Chapter 17

The Ideological Animal

A System Justification View

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In an interview conducted in Afghanistan, Osama bin Laden (1998) was asked how he could justify the use of terrorist means for achieving political objectives. He replied:

Every state and every civilization and culture has so resort to terrorism under certain circumstances for the purpose of abolishing tyranny and corruption. Every country in the world has its own security system and its own security forces, its own police and its own army. They are all designed to terrorize whoever ever contemplates to attack that country or its citizens. The terrorism we practice is of the commendable kind for it is directed at the tyrants and the aggressors and the enemies of Allah, the tyrants, the dictators who commit acts of treason against their own countries and their own faith and their own prophet and their own nation. Terrorizing those and punishing them are necessary measures to straighten things and to make them right.

Slightly more than 3 years later, bin Laden’s terrorist organization was blamed for the most devastating domestic attack in the history of the United States, when four commercial airplanes were hijacked, and two were flown into the World Trade Center in New York City, killing over 3,000 people. In response to these events, President George W. Bush (2002) described his administration’s plans for dealing with the threat of terrorism in his famous “Axis of evil” speech. He declared, in no uncertain terms:

Our cause is just, and it continues. Our discoveries in Afghanistan confirmed our worst fears, and showed us the true scope of the task ahead. We have seen the depth of our enemies’ hatred in videos, where they laug...
out the world like tickling time bombs, so to go off without warning. Our nation will con-
tinue to be steadfast and patient and persistent in the pursuit of two great objectives. First, we
will shut down terrorist camps, disrupt terrorist plans, and bring terrorists to justice. And, sec-
ond, we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weap-
ons from threatening the United States and the world. Nations like [North Korea, Iran, and
Iraq], and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the
world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger.

Approximately 1 year later, the Bush administration used this basic rationale to justify its
initiation of a preemptive war against Iraq. Although there are obviously many differences
between the ideological belief systems held by bin Laden and Bush, a dispassionate observer
would also be forced to conclude that there are at least a few key similarities. In the passages
just quoted, both speakers profess a deep concern for the principles of justice, a moral obli-
gation to defend their own system against threat, and an unwavering conviction that vio-
ence against one’s enemies is justifiable, legitimate, and necessary. It is tempting to conclude
that ideology, as Eagleton (1991) quipped, is “like hallitosis”—something “the other person
[or culture] has” (p. 2), but the reality is that ideology is part of what makes us human.

THEORIES OF THE IDEOLOGICAL ANIMAL

Human beings are, of course, animals, but they are decidedly unlike other species in several
respects. Ernest Becker (1962/1971), the modern father of terror management theory, in-
vited his readers to: “Try repeating ‘man is an animal’ a few times, just to notice how uncon-
vincing it sounds” (p. 13). Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1845/1976), the chief architec-
tors of modern theories of ideology, including system justification theories, wrote that: “Men can
be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion or by anything else you like” (p.
37), including, presumably, a deep immersion in culture, language, history, politics, ideol-
ogy, and the accumulation of surplus labor and capital. Social scientists have given many
names to forms of human life, including the “modern man” (Foucault, 1959), the “social animal”
(Aronson, 1988), the “rationalizing animal” (Aronson, 1973/1989), the “moral animal”
(Wright, 1994), and—drawing these themes together—the “ideological animal” (Althusser,
1970/1994). Other terms may be capable of vengeful, even premeditated murder (de Wyl, 1989),
but only humans can kill or die purely for the sake of an abstract set of ideas (i.e., for ideological reasons).

The Frankfurt School

The 20th century—one of the bloodiest in history—was marked by a dramatic surge in ide-
ological conflict, war, and genocide (e.g., Rummel, 2001). Not by coincidence, this was also
the century in which two disparate traditions in philosophy and psychology, namely, exis-
tential thought and the critique of ideology, were brought together for the first time. To un-
derstand the painful connection between human suffering and institutional attachments,
thinkers sought to reconcile the intellectual legacies of Marx and Freud, especially in the af-
termath of the Nazi Holocaust. This was a primary goal of the members of the Frankfurt
School, including Erich Fromm (1941, 1962), Wilhelm Reich (1946/1970), and the authors of
The Authoritarian Personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950), as
Ideology, defined as a set of consensually shared beliefs and doctrines that provide the moral and intellectual basis for a political, economic, or social system, maintains human existence with meaning and inspiration, but it also fosters illusion and threatens individual freedom. On this point (and, of course, contemporary system justification and research on commitment researchers agree on (see Jost, 1991; Pyszczynski, Solomon, Greenberg, & Stewart-Fouts, 1995). Members of the Frankfurt School and their followers sought to analyze the causes and critique the effects of ideology and false consciousness, thereby contributing to an increase in objective well-being. As Becker (1962/1971) put it, “serious social science is an attempt to come to grips with the fictions that constrain human freedom, with the ideas, beliefs, institutions that stifle the intelligent, responsible self-direction of the people. . . . the task of social science is nothing less than the uncovering of social illusions” (pp. 158–159). Almost surely, social psychologists have a key role to play in the completion of this task.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory

It has been observed often that certain kinds of ideological beliefs provide excuses and justifications for actions and arrangements that would otherwise seem indefensible, even to the belief holder him- or herself (e.g., Bandura, 1990; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). Evidence also suggests that ideology serves palliative functions of reducing anxiety, guilt, shame, dissonance, discomfort, and uncertainty (Chen & Tyler, 2001; Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Kluegel & Smith, 1986). For these reasons, one would think that the analysis of ideological thinking would be a cornerstone of psychological investigation. However, few psychological theories, especially in recent years, have done justice to the topic or placed ideology at the center of what makes us human. Festinger’s (1957) cognitive dissonance theory was a promising start, stealing the human capacity for justification and rationalization in the social world. Unfortunately, the range of rationalizations studied by dissonance theorists has been limited and too narrowly by self-justification for acts of hypocrisy (e.g., Aronson, 1973/1989). Dissonance theory does not say much about the dynamics of complex ideological belief systems (see Jost & Hunyady, 2002) or the tendency to justify the status quo in the absence of personal choice or responsibility (see Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003; Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002).

Just World Theory

Lerner’s (1980) just world theory is perhaps closer than dissonance theory to suggesting a psychological account of ideology, insofar as it postulates that humans are motivated not merely to achieve attitudinal and behavioral consistency but to preserve the more speciﬁc illusion that the world is a just place in which people “get what they deserve and deserve what they get.” According to this theory, being confronted with acts of injustice threatens one’s worldview and consequently motivates people to restore the belief in a just world (e.g., Hoge, 2003). Research has tended to focus on vicarious distancing and derogation as strategies for reducing existential anxiety and uncertainty caused by injustice (e.g., Furnham & Guetter, 1984; Lerner & Miller, 1978; Moncada & Schneider, 1989; Rubin & Peplau, 1975). Disconnecting oneself from innocent victims and blaming them for their own misfortune may indeed preserve the belief in a just world, but research suggests that there is a much wider set of ideological beliefs that serve to justify the status quo. For example, gender inequality may be justified not only by derogating women for occupying an inferior position but also by praising them for their nurturance and moral superiority (e.g., Quick &
A key assumption of Lerner's (1980) theory is that the belief in a just world follows from universal human needs to predict and control one's environment and to maintain a subjective sense of security. Although we agree that general epistemic motives may underlie ideological beliefs (see Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a, 2003b), this formulation does little to facilitate understanding the sources of variation in political beliefs and their distinctive causes and consequences. In fact, Lerner (1997) has acknowledged that "the phrase 'belief in a just world' originally was intended to provide a useful metaphor rather than a psychological construct" (p. 30). Its explanatory power, therefore, seems limited at best. Another question that arises is whether the belief in a just world is motivated by a deep-seated, genuine commitment to the cause of justice, as is increasingly assumed by researchers in this area (e.g., Dulsbert, 2001), or whether it is better conceptualized as a defensive form of justification on behalf of the existing social and political system (e.g., Jost & Hunyady, 2002).

**Terror Management Theory**

Terror management theory (TMT) directly addresses the relationship between psychology and ideology. According to TMT, people are motivated to defend and justify their cultural worldview—whatever in contents—by venerating those who uphold the worldview and by derogating and punishing those who threaten and challenge it, either symbolically or materially (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1990; Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chale, 1992; McGregor et al., 1998; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). Building on the writings of Becker (1962/1971, 1968/1973), error management theorists propose that these and other defensive responses are instigated by threats to self-esteem and/or reminders of one's mortality (see Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997). To cope with the existential anxiety that results from the unique evolutionary combination of an instinct for self-preservation with conscious awareness of the inevitability of death, it is theorized that human beings have developed a buffering system against anxiety that consists of two mutually reinforcing elements: (1) cultural values, norms, and standards that imbue the world with meaning; and (2) a sense of self-esteem that comes from satisfying cultural values, norms, and standards.

To demonstrate the flexibility of motivated responses to sources of existential threat, terror management theorists have repeatedly emphasized that mortality salience does not lead to any specific type of ideological or behavioral response. That is, death primes have been shown to either increase or decrease tolerance of deviants, as a function of one's chronically accessible ideology (Greenberg et al., 1992), to lead people either to derogate or affiliate with others who oppose one's worldview, as a function of whether they are seen as ingroup or outgroup members (Greenberg et al., 1990; Witman & Koole, 2001), and to either increase or decrease ingroup identification, as a function of whether the group is seen as high or low in social status (Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2003; Dechesne, Greenberg, Arndt, & Schimel, 2000; Harmon-Jones, Greenberg, Solomon, & Simon, 1996). Thus, TMT is useful for understanding the myriad ways in which people respond to mortality salience threats, but it takes no position on the unique determinants of specific ideological beliefs (e.g., Greenberg & Jonas, 2003).
System Justification Theory

System justification theory holds that people are motivated to perceive existing social and political arrangements as fair, legitimate, and justifiable (Jost & Banaji, 1994), even sometimes at the expense of personal and group interests and esteem (Jost & Burgess, 2005; Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002; Jost & Thompson, 2000). Threats to the legitimacy or stability of the system—as long as they fall short of toppling and replacing the status quo—should evoke defensive ideological responses, leading people to be even more motivated to justify the system with the use of stereotypes and other ideological devices (see Jost & Hunsley, 2002). According to the most extreme form of the system justification hypothesis, which also draws on the logic of dissonance theory (e.g., Wicklund & Brehm, 1976), people who are most disadvantaged by a given social system should paradoxically be the most likely to provide ideological support for it, insofar as they have the greatest need to justify their suffering. In five national survey studies, Jost et al. (2003c) have found support for this counterintuitive hypothesis.

An important question that arises in attempting to understand system justification effects is why people would be motivated to justify the system under which they are living. We have argued that there are several reasons, including preferences for cognitive consistency, uncertainty reduction, conservation of effort and of prior beliefs, fear of equality, illusion of control, belief in a just world, and the need to reduce dissonance associated with inaction and other ways of being complicit in the status quo (see Jost et al., 2002, 2003c). Ideological and structural factors—including political socialization, mass media influences, and the institutional control that dominant groups have over rewards and punishments in society—also affect system justification tendencies. Thus, according to system justification theory, cognitive, motivational, social, and structural factors all contribute to the tendency to explain, justify, and rationalize the way things are.

It should be clear, however, that system justification motives cannot be reduced to standard psychological motives for self-enhancement or ingroup favoritism (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Hunsley, 2002). Rather, phenomena associated with system justification are guided by specific tendencies to perceive the system as fair, legitimate, valid, meaningful, natural, and predictable. Research examining the theory has suggested the presence of a directional, content-laden motive to preserve the status quo and to subjectively enhance its desirability (e.g., Kay et al., 2002). System-justifying beliefs are therefore conservative in their consequences and may stem at least partially from epistemic and existential needs to manage uncertainty and threat (e.g., Hogg & Mullin, 1999; Jost et al., 2002a; Van den Bos & Lind, 2002). We return to this theme later, but first we flesh out some of the similarities and differences among theories of the ideological animal, focusing especially on terror management and system justification perspectives.

TERROR MANAGEMENT AND SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

We have already alluded to the first and most basic similarity between terror management and system justification theories, which is that both perspectives seek to build on the legacy owing to Marx, Freud, Adorno, Reich, Rank, Fromm, Becker, and many others who have sought to understand the relationship between psychology and ideology (Jost & Banaji),
A second, related similarity is that both theories stress the social construction of reality and the need for consensual validation of ideological beliefs (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Greenberg et al., 1990; Jost & Kruglanski, 2002; Pyszczynski et al., 1996; Stangor, Sechrist, & Jost, 2001). A third, more specific similarity is the shared emphasis on the need to defend one's "cultural worldview" or ideological belief system (Greenberg et al., 1990, 1992; Sue & Hunyady, 2002; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Fourth, both theories have sought to demonstrate that social categorization types serve the function of justifying and bolstering the status quo (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Kay & Jost, 2003; Schimel, 1999). A fifth and final similarity is that research on system justification and terror management has shown that members of disadvantaged groups will engage in ingroup derogation and outgroup favoritism, to the extent that such behavior satisfies existential or ideological needs (Arndt et al., 2002; Jost et al., 2002).

TMT often makes the same empirical predictions as system justification theory, because terror management theorists believe that system justification is one mechanism whereby individuals can reduce death anxiety. The need to justify the system (and, for that matter, to perceive the world as a just and orderly place) is therefore assumed to follow from more fundamental human needs to minimize existential anxiety caused by fear of mortality. Whether system justification motivates can be traced (or reduced) to the fear of death is an issue that is open to debate (see also Lerner, 1997).

Not surprisingly, there are also some meaningful differences between system justification and terror management perspectives, and it is useful to clarify these differences in order to understand the proper role of episodic and existential factors in ideology. One major difference is that terror management theorists accept Becker's (1962/1971) assertion that self-esteem is "the dominant motive of man" (pp. 65-74) and that defending the cultural worldview necessarily increases one's self-esteem, whereas system justification theorists do not. Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991), for example, proceed from the assumption that "social behavior is primarily directed toward the acquisition and maintenance of self-esteem" (p. 26).

Jost and Banaji (1994) argued that motives for self-enhancement and ingroup favoritism are important but do not necessarily trump the motive to rationalize and preserve the status quo. More to the point, perhaps, we have found that among members of disadvantaged groups, ideological support for the status quo is associated with decreased rather than increased self-esteem (e.g., Jost et al., 2002; Jost & Thompson, 2004). Quinn & Crocker (1998).

Another set of issues that arises when one juxtaposes system justification and terror management theories is whether the fear of death is a universal motive that accounts for the emergence of all cultural and ideological forms, as Becker (1962/1971) suggested. In discussing differences between just-world and terror-management perspectives, Pyszczynski et al. (1997) noted that "whereas Lerner et al. view just-world beliefs as providing protection against the general fear that negative things might befall one, TMT posits that this general fear of aversive events is rooted ultimately in the self-preservation instinct and the consequent fear of death" (p. 10). This formulation makes it extremely difficult to empirically distinguish between proximal fears that are related versus unrelated to the fear of death, but research has demonstrated that many of the effects brought about by increased mortality salience are also elicited by heightened levels of uncertainty (e.g., Descheese, Janssen, & van Knippenberg, 2000; McGregor, Zanna, Holone, & Spencer, 2001; Van den Bos & Marrone, 2000). Similarly, there is considerable evidence linking political ideologies to uncertainty avoidance and needs for order, structure, and closure, suggesting that ideological belief systems serve many other epistemic and existen-
tial functions in addition to repressing death anxiety (e.g., Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b; Sorrentino & Roney, 2000; Wilson, 1973).

Related to this is the question whether all ideologies are equally healthy and adaptive (from both individual and societal points of view) and whether they are equally “caused” by the fear of death and other epistemic and existential variables. While acknowledging that human beings, like other animals, possess a strong (but by no means insurmountable) instinct for survival, we think that it is important to consider variation in the ways in which people cope with existential realities. Postulating a universally shared fear of death does not by itself help to understand or appreciate the heterogeneity of personal and political ideologies.

With regard to personal belief systems, studies have indeed shown variability in the relationship between death acceptance and responses to loss. Bonanno et al. (2002) conducted a prospective study of more than 200 elderly individuals before and after the death of their spouse. The researchers found considerable variation in the degree to which participants held worldviews that were accepting (rather than fearful) of death. Results indicated that the degree to which participants were high on the acceptance of mortality before their spouses died subsequently predicted more adaptive coping responses (i.e., resilient and depressed-improved bereavement patterns) to the eventual deaths of their spouses. By contrast, participants who tended to fear rather than accept death were more likely to follow maladaptive bereavement patterns (i.e., common grief, chronic grief, and chronic depression). As Freud put it, “If you want to live, you must be prepared for death.” Freud’s Viennese neighbor, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1916/1979), made the point even more starkly: “Fear in the face of death is the best sign of a false, i.e., a bad life.” (pp. 74–75; see also Schultz, 1999).

Returning to political belief systems, TMT suggests that all political ideologies are illu- sory by definition, functionally interchangeable, and equally traceable to an underlying fear of death. As a result, it is difficult to see how any given ideology could be said to be more individually or socially adaptive than its alternatives. Solomon et al. (1991) recognize this problem and address it by suggesting that the consequences of different cultural systems can be evaluated according to “reasonably objective standards” (p. 33). Specifically, they argue that “applied social science should be directed toward the development and maintenance of worldviews that maximize the equitable distribution of material resources and development of nondestructive technologies, which emphasize social roles that confer the possibility of acquiring self-esteem to as many people as possible, and which do so at a minimum of expense to others” (p. 35). We are in general agreement with these goals but a deeper and more precise analysis is needed to determine which ideologies will move us closer to achieving these goals, and which ideologies will obstruct them (see also Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994).

System justification theory leads us to reject the notion that all ideologies are functionally equivalent. Rather, we suggest that there is utility in distinguishing among different types of ideologies in terms of causes and contents as well as consequences. In addition to highlighting social, cognitive, and motivational tendencies to legitimize the status quo, a system justification perspective can also be used to identify differences in the epistemic and existential bases of different types of political ideologies, including liberalism, conservatism, and other belief systems that can be placed (however imperfectly) on a left-right dimension (Bobbio, 1996). In this sense, system justification theory fills an important gap in explaining the psychological antecedents of specific ideological beliefs. There is an abundance of evidence, as we shall see, that suggests that not all ideologies are the same, psychologically speaking.
CASE STUDY OF A SYSTEM-JUSTIFYING IDEOLOGY: EPISTEMIC AND EXISTENTIAL BASES OF POLITICAL CONSERVATISM

Historians and social scientists tend to agree that the core components of right-wing conservative ideology are resistance to change and acceptance of social inequality (e.g., Huntington, 1957; Kerlinger, 1984; Muller, 2001). Defined in this way, political conservatism is a paradigm case of a system-justifying ideology in that it both preserves the status quo and suggests intellectual and moral rationales for maintaining inequality in society (Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b). To investigate the epistemic and existential roots of political conservatism, therefore, is to investigate (at least partially) the psychological basis of system justification.

Jost et al. (2003a) conducted an extensive meta-analytic review of studies linking psychological variables to the ideology of political conservatism. The original studies, which were conducted between 1958 and 2002, made use of 88 research samples involving 22,818 individual cases, and were carried out in 12 different countries: United States, England, New Zealand, Australia, Poland, Sweden, Germany, Scotland, Israel, Italy, Canada, and South Africa. This body of research made it possible to assess the strength of empirical relations between right-wing conservatism and nine variables pertaining to epistemic and existential functioning: dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, openness to experience, fear of threat and loss, self-esteem, uncertainty avoidance, personal needs for order, structure, and closure; integrative complexity; system instability; and fear of death. These variables were selected on the basis of prior psychological theories of ideology, including right-wing authoritarianism (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1998), dogmatism (Rokeach, 1960), polar theory (Tolmínska, 1963), the dynamic theory of conservatism (Wilson, 1979), TMT (Greenberg et al., 1990), and system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994).

Results of the meta-analysis indicated that all nine of the hypothesized cognitive-motivational variables were indeed significantly related to political conservatism and the holding of right-wing ideological orientations, although the effect sizes for the different variables ranged considerably (see Figure 17.1). The largest effect sizes were obtained for fear of death (and mortality salience) and system instability and threat. Moderate effect sizes were obtained for dogmatism and intolerance of ambiguity, openness to experience, uncertainty avoidance, and personal needs to achieve order, structure, and closure. Weaker effect sizes were obtained for integrative complexity, fear of threat and loss, and self-esteem.

The bulk of the evidence from the meta-analysis by Jost et al. (2003a) supported the notion that there is a "match" between certain epistemic and existential needs and the content of specific political ideologies. This had been suggested not only by Adorno et al. (1950) but also by Rokeach (1960), who wrote that "if a person's underlying motivations are served by forming a closed belief system, then it is more likely that his motivations can also be served by embracing an ideology that is blatantly anti-equalitarian. If this is so, it would account for the somewhat greater affinity we have observed between authoritarian belief structure and conservatism than between the same belief structure and liberalism" (p. 127). After 50 years of research, the correlational evidence is quite strong that there are a number of consistent psychological differences between proponents of conservative versus liberal ideologies. Specifically, epistemic and existential needs to reduce uncertainty and threat seem to be more acute among people who are drawn to right-wing (vs. left-wing) belief systems, at least in the context of the nontotalitarian political environments investigated by Jost et al. (2003a).
WHY WOULD CERTAIN EPSITOMIC AND EXISTENTIAL NEEDS BE ESPECIALLY WELL SATISFIED BY CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGIES?

A number of theoretical and empirical considerations led Jost et al. (2003a) to conclude that all three of the epistemic and existential motives listed in Figure 7.1 (originate in psychological attempts to manage uncertainty and threat. There is also reason to think that the management of uncertainty and threat would be closely linked to the two core components of conservative thought mentioned earlier, namely, resistance to change and acceptance of inequality. This is why we, like Rokeach (1960), argue that there is an especially good match between certain epistemic and existential needs and specific ideological contents.

Needs to reduce uncertainty and threat are well served by ideological resistance to change, insofar as change (by its very nature) upsets existing realities and is fraught with epistemic insecurity. As a general rule, the status quo implies less uncertainty and ambiguity than counterfactual alternatives to it. Because certainty, values, and meaning are derived from existing social arrangements and dominant cultural worldviews, any arising from the possibility of one's own death should similarly induce resistance to change and a rigid rejection of anyone who threatens or deviates from the status quo (e.g., Greenberg et al., 1990). This is why Wicklund (1997) noted several important parallels between the effects of mortality salience and right-wing authoritarianism. Specifically, he concluded:

The existing research [in the terror management] realm points to a person’s guarding and abiding by the established, universal, ingroup rules; the new, the strange, or the ambiguous is avoided or derogated. This form of operationalization then obligates further applications of the theory to
define culture in terms of an authoritarian manner of dealing with threats: One's known, trusted position is correct; those who don't abide by that system are excluded (cf. Adorno et al., 1950). (p. 57)

Similarly, heightened sensitivity to uncertainty and threat could be both causes and consequences of embossing inequality in social, economic, and political domains. To the extent that inequality breeds (and perhaps guarantees) competition, dominance struggles, and occasionally even violent strife, it may also lead to an overall increase in fear, anxiety, and suspicion. Fear of the threat posed by competitors, in turn, may lead one to embrace antigovernmental ideologies even more enthusiastically, in part because these ideologies are particularly useful for justifying the use of force and social control to neutralize one's foes (e.g., Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). For all these reasons, Jost et al. (2003a) argued that psychological needs to manage uncertainty and threat would be especially well satisfied by the core convictions of political conservatives to resist change and justify inequality, especially to the extent that the status quo itself breeds inequality and competition.

The core aspects of conservative ideology should be particularly appealing, therefore, to people who are especially sensitive to fear, uncertainty, and threat for either situational or dispositional reasons (e.g., Wilson, 1973). As Paulhus and Trapnell (1997) put it, "Perhaps conservatives fear both God and death" (p. 43), among other things. A system justification view, as we have shown, is better equipped than a terror management view to account for resonant matches between certain epistemic and existential needs on one hand and specific ideological contents on the other hand.

OBJECTIONS TO DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL ANTECEDENTS OF LIBERAL VERSUS CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGICAL OPINIONATION

When Adorno et al. (1950) first argued for the existence of a right-wing "authoritarian syndrome" combining ego defensiveness, mental rigidity, intolerance of ambiguity, general ethnocentrism, and a number of other factors, critics objected that Adorno and his colleagues had neglected the phenomenon of left-wing rigidity (e.g., Eysenck, 1954/1935; Rokeach, 1969; Shils, 1954). Specifically, critics denied that there were general cognitions and motivational style variables that were associated with specific ideological positions and argued instead that such variables predicted ideological extremity (dogmatism), regardless of political content. In his 1999 introduction to the revised edition of The Psychology of Politics, Eysenck claimed victory for the theoretical opponents of work on the authoritarian personality. He stated, for example, that "authoritarianism (tough-mindedness) could appear equally well on the left as on the right," and that "the existence of left-wing fascism [is] as certain as anything in social psychology." Eysenck concluded that based "upon the social experience of the past forty years, as well as upon the many empirical studies published since 1954, I would confidently say that my major thesis is hardly any longer in doubt" (pp. xv–xx). Indeed, the meta-analysis by Jost et al. (2003a) provides a great deal of evidence to doubt Eysenck's long-held position that there are no epistemic or existential differences that covary with left-right differences in political ideology.

Greenberg and Jonas (2003) echoed many of Eysenck's (1954/1999) objections in critiquing the article by Jost et al. (2003a), arguing that "left-wing ideologies serve their motives [to reduce fear, anxiety, and uncertainty] just as well as right-wing ones" (p. 10).
Consistent with the ideological relativism of TMT, Greenberg and Jonas (2003) flatly rejected the matching hypothesis that specific epistemic and existential needs are more likely to be satisfied by some ideologies than others. They argued that "need for closure, terror management, uncertainty reduction, prevention focus, and system justification are all best served by embracing and rigidly adhering to and defending whatever the prevailing ideology is in one's socio-cultural environment" (p. 10). In responding to this critique, Jost et al. (2003b) suggested that certain epistemic and existential needs could simultaneously increase (1) reliance on culturally available ideologies (i.e., the status quo), and (2) resonance with conservative or right-wing opinions.

STUDIES DIRECTLY PITTING THE MATCHING HYPOTHESIS AGAINST THE EXTREMITY HYPOTHESIS

Jost et al. (2003b) identified 13 individual studies that allowed for a direct test between competing hypotheses. One potential result would be that epistemic and existential needs to reduce uncertainty and threat would increase in a linear fashion from left-wing to right-wing ideologies; this would support the matching hypothesis. Another possibility was that these needs would increase symmetrically with increasing distance from the political center, as suggested by the extremity hypothesis. Finally, a third pattern of results in which both effects were present in combination was also considered. Figure 17.2 illustrates these three hypothesized patterns.

In reviewing the 13 most relevant studies, Jost et al. (2003b) found that 7 of them conformed to the linear pattern suggested by the matching hypothesis illustrated in Figure 17.2. Barker (1963) surveyed student activists in Ohio and found that organized rightists scored significantly higher in dogmatism than did nonorganized students, who scored (nonsignificantly) higher than did organized leftists. Kohr (1974) followed student political groups in Britain and found that Conservatives scored significantly higher than Socialists and Liberals, and they scored marginally higher than Labour Party supporters on intolerance of ambiguity. Studies by Sidanisus (1978) in Sweden and Aibert and Ressler (1998) in Israel also investigated relations between political ideology and intolerance of ambiguity. In both studies significant linear effects were observed, and so were quadratic effects in the dimension that was opposite to the extremity hypothesis. Intolerance of ambiguity decreased slightly between the center right and the far right. Sidanisus (1985) obtained comparable effects for the relation between ideology and cognitive complexity. Studies by Kemmelmeier (1997) in Germany and Chirumbolo (2002) in Italy examined ideological differences related to the need for cognitive closure, and both yielded evidence of significant linear effects (and no evidence of quadratic trends). This, most of the evidence unequivocally supported the matching (rigidity-of-the-right) hypothesis against the extremity hypothesis. Similar results were obtained in six different countries and on such convergent measures as dogmatism, intolerance of ambiguity, need for cognitive closure, and integrative complexity.

None of the 13 studies provided exclusive support for the extremity hypothesis depicted in Figure 17.2. Instead of 6 studies provided evidence that both matching and extremity effects were present. McClosky and Chong (1985) found that a preponderance of respondents classified as high on intolerance of ambiguity came from far left and far right groups, as compared with moderates. In all cases, however, the percentage of high scorers from the far right group exceeded the percentage of high scorers from the far left. Although they do not report full data for center left and center right groups, it seems that-
systems of meaning and value

(a) The matching hypothesis

(b) The extremity hypothesis

(c) Integration of both (a) and (b) hypotheses (independent, additive effects)

FIGURE 17.2. Patterns of results predicted by competing hypotheses (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003b)

McClosky and Chong data would more closely resemble the combined pattern illustrated in Figure 17.2c than that illustrated in Figure 17.2b.

Five additional studies provide evidence that both rigidity of the right and ideologicalementry exert effects, as depicted in Figure 17.2c. Smithen and Lobley’s (1978) study of dogmatism and political orientation in Great Britain produced a pattern of results in which “the V-shaped curve did include more of the conservative end of the scale” (p. 135). Tetlock (1983) found that moderates in the U.S. Senate scored non-significantly higher on integrative complexity than did liberals and that both groups scored significantly higher than conservatives. Tetlock, Bernsweig, and Gallant (1985) obtained similar results in their study of U.S. Supreme Court justices’ opinions on both economic issues and civil liberties. Tetlock’s (1984) study of members of the British House of Commons revealed that the most integratively complex politi-
cians were moderate socialists, who scored significantly higher than extreme socialists, moderate conservatives, and extreme conservatives (who scored lowest in complexity). Finally, Tellock, Hanum, and Michielletti (1998) found that aggregating across five congressional sessions, conservatives on average scored considerably lower on integrative complexity than did liberals, who scored slightly lower than did moderates. Thus, 6 of the 9 studies provided partial evidence for the ideological extremity hypothesis, and all 13 studies provided at least some evidence for the rigidity-of-the-right hypothesis (see Jost et al., 2003b).

AN EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

To further explore the link between existential and ideological factors and to consider the possibility that situational manipulations of mortality salience would affect political conservativeness, we conducted an experimental study (Jost, Kay, & Fiske, 2004). With a predominantly liberal university sample, we first tested participants' self-reported political orientations on a liberal-conservative dimension and then evoked either mortality-related or pain-related thoughts. Afterward, participants were asked their opinions about a number of current political issues that are relevant for assessing liberalism and conservatism. This design allowed us to directly pit hypotheses of terror management and system justification theories against one another.

Terror management theorists would predict that liberal participants would become more liberal in their responses to the current political issues following mortality salience, and that conservative participants would become more conservative (an interaction hypothesis). A similar suggestion was made by Paulhus and Trapnell (1997), who wrote that "it is possible that the tendency to defend the worldview in the face of mortality cues is limited to conservatives . . . Thus, the TMT conception and measure of worldview would be more accurately labeled 'conservative worldview.' Liberals may be less responsive to mortality cues or may even act to defend a liberal worldview." (p. 43). Although we agree that there seems to be a better match between existential fears and conservative ideologies, we do not think that the system-justifying effects of mortality salience "would necessarily differ for liberals and conservatives." Specifically, we would predict that both liberal and conservative participants would grow more conservative following mortality salience (a main effect hypothesis). Our situationist position is closer to that of Ricklund (1997), who observed that "the contents of the death-threatened respondents' worldviews . . . are quite similar to many of the verbalizations of the authoritarian person." (p. 54).

We recruited 56 (28 men and 28 women) from public places on a university campus. Participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire packet that began with demographic information, including self-reported political orientation (with labels ranging from "extreme liberal" to "extremely conservative"). Most of the participants (N = 36) identified themselves as liberals. The remainder identified themselves as moderates (N = 8) or conservatives (N = 12). The relatively small size of the sample (especially the paucity of conservative and moderate respondents) suggests the need for caution in interpreting the results, but the data from this experimental intervention are instructive nonetheless.

After indicating demographic information, participants completed a word-picture matching task in which seven words on the left side of the page had to be matched with seven corresponding pictures reproduced on the right side of the page. For half of the participants, some of the words and pictures were explicitly related to death (e.g., a funeral hearse, a "dead end" street sign, and the grim reaper), whereas the other half of the partici-
plants were exposed to a control group of words and pictures that were related to pain but not to death (e.g., an ambulance, a dentist’s chair, and a bee sting). Both sets of materials also included filler items such as a satellite and a dog.

Following the word-picture matching task, participants completed a “current affairs survey” in which they indicated levels of support versus opposition on 3-point scales to seven different conservative (vs. liberal) causes, including tighter immigration restrictions, maintaining tax breaks for large corporations, affirmative action policies (reverse-scored), and legalization of same-sex marriages (reverse-scored). Responses to these items were collapsed to form an overall index of conservatism; this index showed adequate reliability (alpha = .62) and correlated with self-reports of political conservatism (r = .65, p < .001).

To assess the effects of political orientation and mortality salience on conservative responding, a univariate analysis of variance was conducted in which the three levels of political orientation (liberal, moderate, and conservative) and the two levels of priming condition (death vs. pain) were entered as fixed factors, and the overall conservative endorsement index served as the dependent measure, with respondent gender entered as a covariate. The analysis yielded main effects of political orientation and priming condition, but no interaction between these variables (see Jost et al., 2004). As can be seen in Figure 17.3, participants—regardless of political orientation—exhibited a significant tendency to become more conservative following the death prime (M = 4.64), as compared with the pain primes (M = 3.96). This finding is consistent with system justification theory and supports the contentions of Jost et al. (2003a, 2003b) that specific epistemic and existential variables are associated more with right-wing than left-wing thinking and that temporary directional shifts in political ideology can be brought about experimentally. We are currently seeking to replicate this study using larger sample sizes and more even distributions of liberals and conservatives.

By illustrating that mortality salience increases the attractiveness of politically conservative beliefs, these preliminary data provide additional empirical support for the matching hypothesis by demonstrating that existential threat does not equally or symmetrically rigidify liberal and conservative ideological beliefs. Rather, priming the fear of death exerted a directional effect on ideology, as suggested by system justification theory, leading to an increase in politically conservative responding among self-identified liberals and moderates (as

**FIGURE 17.2** Political conservation scores of liberals, moderates, and conservatives following death versus pain primes (Jost, Kay, & Fiske, 2004).
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well as conservatives). Furthermore, these data suggest that there is value in examining the etiology in the psychological antecedents of different political ideologies, and they question the tempting relativistic assumption that all ideologies serve the same functions and are driven by the same epistemic and existential needs.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have sought to integrate insights from and contribute to the further development of a long and distinguished tradition of analyzing the psychological basis of political ideology. As ideological animals, human beings suffuse the world with socially constructed meanings. The various theories described in this chapter are in general agreement with Marx, Freud, Becker, and many others that meaning systems can be said to reflect underlying need states. In this way, ideologies are socially and psychologically constructed, but they are not constructed arbitrarily (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Jost & Kruglanski, 2002).

There are a number of contemporary theories—including just-world, terror-management, and system-justification perspectives—that are useful for understanding the role of epistemic and existential variables in the context of political life. Just-world theorists were among the first to suggest a motivated psychological account of specific ideological beliefs, namely, that the world is a just and orderly place in which people are deserving of their individual and collective fates (e.g., Lerner & Miller, 1978). Terror-management theorists have successfully renewed social psychological interest in the importance of existential motives and their role in supporting ideological belief systems. Dozens of carefully crafted empirical studies in the terror management tradition have convincingly demonstrated the flexibility of cognitive and ideological responses to sources of motivational threat (see Greenberg et al., 1997).

System justification theorists have posited that defensive responses on behalf of the cultural worldview may even supersede self-esteem needs (Jost & Banaji, 1994; Jost & Thompson, 2000). There may be, in other words, general ideological processes that operate in defense of the status quo, exist at the expense of individual and collective self-esteem (see Jost & Hensley, 2002). An examination of these processes, we argue, is needed to explain why “people willingly propagate whole cultural systems that hold them in bondage,” as Becker (1962/1971, p. 86) so eloquently put it.

There are reasons to think that system-justifying ideological responses stem from a wide range of epistemic and existential needs and not just the fear of death. One especially common manifestation of system justification—political conservatism—has been linked conclusively to heightened cognitive and motivational needs for order, stability, structure, simplicity, closure, uncertainty avoidance, and ambiguity intolerance, as well as terror management (Jost et al., 2003a, 2003b). The preliminary results of an experimental study we have described also suggest that situationally induced mortality salience leads to a general increase in the endorsement of politically conservative attitudes.

The available evidence to date, therefore, supports the utility of distinguishing among different types of ideological belief systems in terms of how well they satisfy and resonate with a variety of psychological needs pertaining to the management of uncertainty and threat. Ideologies, in this sense, should be judged (at least partially) in terms of how successfully they resolve for their adherents the basic questions and strains of human living. This conclusion parallels in many ways a point made by Marx (1846/1999) in a rare, uncharacteristically existentialist passage: “The classification of the different causes of suicide would be the classification of the failures of our society itself” (p. 64).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This chapter was written while John T. Jost held a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, for which we are grateful. We also wish to thank George Bonanno, Ondrej Hunyady, and Tom Pyzczynski for extremely helpful suggestions for revisions.

NOTES

1. Becker (1962/1971) also differentiated human beings from other animals on several dimensions, including the fact that man possesses "an incoordinated level of mastery of his world" (p. 12), the "only time-binding animal" who is aware of his own death (p. 16), "who can dwell on his own experiences and on his fear" (p. 23), and the "only animal in nature who vitally depends on a symbolic constitution of his world" (p. 67). Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyzczynski (1991) built on this view, noting that "there is a fundamental difference between humans and other living organisms that renders us responsive to different types of reinforcement by virtue of our having differing needs (i.e., meaning and value)" (p. 33). Finally, Pyzczynski, Solomon, Greenberg, and Stewart-Foote (1995) concluded: "What distinguishes humans from other animals . . . is not the existence of a system for the internal control of behavior, but the linguistic capabilities that make an abstract representation of self possible" (p. 180).

2. Just world theory can be distinguished from two other theories we consider later in this chapter, namely, system justification and terror management theories, by considering responses to victims of iniquity. Whereas just world theory predicts that people will respond to threats by dis-engaging vic-tims, system justification theory predicts that only when vic-tim blaming serves the higher-order goal of justifying the system will people blame victims for their misfortune. Victim blaming and sys-tem justification often do not coincide, as when victim blaming is employed in the 9/11 attack, on the World Trade Center are symbolic of the cultural meaning that people are motivated to defend. In these cases, system justification and terror management theories would predict that people would defend and even cleanse the victims and the system to which they belong.

3. Becker (1962/1971) also sought to explain cases of system justification in terms of self-enhance-ment motives, suggesting, for example, that some people "work out their urge to supremacy by -. . . being devoted slaves: "I am a focus of real value because I were the great man." Others serve the corporation to get the same feeling, and some serve the war-the-liners" (p. 71). Jost and Rosnow (1994) argue, in contrast, that system justification cannot be reduced to ego justification, and the fact that system justification and self-esteem are negatively correlated among members of disadvan-taged groups suggests that the two are separate, distinguishable, and often in opposition (e.g., Jost & Thompson, 2003).

4. Bonanno et al. (2002) also found that endorsement at the belief in a just world was associated with a resilient coping style, whereas rejection of the belief in a just world was associated with patterns of grief and depression following the loss of a spouse.

5. Unfortunately, the sample sizes within each ideological group were too small to test meaningfully for pairwise effects between majority salience and control conditions.

REFERENCES


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