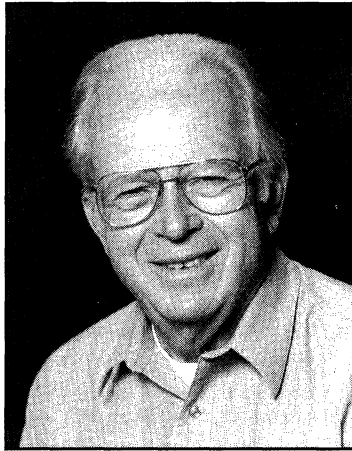


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# THE RATIONAL AND THE AMBIVALENT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES\*

## *1997 Presidential Address*

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*In this essay I attempt to establish the centrality of a fundamental idea—ambivalence—as a psychological postulate that is essential for understanding individual behavior, social institutions, and the human condition generally. In this effort I examine the strengths and limitations of an alternative postulate—the rational-choice model of behavior—and argue for supplementing it with a conception of ambivalence. The idea of ambivalence is essential for explaining phenomena such as reactions to death and separation, but also is required in our understanding of love, social organizations, social movements, consumer attitudes, political practices and institutions, as well as the fundamental values of the Western democratic tradition.*

The idea of “the rational” holds a noble place in the history of philosophy. In that tradition it is closely linked to reason, a mental faculty through which humans are able to think logically, reflect on right reasons for conduct, and discover the rational life—which in its turn is connected with a virtuous life. The idea of reason reached both a turning point and an apex in the Age of Reason in eighteenth-century France, when it came to dwell on the capacity of humankind to devise an orderly, *rational society*, free from the encumbrances of religion, aristocracy, and tradition (Taine 1881; Tocqueville 1856).

“Rational” has always been a positive word. Sica (1988) observes that

... “rationality” has attained totemic status, having served more often during the past two centuries as slogan or symbol than as convincing analytic concept. It connotes secularization and the eclipse of mythological explanation. (P. 4)

An exception to this glorious history, of course, is the idea of “psychological rationalization,” or creating phony good reasons for ignoble motives.

The rational survives in the contemporary social sciences, but except in psychology, the link with reflective capacity has largely dissolved and the idea of a virtuous life derived from reason seems to have disappeared altogether. The major contemporary meanings of “rational” are the following:

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(1) *Rational choice* derives from the British utilitarian tradition, via neo-classical economics. It is the theoretical core of economics, though it has been greatly qualified and elaborated through parametric modifications and other developments such as game theory. It has also spread, with varying success and opposition, into political science, sociology, anthropology, law, organization theory, management science, and elsewhere. The central tenet of rational choice is that individual and corporate actors take into account their preferences and the relevant external conditions and behave so as to maximize their utility or advantage.

(2) *Rationality as an organizational or institutional strategy* is conveyed in Weber's ([1922] 1968) concept of "rational bourgeois capitalism," which connotes the *systematic* organization of ideas, people, and resources in the interests of instrumental efficiency and effectiveness. This idea is also found—though with less positive connotations—in Habermas's (1975) notion of instrumental rationality embodied in the administrative-legal bureaucracy of the contemporary state. Weber's idea sometimes implies *differentiation* and *elaboration*, so that, in addition to the economy, administrative structures, legal systems, musical styles, and religious traditions may become rationalized. In this connotation "rationality" and "rationalization" are almost synonyms; both refer to systematic social-structural and cultural development. Some postmodern and globalist writers regard this meaning of the rational as a distinctive feature of modern society, which is giving way to postmodern forces (Albrow 1996:34–37).

(3) *Scientific rationality* refers to the assumptions, values, norms, and procedures of scientific inquiry. It guides the conduct of research and the production of theory and empirical findings, keeping them in line with scientific logic and methods. Those committed to sociology and other social sciences *as sciences* accept some version of scientific rationality, though its tenets have come under attack within our own fields.

Rational choice and rationality as an institutional strategy have become increasingly dominant in the second half of the twentieth century. I mentioned the march of rational-choice analysis. Consider also several other

examples: in *psychology*, the overwhelming success of the cognitive revolution, with offshoots of cognitive science and information science; in *organizational theory*, the emergence of theories of rational management of organizations, including management science in schools of business administration; in *psychoanalysis*, the shift from drive and instinct psychology toward ego psychology and object-relations theory, and the downplaying of the unconscious and the irrational; in the study of *social movements*, less emphasis on affect and ideology and more emphasis on the instrumental/rational perspectives of resource mobilization and social-movement organizations; in the revolution made possible by the *computer*—a rationalizing device *par excellence*; in the spectacular expansion of *global capitalism*, accompanied by extended rationalization of world resources, organizations, and markets.

Correspondingly, nonrationalist and irrationalist perspectives in the social sciences have diminished. Nietzsche finds few adherents; Freud must be considered marginal (even in anthropology, where the Freudian-inspired "culture and personality" approach has waned); Le Bon has been passé for decades; Mosca and Michels are remembered not for their "irrationalism" but for their theories on the distribution of power; Pareto is famous not for his residues and derivations (the ideological and emotional dimensions of life) but for his "optimum," a rational principle of welfare economics and social policy; and Simmel's sociology of emotion and eroticism remains unappreciated. We currently see stirrings in the psychology and sociology of emotion, but these are flickers in relation to the larger trends toward rationalization.

The main countertrend in the contemporary world is a certain *anti-rationality*, which is directed at all three identified forms of rationality. I have in mind the cumulative impact of strands of thought such as neo-Marxism, critical theory, varieties of phenomenology, some parts of feminist and gender studies, cultural studies, and postmodernism. Some neo-Marxist and critical thought has rejected much social science as an apology for capitalism and the state; the phenomenological impulse has sought to undermine the positivistic and generalizing aspects of so-

cial-science investigation; some feminist writers have attacked rational-choice theory and other lines of social-science analysis as male-dominated and male-biased; and post-modernism combines an alienation from “rational” aspects of modern society with an anti-science impulse, an identification with the oppressed, and a fascination with “difference” and the uniqueness of “the other,” which rejects general principles and grand narratives. At the same time, representatives of these approaches themselves appeal to reason and logic and occasionally marshal empirical data to press their perspectives.

Thus we witness a polarization between various kinds of rationality and a reactive anti-rationality that includes a curious right-left opposition, and serious analysis of the nonrational and irrational somehow has been abandoned by the wayside. I suggest that the role of nonrational forces in individual, group, and institutional behavior can be resuscitated by employing the idea of ambivalence. I hope that we can liberate ourselves to a degree from the world-view implied in the enduring distinctions among the rational, the nonrational, and the irrational.

### SOME NOTES ON RATIONAL CHOICE

I now turn to rational choice as theoretical assumption and as psychological construct. Some of my observations are critical, but I intend neither to applaud nor to bash the rational-choice approach yet again. Rather, I aim toward developing a supplement to it.

The ingredients of rational choice, as refined in neoclassical economics, are: (1) individual actors, uninfluenced by others and “unconstrained by norms” (Coleman 1990: 503), are motivated to maximize their well-being (utility); (2) actors possess complete information about their tastes, their resources, and the availability, quality, and prices of products, as well as about job opportunities and other market conditions; (3) actors calculate and behave rationally—they do not make errors, they do not forget what they know, they do not act on impulse or otherwise irrationally; (4) tastes are “given”—that is, they are stable and not to be explained—they are the starting-point and not the object of analysis; and (5) the interaction

between two actors, the buyer and seller, produces an equilibrium point at which exchange occurs, and at this point supply and demand and utility and cost converge.

In the recent history of rational-choice analysis, economists and others have relaxed every one of these five ingredients and now analyze situations with incomplete information, risk and uncertainty, unstable preferences, power differentials among actors, satisficing rather than maximizing utility, and so on. Furthermore, rational-choice analysts have moved beyond market interchanges to analyze contest situations (game theory), voting and other political behavior (Downs 1957), participation in social movements (Oberschall 1973; Olson 1965), racial discrimination, decisions to marry and have children (Becker 1976), and addiction (Becker and Murphy 1988). Schelling (1996) has even devised a model of coping rationally with lapses in rationality. These developments have meant—according to one’s point of view—a relaxation of original rational-choice assumptions to extend and refine the rational-choice model, and an “imperialism” on the part of economists and other rational-choice theorists. Above all, these developments in rational-choice analysis involve a conceptual stretching of the idea of rational and threaten a theoretical degeneration: *Everything* becomes rational if you push hard enough, and “rational” becomes more or less synonymous with “adaptive.”

Despite these relaxations and extensions, rational-choice analysis retains a theoretical continuity. Even if conditions of risk, uncertainty, lack of knowledge, third parties, and so forth, are incorporated, the rational-choice analyst’s strategy is to convert them into parameters and ask, *given those parameters*, how will individuals behave rationally? This query is answered by building a model of rational behavior under newly hypothesized conditions, frequently expressed mathematically and sometimes related to hypothetical or real empirical data. This, then, is the kernel of continuity, the enduring “culture” of rational-choice analysis (Smelser 1995).

I note five additional points about rational-choice analysis:

(1) “Rational” is a relative, not an absolute notion. It varies according to framing perspective and level of analysis. The same item

of behavior (e.g., smoking) may be rational in the short run (it gratifies) but not in the long run (it increases the probability of premature death). To sell in a panicking financial market may be rational from the individual's standpoint, but its aggregated effects on markets may lead to irrational outcomes. To dump toxic waste in the river may be rational for a firm (to minimize costs), but not rational from the standpoint of preserving the environment.

(2) Rational choice is relative in a second sense. For rational-choice behavior to be possible, a number of conditions must be present. At the individual level, mutual trust and predictability between exchanging partners is a necessary social-psychological condition. At the social level the necessary conditions include a stable institutional setting and rules for exchange (a market), a stable medium (money or its equivalent), and a legal order that prevents theft, fraud, and coercion and enforces rules of property and contract. These conditions are neither rational nor non-rational in themselves. They are best regarded as contextual conditions under which behavior guided by rational choice can occur.

(3) Ironically, as rational-choice analysts execute their work, both formulaic words lose their meaning. Explained behavior is not rational in the classical sense of the term (that is, it need not involve reflection or reasoning). It need not even be consciously calculated. This is so because behavior conceived as the product of rational choice is, in the end, determined by a given set of preferences and by a number of objective factors (e.g., price and quantity). Furthermore, even though alternatives are available to the actor, the explanatory power of preferences and conditions is (or should be) complete, and thus there is no choice. So although the idea of rational choice resonates rhetorically with valued philosophical traditions of rationality and valued cultural traditions of individualism, neither reason nor choice is necessary for what passes as rational-choice analysis. Regarded correctly, rational choice is an intervening psychological constant typically invoked when assigning meaning to and explaining links between market and other conditions and rates of behavior.

(4) Rational-choice analysis leaves little place for affect or emotional attachments

(England 1989; England and Kilbourne 1990; Lawler 1997). In one sense this omission is odd, because the chief principle of utilitarianism is seeking pleasure and avoiding pain, and both pleasure and pain are affective states. Neither do anxiety, rage, love (especially blind love), neurotic conflict, or psychosis figure in rational-choice analysis, despite some recent general efforts to relate rational action and affect (Collins 1993; Hirschleifer 1993; Jasso 1993) and some research on the feelings of regret that occur after decisions are made in uncertain situations (Lindenberg 1994; Loomes and Sudgen 1982).

(5) With respect to actors' motivations, rational-choice theory relies almost exclusively on *univalent* orientations. The motivation is maximizing utility or acting on the basis of a hierarchy of preferences. Yes, negative factors are involved, as in the conception of disutility and costs, but these negative factors are conceptualized separately from preferences and weighed alongside them. Equilibrium states are reached when positives and negatives "balance out" in relation to one another. Rational-choice theory does not deal with the possibility that we can actively love and hate the same object simultaneously, or that such affective orientations cannot come into an equilibrium with one another so as to permit optimizing choice and action based on that choice.

## THE NATURE OF AMBIVALENCE

The issues of affect and valence open the door to another psychological foundation of behavior—human ambivalence. I have treated rational choice as a psychological postulate, not as a general psychological principle. As a postulate, rational choice has two advantages: (1) as a simplification, it permits the creation of formal models capable of mathematical expression and capable of generating predictions about behavior; (2) as an ingredient of explanations, it has value when applied to those socially-structured situations (markets, competitive games, political contests, arranged marriage systems) in which interests are given a place and in which gain and advantage are rewarded.

Now I turn to another psychological postulate that also has wide applicability. This

is the postulate of ambivalence—the simultaneous existence of attraction and repulsion, of love and hate. Ambivalence is inclusive in that it can focus on people, objects, and symbols. Experience alone demonstrates the importance of this phenomenon. We may, for example, divide the world into people we love and people we hate, but on close examination that distinction fades. If we think only of those we love or like most, we almost always discover this feeling accompanied by something we do not like; and even the most hateful people turn out to hold out some morbid attraction or redeeming feature.

In picking the topic of ambivalence, I am in good company. I call to your mind Merton's superb essay on sociological ambivalence ([1963] 1976), in which he masterfully crafted an account of how socially-structured roles call on incumbents simultaneously to embrace and reject the same object or norm. My approach to ambivalence takes intrapsychic processes, not roles, as the starting point, but Merton's and my analyses greet one another in a friendly fashion, even though they approach ambivalence from different directions. In another sense, though, I am in unfriendly territory. In reviewing Merton's "Sociological Ambivalence," Levine (1977) pointed to American culture's tendency "to eschew dualistic or ambivalent constructs in favor of univalent statements." American sociologists, he added, are part of this culture; they like to search for "dominant patterns, univalent metrics, monochromatic path diagrams, and unilineal logical derivations" (p. 1278; also see Levine 1985, chap. 2).

The postulate of ambivalence is meant to differ from that of rational choice in at least two senses: (1) Preferences are generally formulated in positive terms—as what people want. Although preferences can be expressed negatively, as what people do not prefer, they tend to be univalent—either positive or negative. The nature of ambivalence is to hold *opposing affective orientations* toward the same person, object, or symbol. (2) With some exceptions, preferences are regarded as relatively stable; ambivalence tends to be unstable, expressing itself in different and sometimes contradictory ways as actors attempt to cope with it.

Although the postulate of ambivalence differs from that of rational choice, it is not a

theoretical competitor and is certainly not opposed to the postulate of rational choice. Both postulates are generated for purposes of understanding, analysis, and explanation. My argument is that the notion of ambivalence leads us to understand and explain a range of behaviors and situations beyond the scope of rational-choice explanations, however far the latter may be stretched.

The term "ambivalence" was first used by the psychologist Bleuler in 1910, though the idea was not novel. He gave the term a number of meanings, one of which was simultaneously opposing affects—love and hate—toward the same object. This meaning caught the attention of Freud, the great theorist of ambivalence, and it pervaded all his works. Many elements of Freud's psychoanalytic theories have been discredited: *eros* and *thanatos*, universal dream language, the psychosexual stages of development, the primal horde. The principle of ambivalence, however, remains a cornerstone of psychoanalytic thought.

Freud applied the idea of ambivalence widely. In his "Interpretation of Dreams," he noted that often one dreams of a dead person, who subsequently comes alive, and then is again dead in the same dream. Freud argued that this sequence "help[s] the dreamer to repudiate his very intense and often contradictory emotional attitudes" (Freud [1900] 1953, vol. 5:431). Ambivalence may become eroticized, as in sado-masochism (Freud [1905] 1953, vol. 7:159). It is at the core of the oedipal relations between child and parent. Of Little Hans, for example, Freud remarked:

We know that . . . Hans's anxiety had two constituents: there was fear *of* his father and fear *for* his father. The former was derived from his hostility towards his father [a competitor for his mother], and the latter from the conflict between his affection . . . and his hostility. (Freud [1909] 1955, vol. 10:45)

Ambivalence is at the core of obsessive/compulsive disorders, in which the person continuously does and undoes the two sides of "a conflict between two opposing impulses of approximately equal strength" (Freud [1909] 1955 vol. 10:192). Indeed, the development of *conscience* itself is rooted in ambivalence—"one of the opposing feelings

involved shall be unconscious and kept under repression by the compulsive domination of the other one" (Freud [1912–1913] 1955, vol. 13:68).

Combing through Freud's writings, one discovers that he establishes the following characteristics of ambivalence:

(1) Its origins lie in the intimate relations between a child and his or her parents and siblings. These relations, I might add, are those *from which the child cannot escape*: This is a critical point.

(2) The stronger the positive side of ambivalence, the stronger the negative. Freud said,

[The] king or chief arouses envy on account of his privileges: everyone, perhaps, would like to be a king. Dead men, new-born babies and women menstruating or in labour stimulate desires by their special helplessness; a man who has just reached maturity stimulates them by the promise of new enjoyment. For that reason all of these persons and all of these states are taboo, since temptation must be resisted. (Freud [1912–1913] 1955, vol. 13:33)

Elsewhere he wrote of the "law of ambivalence of feeling, which to this day governs our emotional relations with *those whom we love most*" (Freud [1915] 1957, vol. 14:293). (Incidentally, this premise contrasts with Homans's (1950) proposition that "the more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be" [p. 133]. Homans's proposition is only half true; the "law of ambivalence" brings negative sentiments back in.)

(3) Ambivalence becomes established in the psyche. It cannot be resolved once and for all. Speaking of the child's desire to masturbate and its prohibition (both by parents and by the child's conscience), Freud noted that "the prohibition does not succeed in *abolishing* the instinct. Its only result is to *repress* the instinct (the desire to touch) and banish it into the unconscious. Both the prohibition and the instinct persist, . . . the psychological constellation becomes fixed . . . as the subject's *ambivalent* attitude toward a single object" (Freud [1909] 1955, vol. 10:29).

(4) Although fixed mainly in childhood, ambivalences generalize readily to other real and symbolic situations. Freud's most dra-

matic evidence is the patient's positive and negative transferences toward the psychoanalyst, evoked in the absence of any stimulus that might excite strong reactions. Ambivalence finds expression in religious systems. Says Freud,

The contradictions in the original nature of God are . . . a reflection of the ambivalence which governs the relation of the individual to his personal father. If the benevolent and righteous God is a substitute for his father, it is not to be wondered at that his hostile attitude to his father, too, which is one of hating and fearing him and of making complaints against him, should have come to expression in the creation of Satan. (Freud [1922] 1961, vol. 19:85)

E. Erikson (1962) repeatedly applied the idea of splitting in explaining the psychology and theology of Martin Luther's Protestantism.

The psychology of ambivalence has one final ingredient. Because ambivalence is such a *powerful, persistent, unresolvable, volatile, generalizable, and anxiety-provoking* feature of the human condition, people defend against experiencing it in many ways. Those mechanisms of defense Freud mentioned include: reversing one side of the ambivalent feeling, usually by turning the negative side into a positive ("love thine enemy") (Freud [1912] 1958, vol. 12:299); repressing one side and rigidifying the other side into a reaction-formation, for example, in the idealization of a parent; displacing or substituting a remote object or symbol for the real object; projecting, for example, resolving one's own ambivalent feelings toward a loved one who has died by blaming evil spirits; splitting or transferring the positive side of the ambivalence into an unqualified love of one person or object, and the negative side into an unqualified hatred of another (also see Klein, [1935] 1986:141–43).

The sequence beginning with ambivalence, proceeding to defense, and then moving to behavior does not fit comfortably with the logic of rational choice. Many of the dynamics of ambivalence occur beyond the range of consciousness and calculation. The psychological and behavioral reactions involved in ambivalence are likely to be immediate responses to emotions—principally anxiety—that escape personal reflection altogether. We might say that this kind of behavior is *adaptive*—though with varying

success—and *reasonable* in that it is understandable within the logic of ambivalence. (We might even suggest that ambivalence forces us to reason even more than preferences do, because conflict may be a stronger motive for thinking than is desire.) It is also possible to develop models of behavior based on the dynamics of ambivalence. But to subsume it under the logic of “rational” or “choice” or “rational choice” is not analytically helpful. To do so involves serious conceptual stretching and adds little except a false sense of precision and the positive hortatory effect that invoking the idea of “rational” typically produces.

## APPLICATIONS OF THE LOGIC OF AMBIVALENCE

### *Death and Separation*

I begin a further consideration of ambivalence by addressing an obvious example. The loss—especially the unanticipated loss—of loved ones evokes the strongest of ambivalent reactions. The classic study of bereavement is that of Lindemann (1944), a psychiatrist who interviewed the survivors of the Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire and panic in Boston during World War II. He observed among survivors a “mourning syndrome” consisting of several affective and behavioral reactions, sometimes occurring in rough sequence—numbing and denial, blaming the lost victim, blaming oneself and idealizing the victim, blaming others, and then a gradual “working through” the grief by resuming routines and building on old and new social relationships. All these reactions were accompanied by strong affects. Even those not suffering personal loss were shocked, and the tragedy was followed by episodes of scapegoating—the bellboy (who presumably started the fire), the nightclub management, city inspectors, and others (Veltford and Lee 1943).

This mourning syndrome has been documented in other settings, including the battlefield death of comrades in World War II and the Vietnam war (Grinker and Spiegel 1945; Lifton 1973), and the loss of loved ones, friends, and neighbors in natural disasters (K. Erikson 1976). It is also seen in the natural deaths of parents, spouses, children, and

other loved ones, though in the case of long-expected deaths, anticipatory grief and its associated reactions mitigate the bereavement process.

Shock, anger, grief, and recovery from grief are also witnessed in the wake of deaths of political leaders and cultural idols. These figures are often endowed with charisma, especially in times of crisis, but beneath this idealization lies a deep ambivalence, which probably accounts for “the fragility of charisma” (Aberbach 1996). Research has documented ambivalent reactions to the death of Franklin Roosevelt (Grazia 1948) and the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln, John Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Bonjean, Hill, and Martin 1965; Sheatsley and Feldman 1965; Turner 1982). The attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan in 1981 excited a similar range of reactions, including expressions by some that they wished the assassination had succeeded (Mortensen 1987). The idealization of Richard Nixon—perhaps the target of more ambivalence than any other president in the twentieth century—in the days after his death is also notable. Leadership succession—the loss of one leader and the arrival of a new one—often produces instability and turbulence (Gouldner 1954; Weber [1922] 1968). And if more evidence is needed, we need only point to the charged and often idealized memories of figures such as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, which sometimes include the belief that they are still alive (Fowles 1992). We are affectively bound to our leaders and secular gods and goddesses, both because of what they are and because we transfer to them powerful positive and negative affects from childhood. So when leaders are lost, we react with feelings of loss and bereavement.

This mourning syndrome can occur in response to separations other than death. Divorce and separation, often voluntary and even wished, can produce reactions of ambivalence and “working-through” as complex and deep as death reactions. Typically one never completely forgets or recovers from a past marriage or love attachment (Goode 1965). The departure of children from home, though sometimes welcomed by parents and children alike, is also shrouded with continuing ambivalence.

Milder though similar reactions occur after other separations, such as retirement or moving away from a community. In this connection, observe that at the end of the twentieth century the world is experiencing an acceleration of these kinds of separations—through continuing high rates of divorce, estrangement, and break-ups; through sustained rates of geographical mobility and increased rates of international migration; through the tenuousness of neighborhood and community resulting from that mobility; through the “temp revolution,” which brings workers to and from the workplace with greater frequency; and through the increased mobility *within* the workplace associated with the phenomenon of flexible specialization (Piore and Sabel 1984). Our time might be called the “age of temporariness,” or the “age of intermittency,” or perhaps the “age of sequential bonding.” The human being has an enormous capacity to adapt to these circumstances, but we also must acknowledge that we are not immune from the recurrent ambivalent reactions that accompany such comings and goings.

A single principle underlies all these examples: When we bond with people deeply, or even superficially, we become to some degree less emotionally free as a result. These relations invariably become fused with some ambivalence, and when we lose or separate from others, dealing with that ambivalence becomes a necessity, even though the coping process is often mild and passing. This principle invites generalization, and I now turn to some less self-evident applications.

### *Dependence, Limitations on Choice, and Ambivalence*

Let us recall the kinds of situations to which models of rational choice appear to apply best: situations in which both calculation and choice are institutionalized and rewarded and in which standards for calculation are known. Another ingredient of such situations is that the actor may freely enter into and withdraw from exchange relations. We call this ingredient “choice,” which is a type of *freedom*, and markets for consumer goods and free labor are its prototypes. In Hirschman’s (1970) words, “some customers stop buying the firm’s products or some

members leave the organization” (p. 4). This is Hirschman’s *exit option*, to which I will return later.

Of course, this freedom is relative, as deciding *not* to buy a product may involve a psychological cost. Furthermore, one usually has to work *somewhere*, and it is often both costly and risky for an employee to quit one job and search for another. Note, however, that rational-choice theorists (especially game theorists) also have analyzed situations in which choice is limited, for example, relations to authority, blackmail situations, and international relations.

With this reference to freedom in mind, I now call attention to a contrasting range of situations in which actors are *dependent* on one another. The form of dependence may vary. A subordinate person in a power relationship is politically dependent; a person who is committed to a religious or social movement cause is ideologically dependent; a person in love is emotionally dependent. The common element, however, is that freedom to leave—choice—is restricted because it is costly politically, ideologically, or emotionally. Thus, dependence entails a certain entrapment. Although the relation between dependence and solidarity—the positive side of ambivalence—is well articulated (Hechter 1987), this negative side of dependence has not been given anything like equal time. My general proposition is that dependent situations breed ambivalence, and correspondingly, models of behavior based on the postulate of ambivalence are the most applicable. I illustrate this proposition in several situations:

(1) Let us return to Freud. His prototypical setting for the development of ambivalence is the young child, who is dependent on his or her parents in many ways—dependent on them for survival as an organism, dependent on them as authorities, and emotionally dependent on them because he or she loves them. Childhood entails a type of enslavement from which one cannot escape. The child’s objects of ambivalence are those by whom he or she is entrapped—parents and siblings (and perhaps increasingly these days, day-care personnel). Adolescence is the protracted experience of partial escape, a period in which ambivalence toward parents and siblings is repeatedly “acted out,” some-



times in extreme ways. Once the escape to independence has been more or less accomplished, we often observe a return to the positive side of the ambivalence because the entrapment is diminished. This process is captured in Mark Twain's remark that when he was 16 years old he thought his father the stupidest man in the world, but by the time he reached 21 he was surprised at how much the old man had learned in 5 years. The escape is never complete, however. The enslaved child inside us never totally sheds its ambivalence toward parents and siblings, and this ambivalence finds expression in recurrent "transference" to authorities, colleagues, subordinates, loved ones, friends, gods, demons, heroes, and scapegoats.

(2) The most common adult relationships in which ambivalence is most evident are those between lovers, partners, intimates, and friends—in a word, those on whom we are dependent. One might appropriately term these relations "voluntary emotional dependence," or perhaps the dependence arising from the half-voluntary, half-involuntary actions of falling in love and becoming friends. These relationships often involve other kinds of dependence as well—for example, in marriage, the dependence deriving from the differential power of husband and wife, and in friendships among political and status unequals. Emotional dependence, however, is always a part of the picture.

(3) Lawler's (1997) experimental and theoretical work on group membership and affect suggests that "positive emotion generated by choice processes strengthens affective ties to groups credited with making choice opportunities available; negative emotion weakens ties to those blamed for constraining choice" (p. 393 ; also see Lawler 1992). The general principle is that constraint generates ambivalence, and that, as a special case, the difficulty involved in withdrawing from a group into which one is "locked" increases ambivalence toward that group and its members.

(4) Certain types of organization are seedbeds of ambivalence and its consequences—spite, petty wrangling, struggles for recognition, and vicious politics—even though the political stakes are often not very high. These are Goffman's (1962) "total institutions"—mental institutions, military camps, prisons, and private schools—and also include mon-

asteries, convents, psychoanalytic institutes, and academic departments. What these organizations have in common is that their participants are "locked in" by personal or institutional commitment or other situational circumstances and can escape only at great cost. In academic departments people are "locked in" by tenure or by the yearning and struggle for tenure, and can escape only at great cost unless a more attractive opportunity arises. People have to live with one another, but this does not mean they have to love one another; it implies, rather, that they both love and hate one another.

These organizational settings contrast with situations in which people live temporarily but from which they know they will withdraw or escape. I refer to these as "odyssey" situations, which have a known beginning, duration, and end. They include ocean voyages, summer camps, junior years abroad, and the college years. I would also include the years in residence at my own Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. People, sometimes strangers, are thrown together in physical proximity, but they know this close contact will end in time. They can thus afford to love one another and more or less bury the negative side of the ambivalence that is associated with intimacy. This circumstance, I am certain, goes a long way toward explaining why such odyssey experiences are typically lived and remembered with unalloyed sentimentality and nostalgia.

(5) Another setting for ambivalence is those groups, organizations, and social movements that demand commitment, adherence, and faithfulness from their believer-members. These include churches, ethnic and racial identity groups and movements, labor unions and other social-class movements, and social movements generally. Some of these settings have salience in contemporary times—namely in the apparent worldwide challenge to the nation-state by identity groups and identity movements. The dependence created in these settings comes through commitment to a belief, cause, or common goal and through membership in a demanding organization.

Three observations are in order: (a) These groups and organizations manifest the principle of in-group solidarity and out-group hostility. This principle was enunciated

forcefully in the sociology of Georg Simmel (Coser 1956; Wolff 1950:368–70)). Almost all groupings regard the world dichotomously—as friends or enemies, believers or nonbelievers, good or evil. We do not understand the full significance of this categorization, but one of its apparent functions is to diminish the internal ambivalence bred by commitment by splitting it between inside and outside. I know of no mechanism that better protects the fragile solidarity of these intense groups. (b) Many social movements—those we classify as protest movements—act *against* political authorities or against social arrangements put in place and legitimized by them. They express the negative side of ambivalence that colors most orientations toward authority. At the same time, many such movements exhibit opposite tendencies within—the adoration of leaders and strong demands for conformity and commitment. But in the end, movement leaders are themselves subject to the vicissitudes of their followers' ambivalence, and they stand in constant danger of experiencing a negative turn. (c) Just as the defiant child excites ambivalence in his or her parents—generated by struggles with their *own* inherited ambivalences—so political authorities almost invariably assume an ambivalent attitude toward those who protest against them. Accordingly, authorities are forever tempted to punish, ironically contributing to their own vulnerability. The delicate relationship between protesters and authorities is often a double-dance of ambivalence, a game of last-tag in which each forever tries to avoid illegitimate expression of the negative side of their ambivalence and to push their antagonists into it.

(6) In consumer markets we see ambivalence toward some kinds of products such as jewelry, fine clothing, furs, and luxury automobiles. This ambivalence finds expression especially among those who cannot afford extravagance or luxuries and sometimes among those who can. Attitudes toward these luxury products contrast with those toward primarily utilitarian items such as hammers, nails, garden hoses, and toothpaste. The reason for the ambivalence and controversy does not reside in material characteristics of the products themselves. It arises because they are symbols of the *status systems* in

community and society. People's places in these systems are largely involuntary; these are systems from which it is difficult to escape, and symbols of these systems are bound to draw ambivalent reactions.

(7) Finally, in our search for applications of the idea of ambivalence, we would do well to look in sociology's back yard. There is almost no facet of our existence as sociologists about which we do not show ambivalence and its derivative, dividing into groups or quasi-groups of advocacy and counter-advocacy. We are ambivalent toward one another; toward the competing notions of our discipline as science, as humanistic study, as political enterprise, and as art; toward the different methodologies we employ; toward the academic departments that house us; toward the administrators and funding agencies that sustain us; toward other disciplines; and last but not least, toward our subject matter itself—the community as simultaneously embracing and suffocating, the deviant as simultaneously troublemaker and innovator. You name it, we have mixed feelings about it. We do not think much about these ambivalences; we mainly voice and act on them without reflection. The sobering paradox is that although we as sociologists are perhaps among the best equipped to understand ambivalences, we scarcely think about or study them. Yet to understand them would lead us toward explaining our own sectarian and schismatic tendencies, as well as those in academic life generally.

### *Social Structure, Social Process, and Political Ambivalence*

To carry this analysis of ambivalence further, I call attention to some social structures and processes that serve, among other things, as vehicles for the expression, play, and never-to-be-realized resolution of individual and group ambivalence. Let me begin by addressing one possible misunderstanding. I have no interest in the *origins* of these structures and processes, and more important, I disown any claim that they are conscious or unconscious *inventions* designed to deal with ambivalence. The special function these structures and processes serve, however, may have something to do with the passion they excite and their tendency to endure.

Many if not all societies institutionalize rituals that reverse, at least temporarily, ambivalently regarded situations—for example, giving high-school students the opportunity to run the city government for a day and the widespread practice of ritual rebellion (Gluckman 1963). In our own and other societies, athletic contests, organized around institutional memberships (high schools, colleges, and universities) and communities or territories (professional sports), offer endless opportunities for the splitting of ambivalence—solidarity with the one side, hostility toward the other. Because athletic contests are usually carefully controlled and defined as “only games” that do not matter in the serious business of life, the splitting is relatively benign, except when it spills over into barroom brawls, mob violence and looting, and marauding of crowds of soccer fans. In the same light, one also could mention local and regional pride (which invariably includes some hostility toward *other* localities and regions) as well as uneasily institutionalized urban gangs, known both for their fierce solidarity and their potential for violence.

Familiar political institutions and processes also offer opportunities for converting ambivalent feelings into univalent preferences, and in the meantime, delegitimizing in a certain way one side or the other of ambivalence. Consider the following illustrations:

*The public opinion survey*—a special invention of the social sciences—has, over time, evolved into a full-scale political institution. Its essence is this: A representative sample of citizens is asked a question about a political official (approve or disapprove), a political candidate (how one intends to vote), or some issue of public concern (crime, drugs, abortion, affirmative action, race relations). Most research on public opinion focuses on background social factors (age, race, sex, religion, education) or on cognitive processes (complexity theory, balance theory, dissonance theory) (Milburn 1991). From an affective point of view, however, the interesting fact is that most survey questions are phrased *univalently*—approve or disapprove, favor or not favor, and how strongly. Introspection alone, however, informs us that our feelings about pub-

lic figures and issues are *ambivalent* if not *multivalent*. Consider only the following U. S. Presidents: Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton. All of these names conjure in us mixed feelings, even though we may prefer some over others. Likewise, we are ambivalent on many of the social issues tapped by surveys, even though we may sometimes confidently represent our opinions to ourselves and others as absolute. This ambivalence is seldom tapped by most surveys. Indeed, it is typically shunted aside by offering forced-choice alternatives. Surveys often depict the world as though it is divided into people who are for and against someone or something—a clear distortion of the social-psychological reality of public feelings. This representation is then reified into an imagined “public opinion,” reported as reality in the press, read by market analysts and politicians, and acted upon. Following this reasoning, we must regard attitude surveys not as revealed preferences but as a distorted structure of reality that minimizes and—in the process—delegitimizes both ambiguity and ambivalence.

This general diagnosis of public opinion surveys must be qualified in one important way. Some sociological colleagues (Schuman and Presser 1981; Smith 1984; Turner and Martin 1984) have attacked, with great imagination, the issues of measuring non-attitudes, passion, intensity, subjectivity, and ambiguity, thus moving closer to the kind of methodological sophistication required to tap human ambivalence.

Other, *more binding parts of the political process* also redefine, defuse, and pacify—at least temporarily—situations of more or less permanent and never-resolved public ambivalence. In the electoral process, voting converts individual ambivalence into absolute preference. (Votes, too, are not revealed preferences but conversions of ambivalence into univalence.) The results are aggregated and the winner takes all, at least for a time (Slater 1963). At the same time, public ambivalence is temporarily delegitimized, which is why protests against election outcomes seldom occur, or if they do, they are ineffectual unless they take the form of constitutional challenges. This either-or logic

applies to a wide range of political acts—laws enacted, acceptable compromises reached, court decisions made. All these binding political decisions partake of this either-or, winner-take-all character, and thus can be regarded as “truce points” in the eternal process of temporarily resolving ambivalent and conflictual situations and rendering one side of public ambivalence temporarily unacceptable and non-legitimate.

Following this logic, I have found it enlightening to re-read Hirschman’s (1970) remarkable book, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, as a treatise on ambivalence. Hirschman’s view concerns the market mainly, but it also applies to organizations and nation-states. In what follows I will consider the political aspects.

Viewed from the perspectives of citizen and state:

(1) *Exit* is the capacity of citizens to react to the negative side of their ambivalence toward the nation. The nation is, of course, a social entity on which we are dependent, because we are locked into it by membership from birth and live within its laws and power. The exit option is to leave the country.

(2) *Loyalty* represses the negative side of the ambivalence and accentuates the positive.

(3) *Voice*, finally, is intermediate; some degree of loyalty is presupposed, and some degree of alienation and opposition—a wish to exit, as it were—is acknowledged. Some arena is established for “working out” public ambivalence and conflict—with varying effectiveness—and “working it into” institutional arrangements. Voice is, in Hirschman’s words, “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs” (1970:30). Voice is manifested in democratic institutions. It is especially important when exit is unavailable or too costly. As Hirschman noted, “[T]his is very nearly the situation in such basic social organization as the family, the state, or the church” (1970:33).

Exit is costly for individuals, however, and Hirschman (1970) perceives ambivalence—as well as psychological splitting—involved in exiting:

In leaving his country the emigrant makes a difficult decision and usually pays a high price in severing many strong affective ties. Additional payment is extracted as he is being initi-

ated into a new environment and adjusting to it. The result is a strong psychological compulsion to like that for which so large a payment has been made. In retrospect, the “old country” will appear more abominable than ever while the new country will be declared to be the greatest, “the last hope of mankind,” and all manner of other superlatives. (Pp. 112–13)

Hirschman’s “splitting” resolution may be typical, but a truer account would consider the continuing ambivalence toward both old and new, just as colonies that have “exited” an empire experience a continuing ambivalence toward the former colonial power.

Many combinations of exit, voice, and loyalty can function as resolutions of ambivalence in binding organizations. In classical Judaism, self-defined as tribal, exit was impossible and extreme loyalty was demanded. In classical Catholicism, exit was virtually impossible (except through excommunication), and voice (heterodoxy) was prohibited, except for Catholic “orders,” which did not fully exit and retained some voice while proclaiming loyalty. In much of Protestantism loyalty has been a matter of individual commitment; more voice is permitted, and exit (schism) is relatively easy. In its uneasy history, East Germany suppressed both exit and voice and demanded extreme loyalty. When at a critical moment exit became possible, exit *became* voice, and the regime, which commanded ambivalence at best and little true loyalty, collapsed (Joppke 1995).

Finally, this line of reasoning adds to our understanding of democracy and democratic institutions. To simplify, the French Revolution provided the West (and the world, as it turns out) two great political legacies that crystallized as that revolution unfolded. The first legacy is the values of a free democratic community, which were expressed in the first word of the Revolution’s slogan—*liberté*—implying that the state will not intrude on citizens except in instances when they threaten to do harm to others. The second is the idea of the modern nation-state—*la patrie*—which has become the modern basis of political integration. The nation-state is envisioned as the single seat of sovereignty and governance, a bounded territory, the locus of economic self-sufficiency, the monopolistic wielder of legitimate force

and violence, the focus of a common culture (including language), and the object of loyalty and group identity. (Our own pledge of allegiance to the flag, which refers to “one nation . . . indivisible, with liberty . . . for all” compresses both legacies into a single phrase.)

These two sets of ideals are evidently utopian—unrealizable in their pure form. Moreover, they often pull in opposite directions, and as a result, create a range of political ambivalences that have never been resolved and that continue to dominate our political life (Wagner 1994). In this context, most democratic institutions appear as “voices”—mechanisms available to work through these ambivalences continuously as a process if never entirely satisfactorily completed as a task.

Here is my reasoning: Liberty can be regarded as a principle of limited exit within a context of loyalty—a way of minimizing governmental involvement in the lives of citizens. This principle, however, stands in permanent tension with the political imperatives of the sovereign nation, which are to discourage exit and to demand loyalty, both of which impinge on liberty, absolutely defined. By institutionalizing a democratic principle—or fiction, if one prefers—that the rulers are ruled by the people they rule, limited intrusions on liberty are defended as legitimate, particularly if rulers are policed by a quasi-independent agency, the courts.

### CONCLUDING REMARK

If we move toward the broader implications of the place of the rational and the ambivalent in the social sciences, it becomes clear that we are dealing with a fundamental existential dilemma in the human condition. It is communicated in various dichotomies—freedom versus constraint, independence versus dependence, autonomy versus dependence, maturity versus infancy, and more—but whatever the dichotomy, the dilemma appears to be insoluble. Neither pole is a separate state or condition. Neither freedom nor dependence can be realized in a full or exclusive form, because one is part of the other. Human beings long and strive for both, but, when they achieve a measure of either, the other reasserts itself. As in the nature of am-

bivalence itself, we want both sides at once, but cannot fully satisfy either side.

We social scientists, in our brief history, have fashioned a certain “division of labor” that is understandable in the dilemma I have described. Economics and part of political science (democratic theory and the study of democracy) have stressed the freedom side; parts of sociology, anthropology, and social psychology—which stress the interpersonal as well as normative and other constraining forces—stress human interdependence. I have argued that the traditions of rational choice apply best to situations in which *relative* freedom of choice reigns. Coleman (1990) appears to confirm my point in his advocacy of the rational-action model for social theory. He argues that its principles are “grounded in a humanistically congenial image of man” (p. 4). By this he refers to a classical liberal image—“the freedom of individuals to act as they will” and a concern over “constraints that social interdependence places on that freedom” (1990:4). To me this says that rational-choice principles are *applicable* to situations in which choice is *institutionalized*.

I also have argued that psychological models based on ambivalence have special power in social situations in which political, group, and emotional dependence is salient. We find both sides of the dilemma—between freedom and dependence—stressed in relative degrees in our social arrangements.

I argue, finally, that we must be driven to understand both sides—freedom and dependence—by employing different assumptions and different explanatory strategies. In investigating freedom *and* dependence as well as freedom we reach toward a fuller understanding of human action, social institutions, and the human condition itself.

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