recognized that commercial and urban society was tremendously productive, and that it is the "natural operation of a law of supply and demand . . . that brings the secondary growth."[6] Harrington's philosophy expressed well the optimistic individualism of the middle-class settlers of seventeenth-century America. And his constitutional prescriptions for the defense of liberty are found written large on many colonial charters.

Conscience and Interest in Ethical Theory

In the last ten years there has been a proliferation of courses in ethics in developing public policy programs. This has resulted in part from an awareness that traditional standards do not furnish ethical models for a score of new ethical problems that have been spawned by the growth of technology. It is also a fruit of change in American political culture, and in particular of changes in the balance between authoritative norms of moral respectability and a rapid increase in claims of individual liberty. Ethicists have responded by adapting their formal ethical systems to the analysis of public policy dilemmas that confront analysts and decision makers.

Since ethicists have been bred in the same moral culture as other Americans, it is not surprising that the systems they employ bear a remarkable resemblance to the politics of conscience and the politics of interest that are under discussion. Deontological or Kantian ethics places special value on the rights and dignity of every person because of the individual's freedom and rationality. This school of thought grounds the special worth of the individual on his or her ability to understand principles of right and freely to respond to them rather than to the dictates of desire. Utilitarianism, by contrast, is concerned with the social good, quantitatively considered. Its fundamental rule is that public policy should aim at maximizing the utilities of society as a whole. Most utilitarians assume, like the adherents of the politics of interest, that the sole legitimate basis of social good is what individuals happen to value. And they view the process of social choice as an aggregative one, in which individual preferences are added to one another in arriving at decisions on the substance of social welfare. Utilitarians, however, have no principle for distributing social values. Their criterion of judgment is the criterion of maximum social product—efficiency.

The Politics of Conscience Today

The understanding of liberty as grounded in obedience to moral law and of equality as referring to fundamental worth are still powerful notions in American life. The importance of morality, especially in the models of character that leaders present to the general public for their emulation, has been highlighted in the reaction to recent scandals involving public figures. In a 1987 national telephone survey, 74 percent of the sample lamented the failure of leaders to set good examples. "Ethics, often dismissed as a prissy Sunday School word, is now at the center of a new national debate. . . . Has the mindless materialism of the '80s left in its wake a values vacuum?" asks a writer for *Time* magazine.[7] Another writer in the same issue observes that the "good idea" on which America was founded "combines a commitment to man's inalienable rights with the Calvinist belief in an ultimate moral right and sinful man's obligation to do good."[8]

A good deal of work has recently been done on the idea of equality as a salient concept of American political culture. One particularly significant study was carried out by Jennifer Hochschild, a professor of political science, who conducted open-ended interviews with twenty-eight working adults in New Haven, Connecticut. The respondents were chosen at random from the lowest-income and highest-income neighborhoods of the city. The book that resulted from this experience is a splendid qualitative description of attitudes toward equality defined in a variety of ways. Remarkably, Hochschild found an extraordinary agreement across social and economic lines, both in affirmation and rejection of the value of equality. She also found ambivalence toward equality, as well as tensions and psychological conflicts, that cut across social groups. The book is in part an update and extension of Robert Lane's pioneering study of 1962, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does.*[9]

The Right to Equal Opportunity

Hochschild found that rich and poor alike strongly support the principle of equality in "the socializing domain—the arena of home, family, school, and neighborhood" (p. 44). In epitomizing the beliefs of one respondent, she remarks that "the fact of equal human worth and the obligation it imposes on socializing agencies to seek equal well-being for all—these principles matter more than any specific normative claim" (p. 106). Here is a value that is squarely in the tradition of the politics of conscience. One of Hochschild's poor respondents told her that schoolteachers "*should* help the ones that can't do it, the less smart ones. They need it. I believe in that." She also thought that teachers ought not to compare their students with one another to their faces, as this would make the less able feel bad (p. 86). Compassion requires that all be treated as equal. For though people may not be of equal skill, they ought still be accorded equal respect (p. 88). Another needy respondent thought competition in the classroom, as in the economic domain, of great importance as a stimulant to incentive. But he defined the teacher's role in an egalitarian fashion: disproportionate help should be given to the one who needs it most (p. 94). One of Hochschild's well-to-do respondents remembered skipping collections from poor customers of her parents' fuel company in the 1930s depression. People have an obligation to respond to others' needs, without expecting gratitude (p. 102). Another found no place for even structured competition in the classroom. Instead, schools ought to be flexible enough to move gifted students along and to help the poor ones as well (p. 105). The same respondent thought a community is obliged to equalize its members' chances to succeed and be happy; the needy ought to be subsidized to be sure "everybody [has] a fair shot at a happy life." The talented can take care of themselves (p. 105). All this seems to fit under the heading of a broadly agreed social obligation to ensure equality of opportunity.

The Findings of Survey Research

Survey research statistically bears out the results of Hochschild's qualitative study in a single urban area. In a survey done between 1975 and 1977, respondents overwhelmingly embraced the egalitarian response, despite efforts to word the items to make inegalitarian replies acceptable. Asked to choose among three different ways of completing a sentence that began: "Teaching that some kinds of people are better than others" —74 percent both of the general public and of opinion leaders chose the alternative that ran: "goes against the American idea of equality." Only 12 percent of the public (and 8 percent of opinion leaders) chose the phrase: "only recognizes the facts." In the same survey, the corollary notion that society should give people, who are all of equal worth, an equal opportunity to succeed was embraced even more enthusiastically—by 78 percent of the general public and 82 percent of opinion leaders. ("Most of the people who are poor and needy could contribute something valuable to society if given the chance.")[10] Like Hochschild's respondents, the general public also places special emphasis on equality of educational opportunity.[11]

These findings coexist with the fact that American life has displayed rampant racial, ethnic, and religious prejudices and discrimination over the generations. Historical injustices to blacks and Indians are also blatant facts of American history, along with ill treatment of newly arrived immigrants of minority ethnic origin. Ethnocentrism has been an American tradition that contradicts the cultural egalitarianism. But it appears that the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s has severely eroded such prejudice. Political leaders now avoid making statements that suggest racial prejudice. And in a 1978 survey only 15 percent of white respondents expressed the belief that blacks are inferior to whites. In another recent survey, only 30 percent of the public were ready to agree that "like fine race horses, some classes of people are just naturally better than others," in contrast with almost 50 percent in the 1950s. Most Americans, however, acknowledge that *individuals* may differ in talent and capacity.[12]

Political Equality and Community: The Idea of "The People"

Although limited to property holders in the eighteenth century, the franchise became a prerogative of all white males by the Jacksonian period. It included both equal electoral right and an equal right to hold office. The process of constitutional amendment has since served to broaden the franchise to include first blacks and, much later, women. In the James Prothro and Charles Grigg study of American values carried out in the late 1950s, 95 percent of the sample affirmed that "every citizen should have an equal chance to influence government policy."[13] As data of 1958 and of 1978–79 show, a substantial majority of the general public and an even larger majority of influentials also favor equal voting rights for adult citizens, "regardless of how ignorant they may be" and "even if they can't vote intelligently."[14] The conception of the equal franchise has evidently been closely tied in with the idea of the equal moral worth of all human beings.

Derivative of the attribution of equal dignity to all persons is the concept of the moral and political infallibility of "the People," the concept of the egalitarian community. As far back as the 1830s, Tocqueville wrote that "the people reign in the American political world as the Deity does in the Universe. They are the cause and the aim of all things, everything comes from them and everything is absorbed in them."[15] Not many years later, one finds Walt Whitman asserting that "the life of the common people is the life of God."[16] In the emotional attachment of Americans to the idea of "the People" there is an affective ground for the ideal of community. Though lacking in specific moral connotations, the idea of "the People" represents united virtue, and in the language of the politics of conscience it is counterposed to the idea of "the interests," who are understood as special groups that either enjoy or seek special place and privilege without any moral claim to it. This language is found in the rhetoric of both major political parties from generation to generation. Interests are self-seeking and manipulative partial groups; "the People" are, by contrast, the moral force of the community. It is probably not too much to say that for a pluralistic and secularizing time, the idea of "the People" functionally fills the role played by "the Church" in Puritan times; it is the community of the saints, the elect. The idea developed at the same moment that Emersonian transcendentalism supplanted Puritan theology as the major language of the American politics of conscience. Just as in the thought of John Winthrop, liberty and the moral commands of the holy community are in perfect harmony, so are they fused and harmonized in the thought of Walt Whitman. As Vernon Parrington has paraphased Whitman's idea: "Not in distinction but in oneness with the whole we find the good life, for in fellowship is love and in the whole is freedom; and love and freedom are the law and the prophets."[17]

The Politics of Interest

In the American politics of interest, equality does not support liberty. The two are squarely pitted against one another. In the result, individual liberty triumphs; it reins in and severely limits the egalitarian tendencies of the culture.

Property and the Work Ethic

One of Hochschild's young but needy respondents, who earned only $6000 a year in 1976, echoed the Harrington themes of hard work and acquisition. She thought that people could very well make money if they made up their minds not be be lazy. She saw herself as an ambitious achiever, despite her poverty (p. 29). She also expressed Adam Smith's concept of the "unseen Hand" that converts interest into social utility (p. 30).

Respondents at the other end of Hochschild's economic spectrum also celebrated the virtues of free enterprise. A forty-eight-year-old businessman told her how hard work and luck had brought him from a childhood of poverty to the position of a businessman. He was owner of a business that allowed him the luxuries of suburban life, and enabled him to support two children in graduate school (pp. 30–31). He thought welfare payments were bad for the poor, morally corrupting. Welfare taught them to be content with living on a dole rather than to embrace the work ethic (p. 31).

One of Hochschild's needy respondents described the operation of the system of free enterprise as something resembling an Hobbesian war of all against all. "There's always going to be conflict, jealousy. . . . Everybody's out to beat everybody, and it's just human nature to try to get away with everything you can. . . . People are fighting each other—it's a good thing. The more he fights, the more rewards he gets" (p. 38). Like that of Hobbes, the conflictual framework of this respondent resembled one of natural physical necessity rather than an institutionalized system of economic order governed by principles of justice.

In the conception of economic freedom under consideration, liberty and equality come together at only one point—in the equal right of all to compete for material well-being. It is significant that in Jefferson's first draft of the Declaration of Independence, the word "property" appeared in place of "the pursuit of happiness." The famous triad of natural rights announced by the Declaration enshrines an equal right of all Americans to personal freedom and security and to compete in the marketplace. That these are introduced in this document as God-given inalienable rights appears to place them in the context of the politics of conscience rather than in the realm of interest politics. But the justification of individual rights with both these languages is characteristic of American political culture. It has also been argued that the religious categories employed by writers like John Locke and his American successors were adopted by the rising middle-class intelligentsia as a useful way to legitimate for all an economic and political system that this new class found personally profitable.[18] Whatever the semantics of the matter, it should be stressed that liberty as free enterprise runs contrary to the norm of equality. It produces social stratification and an elite structure in society.

The overriding importance of liberty as freedom to acquire property is found throughout American history. Despite his political egalitarianism, Jefferson was a free enterpriser, as were his Federalist opponents. Men like James Madison, who helped develop a complicated constitutional system of separated, divided, and balanced authorities, thought that the "first object of government" was to protect "different and unequal faculties of acquiring property." "All men must be free to seek their immediate profit and to associate with others in the process," declared Madison.[19]

And so things have remained, through the creation of the Horatio Alger success myth in the last part of the nineteenth century and down to the present. "There is probably no people on earth," wrote a nineteenth-century immigrant to the United States "with whom business constitutes pleasure, and industry amusement, in an equal degree with the inhabitants of the United States of America."[20]

Contemporary survey research bears out the continued authority of the profit motive for Americans. In a 1979 study, 91 percent of the respondents disagreed with this statement: "The government should limit the amount of money any individual is allowed to earn in a year." And 73 percent supported this proposition: "The profits a company or business can earn should be as large as they can fairly earn." In a 1975–77 study, 54 percent of the public agreed that the profit system teaches the value of hard work and the importance of the drive to succeed, while only 16 percent thought instead that it brings out the worst qualities in people.[21]

The Rejection of Economic Equality

In view of these opinions, it is not strange that when "equality" is translated from the realm of moral estimate and social compassion to the domain of economic activity, it should be denigrated by the American

public. In his pioneering study of 1962, Robert Lane found that the blue-collar workers he interviewed had a positive fear of economic equality. The existence of a superintending economic elite gave them a sense of security. Lane's respondents did not sympathize with people lower than them on the economic scale. Nor did they wish themselves to be raised, by government policy, to a level they had not achieved by personal effort. Were a demand for leveling to capture the public mind, they thought it would destroy individual incentive. (They had internalized the work ethic very well.) Lane's subjects had also given up hedonic desires in order to achieve something like middle-class respectability.[22]

In her 1976 update and revision of Lane's study, Hochschild found that the same kinds of attitudes obtained after the passage of fourteen years. One of her needy respondents remarked that the rich must have worked hard for their money, and that they deserved it (p. 112). Here inequality is legitimated by attribution of the work ethic to the successful. Another subject spoke disparagingly of the welfare state for leveling society. This person viewed the system as a "gigantic rip-off" by the lazy. Recipients whose stories he recounted "just want to keep their booze, car, and that's it." The "deserving poor" did not come into his ken (p. 116). In summary, research indicates that the people who support equality in what Hochschild calls "the socializing domain" support economic inequality (p. 118). In specific cases, they usually sought a ground for legitimating differentiation. In viewing the system as a whole, however, they tended to accept it as though it were a fact of nature (pp. 122, 125).

The outright rejection of economic equality by rich and poor alike depicted in Lane's and in Hochschild's reports of their interviews in a specific New England locale has been shown by fifty years of survey research to hold true for the nation as a whole. In 1937 and 1939, in the midst of the Great Depression, only 30 to 35 percent of respondents to national *Fortune* polls supported redistribution of wealth from rich to poor by taxation. Even those in the lowest quarter of the income scale did not favor such a measure by more than 46 percent. Of the unemployed, a bare majority of 54 percent were ready to seek redistribution in 1939, while only 44 percent supported such a view in 1937. When in March 1939 a poll used the word "confiscation" to describe the measure and pitted the individual's freedom to earn against the requirements of the "public good," support for the measure was only half of that registered in the less radically worded poll. This was true for the national average and for the poor and unemployed categories as well.[23]

Polls carried out in 1974 and 1976 yielded results similar to those of forty years earlier. In the 1976 poll, blue-collar workers registered 51 percent of their number in favor of the proposition that "the government should tax the rich heavily in order to redistribute the wealth." Interestingly, only 47 percent of the unemployed held this view, which was also the percentage of the nation as a whole in favor of this position.[24]

Equality and Public Policy

Despite the rejection by a majority of all social groups of absolute equality of condition, there is no question that the American egalitarian tradition greatly influenced public policy over the generations. The national faith in the equal worth of all human beings has passed over into public measures designed not to produce economic leveling but to ensure broadly defined equality of opportunity for all persons. From the passage of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution down to the civil rights legislation of the 1960s, blacks gradually achieved a large measure of legal, political, and social equality with whites. Here the meaning of "equality" has been interchangeable with the concept of "freedom." Equality of opportunity has meant equal freedom.

Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, despite its many administrative failures, gave large numbers of blacks, as well as poor whites, greater equality of economic opportunity than they had ever before enjoyed, and brought millions of blacks and poor whites into the ranks of the middle class. Over roughly the same period, women have achieved greater equality with men. Large-scale welfare programs like those of the War on Poverty were not intended by their authors to create a permanently dependent class in American society, like that feared by Lane's and Hochschild's respondents. They were aimed instead at developing all Americans into self-reliant, independent persons. As Lyndon Johnson himself described his objective: "The War on Poverty is not a struggle simply to support people, to make them dependent on the generosity of others.... It is a struggle to give (them) a chance."[25] So as one moves from the private world of individual economic endeavor to the world of public economic and social policy, the American view of equality changes once again.

A Positive Role for Government

Despite their fear of economic equality, Lane's subjects in his 1962 study did not, like nineteenth-century exponents of free enterprise or today's libertarian or economic conservative, view government with suspicion. They saw "big government" as working for them. Hochschild's study of 1976 revealed a similar attitude overall, despite some fears for the corrupting effect of welfare programs. One needy respondent, reflecting on the role of government in society, saw government as the protector of private property, but she also wanted the government to prevent property from inflicting great harm on the poor. Like Lane's subjects, she was aware of the reality of private power as a repressive force, and viewed government as a democratic countervalent. Fair prices and salient community needs dominated private rights and community needs for her. And she did not expect this to emerge from the unseen hand of the market. A more progressive tax structure she saw as an important device for establishing this balance. With more tax revenue from the rich, the government could "eliminate college tuition, increase social security payments, guarantee job training and jobs with a livable income, and provide national health insurance" (p. 149). When directly confronted with questions of equalizing property, this subject backed off from equality. Yet in considering public policy, she favored redistribution. To bring these divergent lines of thought together she espoused the concept of a guaranteed minimum income, but rejected the idea of putting a ceiling on incomes (p. 151).

Another of Hochschild's needy respondents expressed pessimism about the ability of government to effect redistribution. He saw taxes as high because of graft by politicians. His mind was filled with traditional American stereotypes of government officials as conniving rascals who cannot be trusted, an attitude that served to reinforce his acceptance of economic stratification and to blunt hope for greater equality. He preferred no taxation at all to progressive taxation by a government he could not trust (pp. 152–53). But others of Hochschild's respondents expressed greater optimism about government. The extent of existing equality pleased them, and they were hopeful the egalitarian trend under government auspices would continue (p. 156). Their faith in public redistributive measures was expressed, however, with the qualification that it should extend only to equality of opportunity, not equality of result (p. 158).

Tension between the Politics of Conscience and the Politics of Interest

In measuring the views of her well-to-do subjects on egalitarian policies, Hochschild found tension between principles attached to what is here called the politics of conscience and the principles of the politics of interest, both of which the subjects had internalized. But on margin she found greater support among the rich for more equality than was dictated by their own material self-interest (p. 165). One of the wealthy subjects opted for guaranteed jobs and public programs of job training. She thought that social security should have a redistributive effect, and she favored tuition subsidies for college students and loans to medical students. In the latter instance, she saw such equalization of opportunity for some as beneficial to the whole society in the long run (p. 166). She also supported national health insurance. But in evaluating the idea of a minimum income, she wondered whether it would be fair to those who had succeeded on their own (p. 167). Another well-to-do subject resolved the tension between freedom and equality by viewing private property as an instrument for the achievement of freedom, though not as an end in itself. And he was ready to entertain the idea of more egalitarian policies to achieve that goal. Overall, the respondent was "less protective of differentiating property rights than many of the poor, and his egalitarianism sometimes dominated his economic self-interest."[26]

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, tensions between the egalitarian politics of conscience and the libertarian politics of interest increased markedly within the American middle and working classes. In changed electoral behavior, in the resulting activity of the Republican-led 104th Congress, and in the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court, the tension seems to have been resolved in favor of individualism and self-interest. As early as 1986, James Kluegel and Eliot Smith wrote that "compared to 1969, the public is ever more likely to agree that we are spending too much money on welfare and to deny that people on welfare try to find work to support themselves."[27] Nevertheless, sympathy for those on welfare remained consistently high. By 1995, that sympathy seemed to have disappeared. Democrats and Republicans continued to vie with one another to present bills that extensively cut federal taxes and that radically overhauled the redistributive welfare system. Republicans have also attempted to devolve large new welfare responsibilities on state governments through the device of block grants. In *Adarand Contractors* v. *Pena* (1995), the Supreme Court, in holding that the Constitution "protects persons, not groups," has adopted an individualist principle that will overturn federal programs that give special preference to minorities in the name of greater racial equality in the workplace.[28] In another decision the Court held unconstitutional the construction of a majority-black congressional district in Georgia, calling it a racial gerrymander. It had been artificially carved out of a mixed community to ensure the election of a black member of Congress.

Governmental direction is also giving way to individual freedom in another area. As part of their "Contract with America," Republicans attempted to give businesses relief from the high costs of health, safety, and environmental regulation. Democrats by contrast have maintained the sovereignty of public goods. They have insisted, however, that proposed rules be cost effective. Free up individual enterprise and shrink the size and cost of government!—these are the watchwords of the day.

Beginning in the 1930s the egalitarian politics of conscience was successively embodied in the programs of the New Deal, the Square Deal, the Fair Deal, and the New Frontier. From these programs emerged a centralized welfare state dedicated to establishing job security for the working person, financial relief for the unemployed, financial and medical security for the aged and dependent, the equalization of civil and social rights, a guarantee of equal educational opportunity, and safeguarding of the environment. Up to the 1960s, working- and middle-class white voters found their interests congruent with those of black citizens in supporting the downward redistributive policies of this liberal welfare state. But gradually, from 1964 on, issues of race and taxes have eroded the coalition. As Thomas and Mary Edsall summarized this trend: "The costs and burdens of Democratic-endorsed policies seeking to distribute economic and citizenship rights more equitably to blacks and to other minorities fell primarily on working and lower-middle class whites who frequently competed with blacks for jobs and status, who lived in neighborhoods adjoining black ghettos, and whose children attended schools most likely to fall under bussing orders."[29]

In this way the reform plans of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society led eventually to the conservative presidencies of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George Bush, and most recently to the overturn of the long-lived Democratic majority in Congress. This remarkable turnabout in public attitudes was not engendered by a simple callousness about the plight of the poor and underprivileged in the hearts of middle-class Americans. Survey data show that a very large majority of white Americans remain favorable to the principle of equality in racial policy.[30] Nor can it be said that the public have suddenly become conservative after having subscribed for fifty years to liberal ideals. These labels are properly to be applied only to the elites that vie with one another for public attention. In a 1980 poll conducted by the Center for Political Studies, nearly 40 percent of the sample were unable even to give a definition of the terms "liberal" and "conservative."[31] These data tend to support the view of E.J. Dionne Jr. that "America's cultural values are a rich and not necessarily contradictory mix of liberal instincts and conservative values."[32]

The new negative view of egalitarian welfare policies was engendered by three other developments: by the threat to individual interest noted above, by a changed life situation for an increasing number of Americans, and by the failure of many Great Society programs to accomplish the ends for which they were intended.

The threat to low- and lower-middle-income whites living in large urban areas has been not only financial (the tax burden of the welfare state) but also physical. Living adjacent to ghetto areas, they have experienced steadily rising crime rates and an increase in street violence associated with increased drug use, activities that have accompanied the breakdown of the family structure among minority groups. Great Society policies came to connote for them a permissive attitude toward drug abuse and increased incidence of illegitimacy, welfare fraud, and crime in the streets.[33] At the same time, an increasing number of Americans were experiencing changes in life situation and lifestyle that brought with them similarly changed political attitudes. E.J. Dionne Jr. writes that "new jobs in the service industries promote individualism. The decline of the small town and old urban ethnic enclaves and the rise of new suburbs, exurbs, and condominium developments further weaken social solidarity.... In the new politics, each voter is studied and appealed to as an individual."[34]

Last, the promise of the Great Society embodied in the welfare legislation passed during the years of the Johnson administration has not been fulfilled. Some programs, such as Head Start, have indeed made a positive difference for minority educational achievement. But relief payments to unwed mothers, if they have not been a primary cause of an increased incidence of illegitimacy, have at least aggravated this social problem. Young girls who simply have a desire for motherhood are able to fulfill their wish with public support. Also, the vast majority of poor families headed by married couples are ineligible to receive support from the AFDC program, which is a factor in family breakups. Wages for unskilled labor are so low that heads of families (and single people as well) find that they can do better on welfare than by employment in low-paying jobs. Lacking benefit packages in such jobs, they also have no substitute for Medicaid to cover health-care costs, and so they return to welfare rolls. In short, America now has a permanent underclass of demoralized people who subsist with public help and can find no way out of their situation. In this context the family structure of ghetto minorities has come apart. Spouseless women head more than 90 percent of welfare families today. Drug use is rampant in the inner cities, and street violence, characterized by an increasing number of gang conflicts and random shootings, is escalating. Food stamp fraud is a major problem that is often tied in with drug trafficking.

Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, are today agreed on the nature of the unhappy situation in the inner city. What they disagree on is how it can be remedied. The majority of politically conscious Americans seem to have decided to give Republicans an opportunity to enact their conception of change. Twenty percent of the electorate wish to push their demand for individual values and government decentralization further by creating a third party.

Cleavage within the Politics of Conscience

We have described the increasing emphasis in American political culture on individualist values, and the growth of antitax and antigovernment sentiment, in terms of a tension between the politics of conscience (understood as an egalitarian public good) and the politics of interest, with the latter taking on a new preeminence. We can also understand the change that is under way as the result of a cleavage within the politics of conscience. We saw elsewhere in this chapter that the earliest manifestation of our politics of conscience was in colonial Puritanism, which identified the common good (or public interest) with fulfilling God's law. All persons are equal as children of God; they are also equally obligated to obey His moral code. They are free, but free only to do that which is fitting, noble, and good. Preeminent in the catalog of good and noble acts are hard work, living a pure life sexually, dealing fairly with one's fellows, and being model husbands, wives, and children—what we today call "family values." Only later did the politics of conscience come to emphasize political, social, and economic equality as the essence of the common good. Seeing slavery as contrary to God's law required a civil war in order to get this understanding embodied politically in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Later came civil rights acts and the welfare state of our time to give reality to the ideal of human equality in the social and economic realms.

Both concepts remain central to our moral culture today. E.J. Dionne Jr. describes their relationship in the public's mind in the following manner:

> Polls (and our own intuitions) suggest that Americans believe in helping those who fall on hard times, in fostering equal opportunity and equal rights, in providing broad access to education, housing, health care, and child care. Polls (and our intuitions) also suggest that Americans believe that intact families do the best job at bringing up children, that hard work should be rewarded, that people who behave destructively toward others should be punished, that small institutions close to home tend to do better than big institutions run from far away, that private moral choices usually have social consequences. Put another way, Americans believe in social concern and self-reliance; they want to match rights and obligations; they think public moral standards should exist but are skeptical of too much meddling in the private affairs of others.[35]

But despite this continued dual centrality, the two ideals are not readily dovetailed with one another. They seem to be in fundamental conflict. During the heyday of the welfare state, the liberalism that embodied the egalitarian conscience came, under the influence of Republican rhetoric, to mean to the electorate favoring blacks over whites, a permissive attitude toward drug abuse, increased illegitimacy, welfare fraud, crime in the streets, homosexuality, anti-Americanism, and moral anarchy among the youth.[36] Liberal programs could not develop the work ethic, and the bureaucracy administering these programs were seen as desiring to keep the poor in place, in order to serve their own interest.[37]

Cultural war has broken out between liberals who are critical of the free market in economic life, because it promotes inequality, yet are ready to celebrate laissez-faire in cultural and sexual life, and conservatives who want constraints and controls in the areas of culture and sex but advocate an entirely unconstrained market.[38] Conceived as a surrogate for the dissolving moral ties of civil society, the welfare state as now viewed by conservatives corrodes the social ties that form the foundation of good government.[39] One pair of writers, in order to sort out the problem properly, have called for a forum "for a tough-minded exploration of issues of individual conduct, family structure, patterns of socialization, and other so-called moral/cultural matters."[40] In the meantime, representatives of the two visions of what conscientious politics demands do rhetorical battle with one another before a bewildered public that agrees with the basic principles of each of them.

Conclusion

In the past, Americans have sometimes been able to resolve tensions between conflicting values through the device of pragmatic compromise. One writer contends that "in philosophy, Americans accepted the ambiguities and contradictions of the Lockeian tradition. The primacy of sensation and the centrality of the moral sense could flourish at once, as long as each of these theories . . . did not push too far."[41] It is a habit Americans have displayed since the earliest days. The Constitution of 1787 is a prime example of its prevalence. It represents a grand compromise, or rather a whole series of them, designed not theoretically but in a practical way to reconcile energy at the center of the political system with liberty in its parts. John Mercer, commenting in 1830 on *The Federalist,* which aimed at justifying this instrument of government to a diverse people, noted that this work "addresses different arguments to different classes of the American public, in the spirit of an able and skillful disputant before a mixed assembly. Thus from different numbers of this work, and sometimes from the same number, may be derived authorities for opposite principles and opinions."[42] On the other hand, there are kinds of results that are not so happy. Political paralysis in the face of urgent issues is perhaps the most dangerous. Evidence that this is so is presented in other parts of this book.

Notes

1. Samuel Huntington writes that "people sometimes speak of an 'American ideology.' But in the American mind, these ideas do not take the form of a carefully articulated, systematic ideology. . . . They constitute a complex or amorphous amalgam of goals and values, rather than a scheme for establishing priorities among values and for elaborating ways to realize values." *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), 15. Citing the work of Philip E. Converse, David Apter, George F. Bishop, and others, David B. Hill points out that "studies of the constraint, or interconnectedness, of American belief systems conclude that only a small percentage of the public possesses an ideology which is reasonably stable over time and which is not beset by apparent internal contradictions." "Rebuilding a Liberal Constituency," in *The Liberal Future in America,* ed. Philip Abbott and Michael B. Levy (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985), 178.

2. John Winthrop, in his speech to the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony, in Vernon L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1930), 1:49.

3. Ralph Barton Perry, *Puritanism and Democracy* (New York: Vanguard, 1944), 354, quoted in Herbert McClosky and John Zaller, *The American Ethos* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 65.

4. See John G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975).

5. C.B. Macpherson, *The Theory of Possessive Individualism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 175.

6. Ibid., 176, 177.

7. *Time,* 25 May 1987, 14, 27.

8. Ibid., 27.

9. See Jennifer Hochschild, *What's Fair? American Beliefs about Distributive Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981). It is possible that this study is only regionally valid; however, the national survey findings cited in this chapter appear to show national applicability. Quotations from this book are parenthetically cited. The work serves as a frame for the argument presented in this chapter.

10. Opinions and Values of Americans Survey, 1975–77, questions 1 and 3, in McClosky and Zaller, *American Ethos,* 66, table 3-2.

11. See James R. Kluegel and Eliot R. Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1986), 45–48.

12. McClosky and Zaller, *American Ethos,* 70, 71–72.

13. Cited in ibid., 74. See the discussion of this study in William T. Bluhm,

Ideologies and Attitudes: Modern Political Culture (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974), 91–95.

14. Civil Liberties Study 1978–79; Political Affiliation and Beliefs Study, 1958; in McClosky and Zaller, *American Ethos*, 75, table 3-6.

15. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. M. Reeve et al. (New York: Knopf, 1951), 1:58.

16. Quoted in Parrington, *Main Currents*, 2:76.

17. Ibid., 77.

18. See, e.g., Richard Cox, *Locke on War and Peace*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960); William T. Bluhm et al., "Locke's Idea of God: Rational Truth or Political Myth?" *Journal of Politics* 42 (May 1980): 414–38.

19. *The Federalist*, No. 10.

20. In McClosky and Zaller, *American Ethos*, 101.

21. Ibid., 120, table 4-5.

22. See the summary and evaluation of Lane's findings in Bluhm, *Ideologies and Attitudes*, 85–87.

23. The question read: "Do you think our government should or should not confiscate all wealth over and above what people actually need to live on decently, and use it for the public good?" The results of the polls referred to are analyzed in Hochschild, *What's Fair?* 16–19.

24. Ibid., 18. See also Kluegel and Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality*, 76–81; and Sidney Verba and Gary R. Orren, *Equality in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 253. This is a study of views toward equality held by a variety of leadership or elite groups in America. Regarding economic equality, these researchers found that "some (leadership) groups want more income equality, but almost none wants complete equality."

25. Quoted in McClosky and Zaller, *American Ethos*, 89. For a capsulized review of public policies directed to redistribution of income toward the poor, see Kluegel and Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality*, 153–54.

26. Hochschild, *What's Fair?* 169. Samuel Huntington, in writing of tension in American political culture, describes the phenomenon of "creedal passion," which brings on efforts to bring ideals into line with practice. See his *American Politics*.

27. Kluegel and Smith, *Beliefs about Inequality*, 154–55.

28. 515 U.S. (1995)

29. Thomas B. and Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1995), 12.

30. Ibid., 13.

31. Cited by David B. Hill, "Rebuilding a Liberal Constituency," 177–78.

32. E.J. Dionne Jr., *Why Americans Hate Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 14.

33. Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 10.

34. Dionne, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, 17.

35. Ibid., 14.

36. Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 10.

37. Jean B. Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 3–4.

38. Ibid., 2–3, citing Dionne.

39. Ibid., citing Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 30.

40. Edsall and Edsall, *Chain Reaction*, 16.

41. Henry May, in Michael Kammen, *People of Paradox: An Inquiry into the Origins of American Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 218.

42. Ibid., 219.