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*The Political Culture of Ambivalence: Ideological Responses to the Welfare State**

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This paper explores the principles that people draw upon to justify their support for social welfare policy in the United States. The data for this study were produced by open-ended questions asked of a representative sample of the U.S. public. The results show that most people readily use values and principles central to the political culture when discussing their policy preferences. The wide diffusion of *diverse* values—individualism, humanitarianism, and opposition to big government—leads to significant ambivalence in people's discussions of their issue positions. The implications of these patterns of belief for popular support of the welfare state are discussed.

Writing just after the crest of the postwar liberalism symbolized by the Great Society, Free and Cantril (1968) observed an apparent contradiction in the political beliefs of many Americans. A large proportion of the public enthusiastically supported the specific federal programs that constitute the modern American welfare state. However, a similarly large number of people also endorsed a series of strong statements that condemned big government and praised economic individualism. Free and Cantril described this as a "schizoid combination of operational liberalism with ideological conservatism" (1968, 37). While in practice people accept the role of the federal government in maintaining social welfare, "the abstract ideas they tend to hold about the nature and functioning of our socioeconomic system still seem to stem more from the underlying assumptions of a laissez-faire philosophy than from the operating assumptions of the New Deal, the Fair Deal, the New Frontier, or the Great Society" (1968, 30).

Other observers of U.S. society have detected similar sorts of conflicts but

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see them as an enduring feature of U.S. political ideology rather than a short-term failure to adapt to changing circumstances. This conflict is usually seen as a clash between two major elements of the political culture: achievement and equality (Lipset 1979), capitalism and democracy (McClosky and Zaller 1984), or freedom and equality (Rokeach 1973). Rather than making an ideologically clean choice between these competing values, people tend to accept both of them, emphasizing one over the other in specific situations, but never wholly rejecting either.

These claims about American values are important because they purport to describe a fundamental property of public opinion—one that, it is asserted, greatly affects the course of public policy in the United States. For example, Free and Cantril argue that Americans need to adapt their ideological convictions to the changing role of government in order to “implement their political desires in a more intelligent, direct, and consistent manner” (1968, 181). But such claims are highly problematic in that they presume a level of ideological awareness of the public that is, by many accounts, unrealistic. In fact, it has become almost a commonplace in the political behavior literature that Americans are ideologically innocent.¹ One can readily imagine, therefore, that many of the people who endorse welfare state programs while proclaiming allegiance to *laissez-faire* ideals are completely unaware of any tension between them. What analysts such as Free and Cantril call value “schizophrenia” may be just another instance of ideology-free thought.

Our article is an attempt to resolve this difficulty. Contrary to the evidence of “ideological innocence,” we argue that Americans do, for the most part, understand the philosophical underpinnings of the policies they endorse, and that, much more often than the belief systems literature would lead one to expect, Americans make use of cultural values and principles in explicating and justifying their political preferences. Further, we show that, exactly as the Free and Cantril analysis would suggest, it is liberals rather than conservatives who are most beset by value conflict over social welfare because they are the ones who must somehow reconcile activist government with traditional principles of economic individualism and *laissez-faire*.

This paper thus has two separate but closely related aims. The first is to confirm the oft-made claim that popular support for the welfare state in the United States must continually struggle with the values of nineteenth-century liberalism. What is novel about our confirmation is that it is the first to be based on systematic coding of data obtained from open-ended probes of a large, nationally representative sample. This gives us an evidentiary base for our claims that is significantly stronger than that which has been available to previous researchers in this area. The second aim of the paper is to clarify and propose a

¹See Kinder and Sears (1985) for a recent review of the evidence.

resolution to the Converse-Lane controversy over political ideology. We shall not dispute Converse's claim that most people are relatively nonideological in that they normally fail to organize tightly their symbolic concerns in accord with liberalism or conservatism. In fact, our data will help show why this is true, at least for social welfare issues. But in a more revisionist vein, we shall show that Americans do understand and use cultural values and principles in evaluating and articulating many of their political preferences. These two claims do not contradict each other; rather they reflect a long-standing feature of the political culture.

The Prevalence of Ideology in the United States

In Converse's (1964) analysis of mass belief systems, the central idea is that of constraint, namely, the capacity of one political idea to control or "constrain" another. Thus, if people both embrace a general principle, such as economic individualism, and derive specific policies from this value, their more specific ideas are constrained by ideological principle. If, on the other hand, people hold general values that are manifestly inconsistent with most of their concrete policy preferences, the preferences are said to be unconstrained by ideological principle. Converse's conclusion, of course, was that most individuals have unconstrained belief systems in the sense that their attitudes are not organized by the left-right continuum or any other sort of dimensional continuum. Inconsistency in policy preferences and political beliefs is thus a characteristic of a lack of ideological structure.

Several researchers have examined other types of evidence and have come to an entirely different conclusion. In her in-depth interviews with 28 adults from New Haven, Hochschild (1981) describes in detail the "ambivalence" that emerges from her subjects' attempts to apply traditional norms of economic differentiation to modern problems of social welfare. Many of her respondents seemed at least somewhat aware of the underlying conflicts, although "they find it easier to live with, and to try to ignore, even distressing normative tensions than to undertake the enormous effort needed to resolve them" (1981, 258). Similarly, Reinerman's (1987) interviews with six public sector and six private sector workers are full of statements that alternately reflect belief in the free market and individualism, recognition that the system is not completely open and that people need assistance, and criticisms of the bureaucratization and performance of the federal government. In both of these studies, conflict and ambivalence is interpreted not as confusion, inconsistency, or lack of sophistication but as a problem of reconciling the multiple values, beliefs, and principles simultaneously present in the political culture.

Value conflict and ambivalence of this sort are not easily identified with the types of fixed choice questions typically used in mass survey instruments. And worse, when they are identified, they may easily be taken as evidence of lack of constraint—and hence lack of concern for abstract principles. Yet, as both

Hochschild and Reinerman show, it is dangerous to equate lack of consistency with lack of understanding of the principles that underlie policy preferences (see also Lane 1973).

The first step toward untangling these issues is to specify as clearly as possible the relationship between the content and structure of the political culture and the individual-level organization of political preferences and beliefs.

By political culture we mean a set of values that are widely endorsed by politicians, educators, and other opinion leaders and that animate the principal political institutions of a society. In the United States, these values include freedom, equality, individualism, democracy, capitalism, and several others. This distinctive constellation of values originated in radical British politics, diffused to North America in the colonial period, inspired the organizers of the American Revolution (Baylin 1967), and diffused widely enough by the 1830s to be clearly observable at the mass level by the time of Tocqueville's visit to the United States. More recent survey-based studies confirm that most Americans continue to embrace the core values of this political culture (Devine 1972; Lipset 1979; McClosky and Zaller 1984).

Yet many analysts contend that U. S. political culture embodies a substantial amount of unresolved value conflict, especially between freedom and equality (Lipset 1979; McClosky and Zaller 1984). How do people respond to this conflict?

Even the most cursory examination of U.S. politics reveals that many of the elite sources of political culture, especially partisan politicians, are more enthusiastic about some aspects of the culture than others. Thus, some tend to favor freedom, especially individual economic freedom, over other values, especially equality and popular sovereignty. These people are widely considered, and usually consider themselves, to be conservatives. Others manifest the reverse preference ordering and are considered liberals. These recognized liberal and conservative opinion leaders, by the policies they favor and the pronouncements they make, effectively create a set of ideological conventions for organizing conflict among the values of the political culture. Members of the public who attend closely to politics become aware of these organizing conventions and tend to internalize the one that is most congenial to their own value predispositions. People who, on the other hand, devote little attention to politics remain relatively innocent of liberal-conservative ideology.²

Ideology and culture are thus closely related. In fact, liberal-conservative

²There have been a number of discussions of the individual-level roots of ideology and ideological conflict. Space prevents us from discussing this literature in any depth. Hypotheses have pointed variously to orientations toward change and group evaluations (Conover and Feldman 1981), feelings of sympathy and humanitarianism (Conover 1988), priorities attached to the values of freedom and equality (Rokeach 1973), and orientations toward social order, social change, and social benevolence (McClosky and Zaller 1984). These individual-level predispositions may then orient people toward one or the other of the packages of cultural values: liberalism or conservatism.

ideology may be considered a response to conflicts within the culture. Faced with tension between achievement and equality (Lipset 1979), between laissez-faire principles and pressures for a welfare state (Free and Cantril 1968), between freedom and equality (Rokeach 1973), or between capitalism and democracy (McClosky and Zaller 1984), conservatives tend to opt for the former value set and liberals for the latter. As McClosky and Zaller write, "Such ideological conflict as exists in America is confined within a broad framework of almost universal public support for the basic values of capitalism and democracy. . . . [But when] asked to decide between preserving a laissez-faire economy and enacting measures that promise greater social and economic equality, conservatives emphasize capitalistic values while liberals emphasize democratic values. Although both liberals and conservatives accept the basic values of the two traditions, each group emphasizes those parts of the [political culture] most compatible with its own philosophical disposition" (1984, 233). In sum, nearly all Americans have absorbed the principal elements of their political culture, and as Hochschild in particular has shown, they are highly sensitive to its characteristic fault lines. Yet they are relatively nonideological in that most do not reconcile these tensions in ways that would lead to the development of consistent liberal or conservative ideologies. These two conclusions—which, we believe, help clarify the Lane-Converse controversy—constitute our presuppositions as we enter this study.

The Intersection of Political Culture, Ideology, and the Welfare State

Weak though ideological conflict may be in the United States, it obviously remains an important influence. A principal purpose of this study is to show how liberalism and conservatism relate to the values of the larger political culture. Inasmuch as democratic and egalitarian traditions are present in the political culture alongside individualism and limited government, both conservatives and liberals are forced to deal with inherent tensions: conservatives cannot easily dismiss equality and democracy as core values in U.S. society nor can liberals ignore the values of individualism and limited government.³ Nonetheless, policy disputes over the welfare state raise value conflicts that are far more troubling to liberals than to conservatives. Conservatives can, after all, readily justify anti-social welfare attitudes by appeals to the values of individualism and limited

³Individualism and egalitarianism are extremely broad concepts that are variously defined (and ill-defined) in U.S. political culture and political ideology literatures. We focus on *economic individualism*: the commitment to merit as the basis for the distribution of rewards in society and the belief that people ought to work hard. Egalitarianism has a number of dimensions that must be distinguished: equality of opportunity—each person should have the same initial chance of succeeding; formal or legal equality—all people should be treated equally; and equality of rewards. In the last case the desire need not be for complete equality but may involve a limited range of wealth, a floor on income, or an income limit (Verba and Orren 1985; Hochschild 1981).

government. And if pressed that these values leave too little room for equality and democracy, conservatives can reply that they are strong proponents of equality—but equality of opportunity rather than of outcomes. Indeed, it has been argued that Americans (especially conservatives) attach so much importance to equality of opportunity precisely because it appears to offer an unsailable formula for reconciling economic individualism with egalitarianism (Potter 1954; Verba and Orren 1985).

The solution for supporters of the welfare state is not so simple. Direct appeals to equality in justification of a more active commitment to assisting the poor run up against the values of limited government and a free market economy. And to the extent that the welfare state requires some redistribution of income, counterclaims will be generated that this infringes on individual liberty and places limits on the extent to which individual effort is rewarded (see Verba and Orren 1985). Perhaps even more critically, it may not be possible to develop a more positive conception of equality in a political environment in which the language of debate is dominated by liberal individualism (Hartz 1955; Wills 1971).

In view of these difficulties in finding ideological justification for their preferences, supporters of the welfare state have historically tended to fall back on pragmatic and ad hoc justifications. Clearly this was the case with the most important American welfare reformer of the century, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, in seeking support for his New Deal policies, prided himself on the claim that he was just looking for ideas that would work. Other major liberal figures of the recent past, notably John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, were likewise renowned for their pragmatic searches for down-to-earth solutions. We thus anticipate that, in attempting to reconcile their support for social welfare measures with a national political tradition that is in many ways inhospitable to such measures, social welfare liberals will tend to point to particular programs that they consider especially important and useful, rather than to invoke overarching ideological principles.

The claim that liberals are more susceptible than conservatives to value conflict over social welfare policy receives support from two very different sets of studies. Rokeach (1973) has argued that an individual's political ideology can be recovered from the relative rankings of the values of freedom and equality. In the U.S. case, conservatives rank freedom very highly but place somewhat less emphasis on equality. Liberals, on the other hand, also rank freedom highly but insist that equality is at least as important. They are confronted therefore with the problem of balancing two *equally important* values. For this and other reasons, Tetlock (1984, 1985, 1986) argues that liberals will be more prone to value conflict than conservatives and that this will be reflected in the greater complexity of liberal arguments—complexity defined as “guidelines or criteria for coping with the tension between the desired and undesired effects of a policy”

or "rules that clarify why 'reasonable people' might take different stands on a policy issue" (Tetlock 1986, 820). He finds support for this hypothesis across a number of groups.

These arguments generate several additional hypotheses that we wish to test. First, we anticipate that social welfare liberals will exhibit more value conflict over social welfare policy than will conservatives. Second, supporters of social welfare should be more likely than opponents to use concrete references to programs and social groups to defend their policy preferences. Conversely, we expect social welfare conservatives to be more likely to justify their preferences by appeals to values, especially individualism. Finally, we also want to investigate the substantive basis of support for social welfare policy. If arguments about the classical liberal basis of the political culture and the belief in equality of opportunity are correct, how is the social welfare policy defended by its supporters?

Studying Ideological Conflict and Ambivalence

When questions such as these have been empirically studied, the methodological vehicle generally has been in-depth interviews with a relative handful of purposefully selected respondents (see, e.g., Lane 1962; Sennett and Cobb 1972; Lamb 1974; Hochschild 1981; Reinerman 1987). These studies have the advantage of providing a wealth of information about the underlying beliefs (and reasoning processes) that people use in evaluating policy options. Their use of open-ended methodology, in combination with the great amount of time devoted to each respondent, produces a detailed picture of the respondent's belief system not easily obtained from fixed-choice survey questions. And consensual aspects of beliefs and values can be explored, since the purpose of these studies is typically not to analyze covariances across subjects.

Despite their valuable contributions, there are serious limitations to what can be learned from in-depth interview methods. One derives from the difficulty of generalizing from small, nonrepresentative samples. How typical are the opinions of 15 people from "Eastport" or a similar number from the West Coast? Although the authors of these studies resist overgeneralizing from their samples, it remains highly desirable to know whether the results they report can be generalized to the public as a whole. Another shortcoming is that it is extremely difficult in samples of 15 or 30 people to detect even large individual differences in response patterns. Hochschild (1981), for example, emphasizes the absence of ideological cleavage among her respondents. But with only 28 respondents and no standard measures, how can she be certain of this? Questions also can be raised about the degree to which the active participation of the investigator influences the respondents' answers to the questions and probes. Would these people seem as "sophisticated" as they do without a probing researcher? A related problem arises in the selection of cases for analysis. In writing up their results, re-

searchers seem to gravitate toward individuals who have more interesting things to say. The result is that the reader's impressions may be disproportionately influenced by the remarks of a handful of unusually articulate or colorful respondents. Finally, the conclusions from these in-depth interviews have accumulated with little connection to the bulk of the research in public opinion that uses mass survey methodology. This has unfortunately created two almost independent literatures that are often seen as producing different conclusions about ideology and political conceptualization.

In light of these problems, a secondary goal of this paper is to explore the utility of new types of open-ended questions on mass survey samples. We want to see whether focused, open-ended probes, in combination with systematic coding of all responses given, can be used to explore the sorts of questions typically addressed with in-depth interviews. This would provide an additional methodological vehicle for studying questions related to political ideology and political reasoning, one that would combine advantages of both survey research and depth interviews.

Data and Methods

The data for this analysis are drawn from the 1987 National Election Studies pilot study. The pilot study was based on reinterviews with a random sample of 450 people originally interviewed as part of the 1986 National Election Study. The pilot study was a two-wave panel design with respondents first interviewed in May and then again in June. For experimental purposes the survey was split into two random half samples.

The responses used in this study were produced by open-ended probes added to a pair of standard NES policy questions: (1) guaranteed jobs and standard of living and (2) increased government spending versus cuts in services.⁴

⁴The wordings of the two policy questions are as follows. *Spending/services*: Some people think the government should provide fewer services, even in areas such as health and education, in order to reduce spending. Other people feel it is important for the government to provide many more services even if it means an increase in spending. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven't you thought much about this? *Jobs and standard of living*: Some people feel the government in Washington should see to it that every person has a job and a good standard of living. Others think the government should let each person get ahead on their own. Which is closer to the way you feel or haven't you thought much about this? A third question—government assistance to blacks—was also probed in the pilot study, but the responses to this question have not been used in this paper. Although the patterns of responses to this question mirror those of the spending/services and jobs questions, many of the comments on government assistance to blacks referred directly to blacks (i.e., discrimination against them or their opportunity to get ahead) or to attributes of blacks. One entirely new category of responses is thus created (negative attitudes toward blacks), and many of the other responses that reflect the same general categories used for the two social welfare questions are intertwined with race. Using a common coding scheme runs the risk of confounding these general categories with race. The alternative strategy of creating a new set of categories for comments that involve references to race would make the presentation and analysis exceedingly long and messy.

Two forms of the open-ended probes were used. For half the respondents (form A) the issue questions were asked in the normal way but were immediately followed by these open-ended questions:

Still thinking about the question you just answered, I'd like you to tell me what ideas came to mind as you were answering that question. Exactly what things went through your mind?

Are there any (other) reasons that you favor [the option just selected]?

Do you see any problems with [the option just selected]?

For the other half of the sample (form B), interviewers read the policy items in the standard way, but without pausing for the respondent to answer, they asked the respondent to "stop and think" about the question. For the jobs and standard of living question, the exact probes were

Before telling me how you feel about this, could you tell me what kinds of things come to mind when you think about government making sure that every person has a good standard of living? (Any others?)

Now, what comes to mind when you think about letting each person get ahead on their own? (Any others?)

These open-ended probes were designed to elicit the thoughts that respondents had as they went about answering the two social welfare questions.⁵ Our hope was that these probes would reveal how respondents frame issues, what values or other considerations were especially important to them, and what degree of ambivalence (if any) they experienced. In form A the intent was to have people answer the survey question as they normally would and then immediately find out what they were thinking about as they did so.⁶ In the second form, respondents were asked first to think about each component part of the question *before* giving their position on the issue.

All responses to these probes were recorded by the interviewers and then coded according to an elaborate coding scheme. The substance of each response was coded along with the direction of the statement (i.e., whether it favored a

⁵These two questions were chosen, in part, because they have been the primary NES social welfare issue items for the last decade (the history of the guaranteed jobs item goes back to the 1950s). This, of course, does not ensure that they do an adequate job of representing Americans' attitudes on social welfare policy. As a check on this, these two questions were factor analyzed along with other questions on domestic spending priorities and general attitudes toward economic equality and redistribution. A clear first factor emerged from the analysis with the two NES issue questions loading strongly on that factor.

⁶This is based on work done by Ericsson and Simon (1984) that shows that people are able to report the thoughts they had while completing a task if they are asked immediately after they have completed the task.

given side of the issue), indications of affect, and degree of elaboration.⁷ The coders were unaware of our intent to study the active use of values and principles by the U.S. public. The substantive codes involved more than 150 discrete categories. For ease of presentation and interpretation, those categories have been combined into two coding schemes. The first combines all the initial codes to yield 15 master categories plus a residual code. The second focuses more closely on just the major political values. The Appendix contains a detailed description of the substantive comments that are included in each category.

To control for variations in "talkativeness," the coding schemes reflect whether an individual made any comment that falls within each substantive category. Thus, multiple comments in any one category or elaborations on a single theme are not counted as separate comments. (Each category is coded as a 0–1 dummy variable.) To maximize the number of respondents we have to work with, the two half samples have been combined. A detailed check of the distributions of responses produced by the two different probes showed a very high degree of similarity (see Table A.1 in the Appendix).⁸ The substance of the comments made seems not to have been affected by the form of the open-ended probe. Finally, we have combined the two waves of responses to each policy question. Since the two issue questions were asked in both waves, the results we shall present come from each respondent having two distinct opportunities to talk about these issues.

These data are rich in information about the considerations that people used to respond to these two survey questions, but they are also difficult to manipulate statistically. There is a trade-off between preserving the informational value of the 150 codes and each respondent's opportunities for multiple responses, and the presentation of simple summary statistics. Since this is an initial exploration of the use of open-ended questions to explore popular understandings of public policy preferences, we have chosen to present the data in relatively unprocessed form. This will give the reader an opportunity to examine the patterns of responses in close to their natural state. A few summary statistics will be presented, but the bulk of the data presentation will involve analysis of frequency distributions for the open-ended responses.

⁷The coding scheme was developed by the authors in consultation with Steve Pinney of the coding section of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The actual coding was carried out by experienced coders of the ISR staff and subject to frequent cross-checking by Pinney.

⁸Differences between the two forms are evident in the *process* by which people answered the questions (see Zaller and Feldman 1988). For the present purposes, there appear to be few differences in the substance of the dimensions people thought about. The most significant difference between the two forms is that there are substantially more missing cases for the retrospective form than for the stop and think form. Those people who offered no opinion on the issue question were dropped from all of the following analysis. See Table A.1 for a direct comparison of the two forms of the open-ended probes.

The Nature of Beliefs about Social Welfare Policy

Table 1 shows the distribution of responses across the 15 master categories for the two policy questions. For each question the distributions are shown separately for those who gave two prosocial welfare, two antisocial welfare, or mixed responses to the policy questions across the two waves of the pilot study.⁹ For convenience we will often refer to the prosocial welfare position as "liberal" and the antisocial welfare position as "conservative." *The ideological labels do not necessarily imply any broader understanding of an ideological continuum or extension to ideological views outside the social welfare domain.* Before examining the differences among these three groups, it is useful to get a general feel for the comments our respondents gave to these series of open-ended probes.

The first thing to note is the widespread and active use of abstract terminology. Looking first at the services and spending item, we find that 53% of respondents made at least one remark that either invoked a value such as individualism, humanitarianism, or limited government or made an argument at a comparable level of abstraction.¹⁰ Overall, one out of every 10 of the individual comments from the probes of the spending/services question referred to an abstract value or principle. The remainder referred mainly to specific programs or problems that were especially important to the respondent. These results are all the more impressive in that they derive from a question that is fairly concrete and does not explicitly raise these value concerns.

Turning now to the item on job guarantees and living standards, we again find that a high proportion of respondents invoked some value or principle. The largest number of these responses refer to individualism. Altogether, about three out of four people invoke this value in some way. Some references were little more than repetitions of the question ("Well, I think people *should* get ahead on

⁹As can be seen in Table 1, a large number of people gave different responses to the social welfare questions across the two waves of the pilot study. This is consistent with all other studies that have looked at response stability in issue preferences. The major explanations for this temporal instability are that it either reflects nonattitudes or high levels of random measurement error. A third interpretation is that this response instability is a result of conflicting or ambivalent considerations (Zaller and Feldman 1988). The evidence to be presented here will offer some support for the latter view.

¹⁰We used a very conservative definition of abstract remarks. This includes responses in categories 9 through 14 as well as those comments in category 15 that refer to some value or principle (not just references that people need help). If the definition of abstract remarks were expanded to include categories 5, 7, and 8 as well, the proportion of respondents making at least one abstract comment rises to 75%. We are using abstract and concrete here to refer to the nature of the *terms* used in the responses. We think it is important to distinguish between use of a general principle (like all people should get ahead on their own) and reference to a specific condition or government program. This distinction does not necessarily imply that the *reasoning* processes underlying these responses parallel the same abstract and concrete patterns. Indeed, it is possible that concrete responses can be given by someone reasoning abstractly while abstract comments may be given by someone who is thinking about the world in very simple manner.

**Table 1. Distribution of Responses by Policy Preferences
(In Percentages)**

	Spending/Services			Jobs/Standard of Living		
	Anti-welfare	Mixed	Pro-welfare	Anti-welfare	Mixed	Pro-welfare
1. Personal comments	5.9	9.5	13.5	7.3	7.7	9.7
2. Politics	13.7	4.7	2.3**	1.5	1.8	3.2
3. Specific group references	21.6	31.4	46.6**	8.8	14.8	19.4
4. Specific program comments	86.3	91.7	96.2	40.9	40.2	69.4**
5. Sophisticated program comments	21.6	17.8	16.5	.7	2.4	6.5*
6. National conditions	7.8	8.3	8.3	8.8	19.5	24.2**
7. Anti-American	9.8	0.0	0.0**	16.8	6.5	1.6**
8. Taxes/budget	56.9	38.5	35.3**	9.5	7.7	14.5
9. Positive government role	2.0	2.4	7.5	16.8	33.7	43.5**
10. Antigovernment orientation	58.8	32.0	22.6**	58.4	39.1	37.1**
11. Individualism	35.3	21.3	13.5**	95.6	72.8	50.0**
12. Equality of treatment	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.0	5.9	3.2
13. Qualified assistance	9.8	7.7	10.5	21.2	24.9	33.9*
14. Lack of opportunity	0.0	1.2	2.3	10.2	7.1	22.6**
15. Fairness/equality/assistance	7.8	16.9	25.6**	22.6	24.9	33.9*
16. Other abstract comments	1.9	8.1	1.5	.7	10.1	9.7**
<i>N</i> =	51	169	133	137	169	62

Note: Frequencies total to more than 100% due to multiple responses to each question.

* = differences across groups significant at .05 level; ** = differences across groups significant at .01 level.

their own if they can”), but usually people provided their own renditions of the concept of individualism. NES policy precludes us from providing verbatim transcriptions of any individual’s remarks. However, we can convey the flavor of these remarks by quoting from the code book to the pilot study some of the most commonly invoked codes referring to individualism:¹¹

Code 140. Individuals should *make it on their own*; people must make use of the opportunities they have; people should be responsible for themselves; people should just work harder; people have the right to work as much or little as they want; they control their own fate.

Code 141. *Dependency*; living off handouts is bad; welfare makes people dependent; “if it’s too easy to get welfare, no one would work anymore”; people become lazy or lose self-respect if they are on welfare; “the more you give, the more they want.”

Code 142. People who don’t/won’t work *don’t deserve help*; people who are poor deserve to be poor; “if you can’t make it in America, you have only yourself to blame”; anyone who really tries can make it.

There are certain common themes across these two social welfare questions: specific mentions of federal programs and groups affected; taxes, budget problems, and general antigovernment feelings; and values of individualism and compassion for the disadvantaged. However, the job guarantee item produces many more comments that invoke values and principles than does the services item. In fact, 95% of respondents made use of at least one value or general concept in discussing their thoughts on this issue. Moreover, 61% of all of the responses to the open-ended questions invoked a value or principle. This is all the more impressive since the responses in most of these categories are unaffected by the respondents’ levels of political information (see Table A.2 in the Appendix).¹²

¹¹The italicized phrase is the central theme; the supplemental language was loosely adapted from the transcripts (to avoid things that particular respondents might have said) in order to indicate to the coders the kinds of remarks that would justify use of the code.

¹²These two policy questions clearly differ in the extent to which they appeal to “prime” values and principles. The spending/services question is very concrete. On the other hand, the guaranteed jobs question explicitly mentions letting people get ahead on their own. It is perhaps not surprising to find more references to values and principles in responses to the second question. There are several things to keep in mind, however. First, despite the lack of priming by the question, there are a large number of responses to the spending/services question that refer to values and principles. If a concrete question like this defines the lower limit to the number of such responses, it is still substantial. Second, we are much more interested in how those on opposing sides of each issue defend their positions than on comparisons of numbers of responses across issues. Although the levels may vary, our analysis shows many common patterns in the responses to each question. Finally, some may be concerned that responses to the guaranteed jobs question are biased because the conservative position more clearly evokes value concerns than the liberal position. While we cannot completely dismiss

These findings should remove whatever doubt may exist that the results obtained from Lane-style in-depth interviews depend on either the particular samples chosen or the probing interview technique used by the investigators. When the subject of discussion is the substance of government welfare policy rather than presidential politics, Americans are, by our survey-based evidence, quite able to make active use of values and principles in articulating their views. The values they invoke are not the partisan values of liberalism and conservatism but the common cultural values of America's liberal tradition.

Prosocial and Antisocial Welfare Arguments

We have hypothesized that social welfare liberals would experience more conflict in discussing welfare policy because they are the ones who must reconcile their policy preferences with the pronounced individualistic and antigovernment emphasis of the political culture. A closer reexamination of Table 1 provides initial confirmation of that expectation.

Looking first at the services/spending issue, we find that those opposed to increasing government programs draw upon three highly consistent concerns: taxes and budgets, opposition to big government (*laissez-faire* and bureaucracy), and individualism. In contrast, the comments of social welfare liberals are characterized by positive responses to particular government programs and feelings of sympathy for affected groups but also by concern about taxes and the size of government. In fact, 35% of social welfare liberals mentioned tax and budget issues, and 22% made some antigovernment statement. It is also notable that scarcely any advocates of more government services advocated a positive role for government or a more egalitarian society. Thus, few supporters of more government services were able to offer a consistent ideological justification for their positions, and many indicated awareness of negative consequences of government spending. Antisocial welfare people are much more consistent in their rejection of greater services—complaining about tax and budget problems, specific programs, and big government, on the one hand, and invoking the values of economic individualism, on the other. Though, at the same time, many do cite one or more government programs of which they approve and show some sympathy for needy groups.

Responses to the jobs and living standards question provide further support for our argument. Those on the conservative side of this issue are virtually unanimous in their use of individualistic arguments, citing such things as the value of hard work and the sufficiency of equal opportunity, and problems of fairness and

this concern, it is important to note that those opposed to greater government spending are also much more likely to raise individualistic arguments than those in favor despite the lack of any explicit primes in that question.

dependency. Almost 60% of them also complain about the general role of government. At the same time, only a small handful of those opposed to government guarantees admit that some people are disadvantaged and need assistance and that the government has some role in providing social welfare services.

Supporters of guaranteed jobs and living standards show substantially more evidence of sympathy for the disadvantaged, but much of it is qualified: their basic posture is that people should get ahead on their own but those who cannot do so should receive assistance. They are also likely to make references to particular programs or to the poor state of the national economy. A little over 40% of them made a favorable reference to the positive role of the federal government, but more made either a negative reference to the role of government or a positive reference to individualism. Thus, while those opposed to government guarantees indicated some ambivalence in their qualified admission that some people are disadvantaged, supporters of the welfare state were deeply conflicted. When they spoke in purely abstract or principled terms, they were more unfavorable than favorable toward social welfare, even though they had endorsed the social welfare position on both waves of the survey.

People who support guaranteed jobs and living standards defend their positions with two main types of arguments. The first type is an endorsement of specific programs or indication that certain people need assistance. The second type of argument is more abstract. Although less widespread than the conservatives' use of individualism and antigovernment arguments, this argument centers on the contention that there is not full equality of opportunity along with support for government activity to intervene when people need assistance. Thus, while opposition to social welfare stems in part from a commitment to equal opportunity, support for social welfare is often justified by beliefs that significant barriers to equal opportunity exist (see Kluegel and Smith 1986).

The Extent of Value Conflict

Table 1 shows that supporters of social welfare are more likely than opponents to report values and beliefs contrary to their expressed policy position. However, it is difficult to determine the magnitude of the value conflict or the difference between social welfare liberals and conservatives from the data in this form. We therefore went back to the responses to the open-ended probes and coded each *response* as prosocial welfare, antisocial welfare, or ambivalent. In addition, we classified each response as abstract (reflecting a value or principle) or concrete (typically referring to a specific program, group, or condition of the country).¹³ The results are shown in Table 2.

The most striking finding in Table 2 is that values and general principles

¹³The codes used to construct the abstract and concrete categories are the same as reported in note 10.

**Table 2. Levels of Conflict for Abstract and Concrete Responses
(In Percentages)**

Response Type	Spending/Services				Jobs/Standard of Living			
	Anti-welfare	Mixed	Pro-welfare	All	Anti-welfare	Mixed	Pro-welfare	All
<i>Abstract:</i>								
Antiwelfare	74	47	23	45	76	56	29	58
Ambivalent	20	16	26	20	11	13	19	13
Prowelfare	06	37	51	35	13	31	52	29
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Concrete:</i>								
Antiwelfare	53	28	18	27	42	14	10	22
Ambivalent	29	29	30	29	37	49	35	44
Prowelfare	19	43	52	42	21	37	55	34
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Abstract	19	11	09	11	70	58	49	61
N =	51	169	133	353	137	169	62	368

predominate in the discussion of the job guarantees issue (61% of all comments), while more concrete, group- and program-related comments are predominant in the discussion of the government services item (89% of all comments). This makes a point that, although it is perhaps unsurprising, has often been overlooked in discussions of the public's proclivity to use abstract terms, namely, that this proclivity depends heavily on the particular issue or problem about which people are questioned and the ways in which those issues are framed.

The second point to notice in Table 2 is that, in the population as a whole, the balance of abstract remarks favors the antisocial welfare position on both issues, while the balance of concrete remarks favors the pro welfare position on the same issues. This tendency is most pronounced in responses to the job guarantees item. Abstract comments run heavily against the social welfare position (58% to 29%), but concrete comments run in favor of it (34% to 22%). This finding supports Free and Cantril's observation that Americans tend to be ambivalent welfare statist: philosophical conservatives but operational liberals.¹⁴

¹⁴ It is, of course, possible that there is some general principle or value underlying references to programs or groups that our methodology was unable to discover. We do think this is unlikely, however. The data show that these questions and probes were generally successful in eliciting references to principles and values. The coders were also instructed to note any evidence of higher-order concepts in the responses. Despite this, the concrete comments appeared in sizable numbers primarily where prior studies suggested they would.

The value conflict that fuels this ambivalence takes different forms for social welfare liberals and conservatives. The frequencies for abstract comments are consistent with our hypothesis that social welfare liberals should be more susceptible to value conflict than conservatives. For both issues, barely half of all abstract comments by social welfare supporters are favorable to welfare. While pro-welfare abstract comments are relatively few among those who twice opposed social welfare (6% for spending/services and 13% for jobs), the corresponding anti-welfare comments among social welfare liberals are significantly greater (23% and 29%). In addition, social welfare liberals are more likely than conservatives to make statements that show ambivalent feelings about these two issues.

The picture is less clear for the concrete responses. In the case of spending and services, supporters and opponents of social welfare show virtually identical levels of conflict. The results for the guaranteed jobs question are more in line with our expectations. Social welfare conservatives are twice as likely as liberals to give concrete comments inconsistent with their expressed issue position.

The Underlying Values: A Closer Look

Our analysis of Tables 1 and 2 has suggested the existence of considerable ambivalence among social welfare liberals and conservatives, but the nature of the coding scheme used in these tables obscures differences that come through clearly once the comments have been broken down more finely. Our category of individualism, for example, encompasses a variety of work and opportunity values on which social welfare liberals and conservatives differ more sharply than is indicated in Table 1. Simultaneously, commitment to certain general values is sometimes hidden by the way the categories have been constructed. For example, liberals often said that people should work hard but may still need help in overcoming the effects of the weak national economy. Although such comments indicate that the respondent is working within an individualistic framework, Table 1 does not count such remarks in the individualism category.

To deal with these limitations of our initial breakdown of the pilot study codes, we have devised a second and more detailed classification scheme that pays particular attention to three sets of values and principles: individualism, humanitarianism, and opposition to big government. This coding scheme both combines certain categories from Table 1 into more global ones and simultaneously subdivides those categories into more finely differentiated sets of responses. Note that two subcategories, "qualified help" and "lack of opportunity," are simultaneously counted under individualism and humanitarianism. On the one hand, both sets of responses indicate an awareness that some people do need assistance. At the same time, this need for assistance does not challenge the underlying assumption of individualism. A description of this new coding structure is presented in the Appendix. The results are shown in Table 3.

When all individualism-related comments are combined, we see that the

differences between those who are consistently prosocial or antisocial welfare on each question are somewhat different in nature than they first appeared. For the jobs and living standards question, opponents of social welfare show virtually unanimous concern for individualism, but now fully three out of four social welfare liberals do so as well. What varies is the way in which the two types of people express their concerns. Those opposed to job guarantees are much more likely to invoke rigorous norms of individual effort—the value and efficacy of the hard work, the fairness of the economic system, the existence of equal opportunity, and problems of dependency. Although these elements of individualism are raised by welfare liberals as well, the latter are much more likely to contend that some people do work hard and still need help, possibly because true equality of opportunity does not exist. Still, over 40% of those supporting jobs and living standards guarantees express the basic idea that people should simply work hard and take care of themselves.

On both the spending/services and jobs and living standards questions, welfare liberals are more likely than their conservative counterparts to express sympathy for the disadvantaged. What is interesting is the qualified way in which these concerns are expressed. The most common single theme is that, even though people *should* get ahead on their own, they may still need help. Others argue more directly that people should try to get ahead on their own but that opportunities are not currently equal and should be made more so. However, ideas that would provide a clear egalitarian basis for support for the welfare state—for example, a clear appeal for equal outcomes, or claims of individual entitlement—are rarely mentioned. *In fact, supporters of social welfare are hardly more likely to invoke these values than welfare opponents.*

Table 3 also shows that, for both questions, more social welfare conservatives than liberals express antigovernment sentiments, although fully half of welfare state supporters make at least one such comment. Again, however, there are sharp differences in the form these feelings take. Among opponents of social welfare programs, there are a large number of laissez-faire/limited government comments; supporters make relatively few principled statements favoring overall government restraint. Opponents are also frequently critical of government bureaucracy, worried about the limits of what government can do, and upset over taxes and the budget. But we find a surprisingly high number of welfare liberals who express similar concerns. On the spending/services question, more than half of welfare liberals complain about taxes, the budget deficit, or problems of bureaucracy. For jobs and living standards, one liberal in four talks about the *limits* of government action in solving these problems and others mention tax/budget problems and bureaucracy. Thus, where opponents of social welfare often oppose big government per se, supporters attack what many see as the undesirable side effects of big government: bureaucracy, taxes, and the difficulties of solving large-scale social problems.

Table 3. Breakdowns of Individualism, Humanitarianism,
and Antigovernment Responses
(In Percentages)

	Spending/Services			Jobs/Standard of Living		
	Anti- welfare	Mixed	Pro- welfare	Anti- welfare	Mixed	Pro- welfare
<i>1. Total individualism:</i>	39.2	26.6	21.8*	96.4	79.9	75.8**
a. Equal opportunity	2.0	0.0	0.0*	20.4	8.3	1.6**
b. Fairness	9.8	9.5	5.3	16.1	8.3	4.8*
c. Hard work/effort	21.6	7.1	5.3**	89.1	69.8	41.9**
d. Value of work	2.0	.6	0.0	17.5	11.8	6.5
e. Dependency	13.7	7.7	5.3	23.4	17.8	8.1*
f. Competitiveness	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.0	3.0	0.0*
g. Qualified help	9.8	7.7	10.5	21.2	24.9	33.9
h. Equal treatment	0.0	0.0	.7	8.0	5.9	3.2
i. Lack of opportunity	0.0	1.2	3.8	11.7	8.3	22.6**

2. Total humanitarianism:						
a. Equal outcomes	17.6	25.4	30.8	43.8	40.2	69.4**
b. Social responsibility	0.0	0.0	.8	2.2	1.2	4.8
c. Individual entitlement	0.0	1.8	3.8	1.5	3.6	1.6
d. People need help	0.0	.6	.8	5.1	4.1	6.5
e. Qualified help	7.8	16.0	22.6*	14.6	19.9	19.4
f. Lack of opportunity	9.8	7.7	10.5	21.2	24.9	33.9
3. Total antigovernment:						
a. Limited government/ laissez-faire	0.0	1.2	3.8	11.7	8.3	22.6**
b. Bureaucracy	80.4	54.4	49.6**	60.6	43.8	45.2**
c. Limits	21.6	5.3	2.3**	47.4	19.5	6.5**
d. Taxes/budget	41.2	26.4	22.6*	4.6	9.5	11.3
	3.9	1.8	1.5	21.9	18.3	25.8
	56.9	38.5	35.3**	9.5	7.7	14.5
N =	51	169	133	137	169	62

* = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$.

These results confirm and clarify our initial expectations that social welfare conservatives would be able to draw upon a consistent set of values and beliefs to support their opposition to social welfare policy. Their individualism statements elaborate several themes concerning the efficacy of hard work and the value of opportunity, and their antigovernment comments are strongly rooted in the laissez-faire ideology. There is some evidence of ambivalence in their beliefs, most clearly in occasional remarks that some people really do need assistance. For the most part, this sympathy is expressed in strongly individualistic terms. Many social welfare liberals, on the other hand, support social welfare policies while also endorsing individualism and criticizing the size of the federal government. Their ambivalence is more extensive and deep seated. Many do qualify their endorsements of individualism and criticism of government, but few welfare liberals evoke egalitarian principles of the type that might provide a strong ideological foundation for the welfare state. Their abstract justification for social welfare policies involves a conviction that some people may need help despite their efforts and a belief that the government is obligated to provide that assistance.

Egalitarianism, Sophistication, and Support for Social Welfare

Our analysis so far has focused on how people who favor or oppose particular welfare state policies describe and justify their views. We shift now to a related question: How do people who differ in their professed commitment to egalitarian values describe and justify their social welfare attitudes? We want to see whether people who are, *in a general sense*, strongly egalitarian can mobilize egalitarian arguments on behalf of specific social welfare attitudes. That is, we want to determine how, if at all, egalitarian values are translated into arguments for social welfare policies. Many have argued that egalitarianism is the value dimension that is most relevant to policy debate over social welfare (Feldman 1988; Huntington 1981; Kinder 1983; Lipset 1979; Rokeach 1973; Verba and Orren 1985). If so, how can we account for the apparent absence of egalitarian arguments among supporters of social welfare policy?

To measure egalitarianism we use a series of NES items designed to measure support for greater formal and economic equality in the United States (see the Appendix for the exact wordings of these questions). An additive scale based on these items has a roughly normal distribution. Those in the upper third of the scale repeatedly endorsed statements calling for greater equality. Studies have shown that these equality items are powerfully related to a number of attitudes toward economic and racial policies (Feldman 1988; Kinder and Sanders 1987). How is this reflected in the open-ended responses?

When we examined the effect of egalitarianism on justifications for social welfare attitudes, we found patterns that closely resembled those in Table 2.¹⁵ In

¹⁵ These data are not shown but are available from the authors upon request.

particular, persons scoring high on egalitarianism showed, as expected, relatively high levels of sympathy for the disadvantaged, but again this concern often took the form of qualified statements of assistance. A little over 40% of those high in equality also made statements endorsing a positive government role in dealing with social welfare issues, but here as elsewhere, this support for government action was unaccompanied by statements that justified it in terms of the value of equality. This is a very notable fact. Our coding scheme was highly sensitive to the possibility that respondents would justify their preferences by appeals to egalitarian values and included many ways in which they might do so. Yet very few made such statements. *We infer from this that the American political culture provides few explicitly egalitarian (as against pragmatic or humanitarian) arguments that are useful for justifying welfare state policies.*

These new results are at once consistent with what we have found before and are puzzling. In the closed-ended egalitarianism items, many people do endorse egalitarian statements that go well beyond simple equality of opportunity. And variation in support for equality is strongly related to policy preferences in the social welfare domain. What is conspicuously missing, as we have stressed, is the verbal justification of these preferences in terms of egalitarian principles. Is it not possible, however, that the sort of ideological superstructure we expect exists only among those who are politically sophisticated? If so, many of the conclusions we have reached to this point about the extent of ambivalence and structuring of beliefs may be masking large differences in the use of these dimensions between the more and less politically aware segments of the public.

To investigate this we constructed a measure of political information from items in the pilot study data and those previously asked in the 1986 survey (see Zaller 1986 for a discussion of this measure). To retain enough cases for comparison purposes, the information measure and the equality measure were both dichotomized at their median.¹⁶ These results are shown in Table 4.

As can be seen, there is virtually no support for the hypothesis that higher levels of sophistication are required for the expression of abstract values and principles. Among those low in egalitarianism, there is some tendency for information to be related to the extent and elaboration of the individualistic statements made. More sophisticated nonegalitarians make somewhat greater use of several individualistic arguments than their less sophisticated counterparts and are slightly less likely to advocate assistance for the disadvantaged. There are even more modest effects of sophistication for those scoring high on the egalitarianism scale. But there is no consistent tendency for those lower in informa-

¹⁶We also estimated probit equations for each of the response categories that included the continuous versions of the equality and information scales as well as a multiplicative interaction term. Those results virtually replicate the data shown in Table 4. We have presented the simple frequencies in order to show the overall use of each type of response as well as differences across issue preferences and information.

**Table 4. Breakdown of Subcategories by Equality and Information
(In Percentages)**

Equality = Information =	Spending/Services				Jobs/Standard of Living			
	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low	High	High
<i>1. Total individualism:</i>	24.6	30.4	30.2	20.4	85.3	96.1*	75.6	80.2
a. Equal opportunity	0.0	.9	0.0	0.0	8.8	23.3	2.1	10.3
b. Fairness	9.8	10.8	4.7	6.5	7.4	14.6	12.6	6.5
c. Hard work/effort	4.9	10.8	10.5	6.5	71.1	87.3**	60.9	64.4
d. Value of work	0.0	0.0	1.2	.9	16.2	19.4	6.2	10.2
e. Dependency	1.6	12.8*	6.9	6.4	16.2	21.4	17.8	15.8
f. Competitiveness	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	9.7*	1.0	3.7
g. Qualified help	11.5	8.8	9.3	7.4	23.5	15.5	32.6	27.1
h. Equal treatment	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.8	6.8	5.3	6.5
i. Lack of opportunity	3.2	0.0	2.3	2.8	10.3	5.8	12.6	17.7

<i>2. Total humanitarianism:</i>										
a. Equal outcomes	29.5	22.6	25.6	27.8	42.7	33.0	54.8	52.4		
	0.0	0.0	0.0	.9	0.0	1.9	3.1	2.8		
b. Social responsibility										
c. Individual entitlement	0.0	.9	2.3	4.6	4.4	.9	1.0	3.7		
d. People need help	0.0	0.0	1.2	.9	2.9	2.9	6.3	6.5		
e. Qualified help	16.4	13.7	17.4	20.4	17.7	12.6	17.9	20.6		
f. Lack of opportunity	11.5	8.8	9.3	7.4	23.5	15.5	32.6	27.1		
	3.2	0.0	2.3	2.8	10.3	5.8	12.6	17.7		
<i>3. Total antigovernment:</i>	45.9	69.6**	37.5	61.1**	38.2	62.1**	35.7	57.0**		
a. Limited government/ laissez-faire	4.9	15.7*	1.1	2.8	26.5	40.8*	10.5	29.9**		
b. Bureaucracy	18.0	38.2**	15.1	30.6*	2.9	6.8	6.3	13.1		
c. Limits	0.0	5.8*	0.0	.9	13.2	29.1*	14.7	22.4		
d. Taxes/budget	32.8	47.1*	30.2	43.5*	4.4	14.6*	8.4	8.4		
N =	61	102	86	108	68	103	95	107		

Note: T-tests are for differences across information within levels of equalitarianism.

* = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$.

tion to make less use of individualistic arguments and only a barely observable increase in the proportion of statements on assistance that are not highly qualified.

Apparently, then, the failure to invoke explicit egalitarian values has little to do with levels of political sophistication. The values of individualism and sympathy for the disadvantaged are widely diffused in the public independently of political sophistication. Such is not the case, however, for antigovernment arguments. Increases in political sophistication are consistently related to greater expression of all types of antigovernment statements: *laissez-faire*, bureaucracy, limits, and taxes/budgets. Moreover, this relationship holds for those low *and* high in support for equality.¹⁷ This produces two very different results, however. For those low in support for equality, greater sophistication is associated with even higher levels of opposition to an active federal government, making these people even more consistently conservative in their arguments against providing social welfare benefits. Among those high in egalitarianism, concern over big government among the more sophisticated leads people to become even *more conflicted* in their expressions of support for social welfare. Seeing a need for the federal government to aid those who have not received equal opportunity, they are then faced with not only their commitment to individualism but often with fears about the negative consequences of big government. Thus, increasing sophistication among those high on the equality scale is associated with, not greater commitment to egalitarian principles, but rather neoliberalism: "a 'tough-minded' and 'nonideological' approach that recognizes fiscal and other limits while still seeking to promote social justice and equity" (Medcalf and Dolbear 1985, 56).

Conclusions and Implications

Ideological Responses to the Welfare State

The data we have examined show clearly that most Americans can draw with apparent ease upon several elements of the U.S. political tradition in justifying their social welfare preferences. The elements of the tradition most commonly invoked were suspicion of big government, humanitarianism, the Protestant ethic, and above all, economic individualism. The fact that references to these values emerged spontaneously while discussing policy questions is evidence that they have real meaning to the people who invoked them. This conclusion corroborates the position of Lane, Hochschild, and others who contend that ordinary people view the world through the prism of a distinctive cultural

¹⁷We obviously cannot interpret this relationship to mean that political sophistication causes increased antigovernment sentiments. Sophistication is related to such factors as education and income that could be responsible for this relationship. For our purposes, it is sufficient to observe how response patterns differ across levels of sophistication.

bias—the ideology of classical liberalism. This set of ideas, according to many scholars, virtually defines the political culture and has, by our data, diffused thoroughly in the population. At the same time, however, our findings also confirm Converse's claim that most Americans are nonideological, where the term ideological refers to the use of the liberal-conservative continuum to organize one's political attitudes. We found some evidence of consistent left-right ideological structuring of justifications for welfare state policy preferences and some tendency for more politically aware persons (particularly among conservatives) to become more consistent. But these tendencies are rather modest.

Our results offer strong support to studies, especially that of Hochschild, that have identified ambivalence as a fundamental feature of political belief systems. Most people are internally conflicted about exactly what kind of welfare system they want. Even those who take consistently pro- or consistently antiwelfare positions often cite reasons for the opposite point of view. The reason for this, we believe, is that ordinary people are both regularly exposed to arguments that extol individualism and decry big government and also to political rhetoric that urges sympathy for the poor and state action to ameliorate existing social ills. Sensitivity to such arguments obviously does not make ideological consistency, in the liberal-conservative sense, more likely. Indeed, the more people attend to these contradictory messages, the more difficult it may be to maintain a consistent ideological liberal-conservative position. Seen this way, ideological consistency requires not just attention to politics and political debate but a rejection of some elements of the political culture in favor of others.

Ambivalence and inconsistency are not found with equal frequency in all segments of the population. Social welfare conservatives exhibit relatively less value conflict. Many of them do, to be sure, admit that people sometimes need government help but the ability of conservatives to appeal to a wide range of individualistic and antigovernment values keeps their sympathy for the needy within definite and comfortable bounds. Conflict does emerge for opponents of social welfare when they think about specific government programs and their beneficiaries. Thus, the more welfare conservatives think about welfare policy in abstract terms, the better they can feel.

Ambivalence with respect to social welfare policy is more pronounced among welfare liberals. They must reconcile their humanitarian impulses with the conservative principles of individualism and limited government. Many find this difficult to do. They end up acknowledging the values of economic individualism even as they try to justify their liberal preferences.

That the U.S. political tradition is inhospitable to the welfare state is scarcely news at this point. Many prominent analysts, as noted earlier, have viewed this as a fundamental feature of this nation's political culture. What is surprising is the extent to which the elements of this inhospitality are internalized even in the minds of people who most strongly support welfare state policies.

There are alternative ways to interpret our findings on liberal ambivalence that ought to be noted. One possibility is that our analysis is time bound. Our results showing that social welfare liberals have higher levels of value conflict than welfare conservatives may reflect the current defensive position of liberalism in the United States rather than any inherent differences between liberal and conservative reactions to the welfare state. More generally, since our data come from a single snapshot of attitudes in the summer of 1987, analysis of these data cannot, by itself, establish that liberals are always more conflicted over social welfare policy than conservatives. However, there is a great deal of other evidence that our data have captured a long-standing and largely constant feature of opinion in the United States. Hartz (1955), writing in the mid-1950s, discussed the lack of an ideological justification for the welfare state in its formative years. Free and Cantril (1968), reporting on survey data collected in 1965 (the height of enthusiasm for the welfare state in this country), vividly showed the contrast between opposition to the philosophical underpinnings of the welfare state and high levels of support for specific programs. Hochschild's (1981) in-depth interviews from the mid-1970s explored in detail the ambivalence that emerges when Americans are asked to think about social welfare. (See also Rokeach 1973; Reinerman 1987.)

Our results are thus consistent with observations of Americans' attitudes over the past several decades. Our hypotheses—derived from an examination of the literature on U.S. political culture—also led us to expect the patterns of conflict and ambivalence found in these data. Our conclusions are thus supported by a substantial body of empirical analyses and theoretical discussions of U.S. politics and society in addition to the data presented here.

A second alternative interpretation focuses on our theoretical framework. Aaron Wildavsky (1987a, 1987b) has recently proposed a typology of political cultures, one which he designates as egalitarian culture. Egalitarians, he argues, are levelers who tend to like social welfare measures because they make citizens more equal, but who dislike the government that undertakes these measures because it is hierarchically structured. Hence, they end up praising and attacking the welfare state simultaneously.

Thus, whereas we attribute liberal ambivalence to conflict within the political culture, Wildavsky attributes it to conflicts within an ideology. Which explanation is correct cannot be determined with the data presently available.¹⁸ But either way the main conclusion remains that social welfare liberals are more deeply conflicted over this issue and that they can express their ambivalence in relatively abstract and principled terms.

It is important to recognize that liberals may not be more internally con-

¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that there is little evidence in our data that supporters of social welfare programs are strong egalitarians who wish to impose a more equal distribution of resources in U.S. society.

flicted than conservatives on all issues. In other issue domains, it may turn out that conservatives are the ones who must reconcile competing cultural values. (See Tetlock 1986 for evidence on this point.) Civil liberties may be a case in point. Efforts to justify limiting freedom of expression come into conflict with the libertarian tradition in this country (see McClosky and Zaller 1984). Here, civil libertarians may be better able to bring their position into line with the basic principles of the political culture, and those who wish to limit freedom of expression may be the ones who experience ambivalence most deeply and who must offer pragmatic or nonprincipled reasons to justify their preferences.

There are clearly some ways around the ambivalence and conflict we have described. One partial solution evident in our data is the tendency of supporters of social welfare to draw upon more concrete justifications for their positions while opponents of social welfare depend much more on abstract values and principles. This tends to diminish the total impact of the most serious conflicts for each group. A second solution is the ability of people to shape general values to particular political positions. So, while opponents of social welfare programs extol the value of hard work, welfare state supporters argue for greater government activism so that all individuals will have a chance to work. Similarly, while the antigovernment attitudes of social welfare conservatives often take the form of principled commitment to limited government and the ideal of *laissez-faire*, liberals emphasize instead the problems of bureaucracy and the practical limits to what government can accomplish—emphases that leave open the possibility that government can sometimes play a positive role in promoting social welfare. It is perhaps an indication of the power of cultural values that they can be simultaneously accepted overwhelmingly by the public and interpreted in various ways congenial to peoples' partisan political beliefs.

The Measurement of Complex Attitudes

As we have seen, the pilot study data suggest that many people do not possess a single attitude toward the welfare state. Rather, they seem to possess a range of only partially consistent reactions to it. Complex attitudes of this type are, we believe, best captured by a combination of open-ended and closed-ended interview techniques, as we have attempted in this paper. Studies that rely exclusively on closed-ended questions can, as Free and Cantril (1968), in particular, have shown, reach substantive conclusions similar to our own, but they cannot tap the underlying structure of these attitudes as well as studies that employ a more diverse measurement strategy. Since, moreover, public attitudes toward the welfare state are probably not uniquely complex, it seems likely that studies of other types of attitudes can also profit from a mixed measurement strategy.

Although the open-ended probes used in this study have not produced the wealth of information of a Robert Lane-type interview, they have, with the aid of a suitably elaborate coding scheme, generated quite a lot of informa-

tion—much more, certainly, than can standard closed-ended questions alone. A major advantage of our approach is that such information is available for a representative cross-section of the public, thereby eliminating the concerns about generalizability that arise in depth studies. The large increase in the number of cases available in our approach also makes it possible to detect and analyze relationships among types of beliefs. Finally, our use of strictly standardized probes to elicit responses and professional coders to tally the results help to allay the concern, always present with data from depth interviews, that investigators may have inadvertently prejudiced their findings either by injecting their own attitudes into the interview process or by giving disproportionate weight to some kinds of individuals or some kinds of comments.

This is not to say that open-ended survey techniques should replace depth interviews. Depth interviews have proven immensely useful in generating insights about the nature of public opinion and will surely continue to do so. But the techniques employed here should prove a useful supplement to the older method.

Although we have focused largely on common patterns across the two issue questions, some significant differences should not be ignored. One important lesson to emerge from this study is that people may appear substantially more or less “ideological” depending on what they are asked to talk about. In particular, our respondents were far more inclined toward the use of abstract and ideological terms when discussing job guarantees than discussing government services. Thus, the “level of conceptualization” (Campbell et al. 1960) that citizens bring to the evaluation of politics may vary as much across types of issues and situations as it does across types of individuals.

The public’s more abstract and principled response to the job guarantees item raises another key measurement issue: the jobs item measures what Free and Cantril have called the “philosophical” dimension of the welfare state, while the spending/services item measures the “operational” dimension of this issue. These concerns are not simply alternative aspects of the same attitude; despite a high intercorrelation, they also appear to represent somewhat independent reservoirs of opinion. This can be seen most clearly in the differing patterns of overtime change in the marginal distributions of the two items. From 1984 to 1986, the percentage of people who felt that individuals should get ahead on their own increased by 9% at the same time that the number of people favoring greater spending on government programs increased by 7%. We can only reconcile these apparently contradictory trends by noting that the guaranteed jobs question leads people to think much more about abstract values and principles while the spending/services question generates thoughts about concrete programs and groups. These two sources of attitudes toward the welfare state do not necessarily respond identically to political events. Thus, over this two-year period, the public

seems to have become more philosophically conservative and more operationally liberal *at the same time*, thereby intensifying the conflict that, as we have seen, pervades the public's attitudes toward social welfare issues.

If, as we have suggested, the job guarantees item captures the public's enduring philosophical response to the general problems of the welfare state, responses to this item ought to exhibit less over-time variation than responses to the services item, which would more closely mirror vicissitudes in spending priorities, the popularity of particular programs, and other short-term forces. Data from the five election studies between 1980 and 1988 (the only period in which both questions were asked) are clearly consistent with this expectation. The mean absolute change (between adjacent election studies) in the percentage of those opposing guaranteed jobs is 3.3%. The mean change in those supporting greater services is 10.3%. In several respects, the behavior of these two issue questions reflects the pattern of considerations we have identified in these data.

Justifying the Welfare State

Writing at a time when the progressive accomplishments of the New Deal still seemed fragile, Hartz (1955) argued that the justification for the welfare state in the United States rested mainly on pragmatic concerns: its proponents emphasized the need for government action to solve a wide range of practical problems, but shied away from linking their programs to a European-style ideology of positive government and egalitarian democracy.

More than 30 years after Hartz, we find that supporters of the welfare state still lack a clear *ideological* justification for their positions. Many welfare liberals expressed serious misgivings about the welfare state. Moreover, even the people most friendly toward welfare state policies exhibited very little support for greater equality of outcomes, social responsibility for guaranteeing everyone the material necessities for a decent life, or individual entitlement to such necessities. Although the effect of many social welfare policies is to move society a bit closer to equality, supporters of those policies do not seem able to mobilize egalitarian arguments in their behalf. In fact, our analysis was unable to solve a key puzzle: even people who scored high on a closed-ended egalitarianism scale made few or no references to egalitarianism in the open-ended remarks. How are we to account for this?

It is of course possible that such egalitarian justifications do exist but that our questions could not elicit them. Even so, given the ease with which people could draw upon other cultural values, the inability to articulate egalitarian principles is significant. We can suggest two alternative explanations. It is possible that the people who do have egalitarian values (as indicated by their responses to the closed-ended questions) are unable to articulate those principles because of the strength of economic individualism in the United States and the absence of

clear egalitarian rhetoric.¹⁹ It is also possible that it is the egalitarianism scale that is at fault. Positive responses to these questions may reflect such other sentiments as humanitarianism or social benevolence. In this case the open-ended data are telling the correct story. Humanitarian sentiments are widespread; egalitarian principles are rare.

Our data suggest, therefore, that support for welfare state policies derive from sympathy and humanitarianism, not egalitarian principles.²⁰ That sympathy exists in the context of support for an individualistic system. Advocates of social welfare programs thus acknowledge that people should work hard and government should have limited powers but when people fail or have their opportunities limited they should receive some measure of help. Programs to assist the disadvantaged are defended by a combination of the perception of the lack of equal opportunity, sympathy for the disadvantaged, and support for specific programs. Our analysis is thus in accord with a major conclusion of the Verba and Orren study of elites: "American leaders, even the most egalitarian ones, [similarly] opt for measures to increase equality that are consistent with the norm of opportunity" (1985, 257).

The power of this largely pragmatic justification for social welfare should not be underestimated. As Ladd and Lipset (1980) have argued, despite the increasingly conservative tone of recent political debate, public support for most government welfare programs remains high. And after two full terms in office, Ronald Reagan had remarkably little success in dismantling the welfare state. However, as our data have shown, the values of the political culture severely limit the development of a more encompassing ideological justification for the welfare state. Under these circumstances it is perhaps not surprising that liberalism was seen as losing support among the public as the economic pie began to expand less rapidly in the 1970s (Medcalf and Dolbeare 1985). Forced to defend their positions in the aftermath of high inflation and economic stagnation, many liberals have been accused of giving up on the principles of a liberal social welfare state. And while it would be naive to assert any simple connection between

¹⁹It is important to distinguish here between equality of opportunity and formal equality, on the one hand, and egalitarianism as a principle for evaluating the distribution of resources in society. The first two are, according to virtually all political analysts, part of the political culture; the third has lacked articulate supporters (see Verba and Orren 1985).

²⁰Since respondents were not asked to explain their open-ended comments, our methodology does not permit us to examine the origins of the principles that people use to justify their positions on social welfare policy. We therefore cannot investigate the basis for the expressions of sympathy and humanitarianism that appear most frequently among those supportive of social welfare. Discussions of the origins of altruistic sentiments have suggested that such factors as personality, socialization, and social background may explain individual differences (for a summary, see Conover 1988). Alternatively, sympathy and humanitarianism may derive from Judeo-Christian ethics (Bellah et al. 1985; Reichley 1985; Wald 1987). If so, Judeo-Christian ethics could provide a principled basis of support for social welfare more comparable to the role of individualism and antigovernment orientations in opposition to welfare.

public opinion and government policy, it is interesting to note that in comparison to other Western democracies the United States ranks relatively low in the extent of the welfare state and the distribution of wealth in society (Verba and Orren 1985; Smith 1987) as well as in *popular* support for the principles of the welfare state (Smith 1987).

Opponents of the welfare state are better served by the political culture. Conservatives stand ready to cite traditional beliefs in individualism and limited government to provide a consistent basis for their critiques of the growth of the welfare state. These critiques are not easily dismissed by a majority of the public even as they stand behind many of the specific programs that continue to form the basis of domestic policy.

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APPENDIX

1. Construction of the 15 master codes from the open-ended responses. The original coding scheme for the open-ended probes was reduced to the smallest number of categories that did not require combining substantively inconsistent comments. Most of the description provided for each category is drawn directly from the instructions used by the coders. The full set of codes included in each category (from the pilot study code book) is available from the authors upon request.

1. *Personal comments.* All statements with an explicit self-frame of reference. For example: *R's taxes are too high; R is not prejudiced; R makes it on own; R once got help; R's personal experience with a specific program or friend or relative's experience.*

2. *Politics.* Statements that reflect concern with political context. For example: political conflict would block implementation of *R's* preferences; politicians would never give the people what they want on this; the lobbyists wouldn't like it; it would really shake up a lot of people.

3. *Specific group references.* Comments that reflect concern with the problems or needs of particular groups. For example: elderly (senior citizens); women as group; working/single mothers; poor people; working people; business people, industrialists.

4. *Specific program comments.* All simple statements (positive or negative) about particular government programs. For example: child care; defense; jobs or job training; small business assistance; social security; unemployment benefits; welfare.

5. *Sophisticated program references.* Comments that discuss programs at a fairly general or abstract level. For example: references to "New Deal"-type programs; focus on how programs work; complaints about waste or inefficiency in specific programs or areas.

6. *National conditions.* Comments about the state of the country or consequences for national conditions if policies are changed. For example: economic conditions of country (high unemployment, poor business conditions, competition from abroad); natural resource problems; program would help the whole country by spurring the economy; crime would increase/decrease.

7. *Anti-American.* Reference to foreign or un-American ideology; idea is like socialism or communism; goes against the American way; it's against capitalism.

8. *Taxes/budgets.* Government is spending too much; problem of unbalanced budget; complaints about overall tax burden; society can't afford what it will cost; high taxes hurt the economy.

9. *Positive government role.* All statements that assert some sort of role for the government in providing social welfare benefits. For example: the government is responsible for making sure that

citizens have a chance to get ahead; government responsibility for taking care of its citizens; government responsibility for handling a problem; optimism or conviction that we could do it if we really wanted to.

10. *Antigovernment orientation.* All comments critical of the role of government in social welfare policy or of the performance of the government. For example: concept of limited government; government is not responsible for citizens' welfare; government has gotten too big, government bureaucracy or red tape; wastefulness of government; inherent limits to what anyone can accomplish; problem should be handled by private sector or by market forces.

11. *Individualism.* All positive statements referring to the work ethic, equal opportunity, or fairness. For example: individuals should make it on their own; people should be responsible for themselves; welfare makes people dependent; people who are poor deserve to be poor; some people are lazy; references to pride and self-esteem from work; equality of opportunity is important and does exist; unfair to those who work if some people don't have to work.

12. *Equal treatment.* Equal rights for individuals; no one should have special privileges; all groups should be treated the same.

13. *Qualified assistance.* People should make it on their own, but some may need help; any comment indicating that *R* feels it is important both that individuals help themselves and that government provide aid; helping the people who need it without giving too much help to those who don't.

14. *Lack of opportunity.* Equality of opportunity is important but does not exist; common people don't have a fair chance; government should create more opportunity; some people work hard and still don't get ahead.

15. *Fairness/equality/assistance.* All statements supporting assistance to the needy regardless of the justification given. For example: people need the help; some people can't make it on their own; we should help our own before spending money on foreign aid, foreign wars; social responsibility, duty, or obligation to care for the needy; individuals are entitled to have enough to live decently; economic equality; wealth should be spread around more.

II. Construction of the elaborated categories for individualism, humanitarianism, and antigovernment orientations.

1. *Total individualism.* Sum of categories 11, 12, 13, and 14.

a. *Equality of opportunity.* Equality of opportunity does exist; everyone gets the same chance at the start of the race, but you expect some to finish ahead of others.

b. *Fairness.* Unfair to those who work if some people don't have to work; welfare cheats; many people are on welfare who don't deserve to be.

c. *Work/effort.* Individuals should make it on their own; people who don't work don't deserve help; some people are lazy.

d. *Value of work.* Inherent positive value of work and achievement; it is good for people to work.

e. *Dependency.* Living off handouts is bad; welfare makes people dependent; people on welfare should be required to do useful work in exchange for support.

f. *Competitiveness.* It would erode competitiveness of the economic system; survival of the fittest.

g. *Qualified help.* People should make it on their own, but some may need help; people should try to get ahead on their own, but government should help when necessary; problem is helping the people who need it without giving too much help to those who don't.

h. *Equal treatment.* Equal rights for individuals; no one should have special privileges; all groups should be treated the same.

i. *Lack of equal opportunity.* Equality of opportunity is important but does not exist; common people don't have a fair chance; government should create more opportunity; some people work hard and still don't get ahead.

2. *Total humanitarianism*. Sum of categories 13, 14, and 15.

- a. *Equal outcomes*. Economic equality; wealth should be spread around more.
- b. *Social responsibility*. Social responsibility, duty, or obligation to care for the needy; society, or individuals in society, have obligation to take care of those who need help.
- c. *Individual entitlement*. Individuals are entitled to have enough to live decently; people have a right to have enough to eat.
- d. *People need help*. People need the help; some people can't make it on their own; we should help our own.
- e. *Qualified help*. People should make it on their own but some may need help; people should try to get ahead on their own, but government should help when necessary; problem is helping the people who need it without giving too much help to those who don't.
- f. *Lack of equal opportunity*. Equality of opportunity is important but does not exist; common people don't have a fair chance; government should create more opportunity; some people work hard and still don't get ahead.

3. *Total antigovernment*. Sum of categories 8 and 10.

- a. *Limited government/laissez-faire*. Concept of limited government; government is not responsible for citizens' welfare; government trying to do too much; government has gotten too big; private charities, churches should take care of the needy rather than the government.
- b. *Bureaucracy*. Government bureaucracy or red tape; government is inefficient; wastefulness of government.
- c. *Limits*. Inherent limits to what anyone can accomplish; impossibility of planning large-scale social change.
- d. *Taxes/budget*. Government is spending too much; problems of unbalanced budget; complaints about overall tax burden; society can't afford what it would cost; taxes are too high; high taxes hurt the economy.

III. Egalitarianism questions:

- 1. One of the big problems in this country is that we don't give everyone an equal chance.
- 2. If people were treated more equally in this country we would have many fewer problems.
- 3. It would be better for everyone if the distribution of wealth in this country were more equal.
- 4. We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country.
- 5. This country would be better off if we worried less about how equal people are.
- 6. All in all, I think economic differences in this country are justified.

**Table A.1. Distribution of Responses by Question Form
(In Percentages)**

	Spending/Services			Jobs/Standard of Living		
	A	B	All	A	B	All
1. Personal comments	10.6	10.1	10.4	10.8	4.5*	7.8
2. Politics	8.5	1.6*	5.0	3.1	.6	1.9
3. Specific group references	32.4	38.2	35.3	16.4	9.6	13.1
4. Specific program comments	88.0	95.3**	91.6	39.3	50.3**	44.7
5. Sophisticated program comments	17.3	17.9	17.6	3.6	1.1	2.4
6. National conditions	9.5	6.7	8.1	17.9	14.0	16.1
7. Anti-American	1.7	1.1	1.4	6.7	12.4	9.4
8. Taxes/budget	43.8	35.2*	39.5	10.5	8.4	9.4

9. Positive government role	6.1	2.3	4.2	27.7	29.8	28.7
10. Antigovernment orientation	35.2	28.7	31.9	46.1	44.6	45.3
11. Individualism	24.6	15.7*	20.2	73.2	80.3*	76.4
12. Equality of treatment	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.7	8.9*	6.2
13. Qualified assistance	8.9	8.9	8.9	22.5	27.2*	24.6
14. Lack of opportunity	1.6	1.1	1.4	10.2	11.2	10.7
15. Fairness/equality/assistance	22.9	14.6	18.8	26.2	24.2	25.2
16. Other abstract comments	5.6	3.9	4.8	6.2	6.7	6.4
Missing =	21.2	.6	11.7	14.4	1.7	8.0
N =	175	178	353	190	178	368

Note: Frequencies total to more than 100% due to multiple responses to each question.

* = difference between forms significant at .05 level; ** = difference between forms significant at .01 level.

**Table A.2. Distribution of Responses by Level of Information
(In Percentages)**

	Spending/Services			Jobs/Standard of Living		
	Low	Med.	High	Low	Med.	High
1. Personal comments	15.3	8.8	8.2	10.0	8.5	5.5
2. Politics	2.0	5.3	6.8	1.8	0.0	3.5
3. Specific group references	37.7	38.1	31.5	16.4	15.3	8.9
4. Specific program comments	89.8	92.0	92.4	40.0	44.1	48.9
5. Sophisticated program comments	13.2	16.8	21.2	2.7	2.5	2.1
6. National conditions	7.1	9.7	7.5	16.4	15.3	16.6
7. Anti-American	0.0	2.7	1.4	3.6	14.4	9.7*
8. Taxes/budget	29.6	42.4	43.8	6.4	11.0	10.3

9. Positive government role	7.1	3.5	2.7	29.1	32.2	25.5
10. Antigovernment orientation	14.3	31.9	43.8**	34.6	42.4	55.8**
11. Individualism	14.3	21.2	23.3	70.5	81.4	80.1*
12. Equality of treatment	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.9	5.6	8.2
13. Qualified assistance	9.2	10.6	7.5	32.7	18.6	23.5
14. Lack of opportunity	4.1	0.0	.7*	8.2	12.7	11.0
15. Fairness/equality/assistance	19.4	19.5	17.8	29.1	21.2	25.5
16. Other abstract comments	2.0	4.5	6.9	4.5	4.2	9.7
Missing =	26.0	9.6	1.4	17.3	5.6	2.0
N =	94	113	146	105	118	148

* = differences across groups significant at .05 level; ** = differences across groups significant at .01 level.

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