



ISPP News

International Society of Political Psychology
Spring 2009 Vol. 20 (1)

The purpose of the International Society of Political Psychology (ISPP) is to facilitate communication across disciplinary, geographic and political boundaries, among scholars and concerned individuals in government and public posts, the communications media and elsewhere, who have a scientific interest in the relationship between politics and psychological processes. In so doing, ISPP aims to continue to advance scholarship in political psychology, and to contribute to the usefulness of work in political psychology.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S CORNER

ISPP continues to thrive with membership renewals coming in at a rate about equal to that of 2008, a record year in terms of membership numbers. Equally impressive is that 642 individual paper proposals have been submitted for the Dublin conference assuring that our July 2009 annual meeting will once again be well-attended with representation from nearly every continent and sub-discipline of political psychology.

As usual the hard work of our many volunteers is to thank for these good tidings. With 16 standing or special committees working on numerous special projects and initiatives, and with 23 members of the Governing Council and Executive Committees guiding us, political psychology continues to make inroads into centers of learning and policy circles across the globe.

ISPP is fortunate in that most of our small but steadily growing pool of surplus cash was not invested in the markets when the economic downturn hit last fall. As a result the Society is in a good position to build our endowment over the next several years. The Governing Council is in the process of adopting a long-term investment strategy that will make the funding of new kinds of initiatives possible for years to come. Indeed, 2009 marks the first time that ISPP is able to provide funding for two special initiatives proposed by our members (see President's column for details).

Radell and I in the Central Office look forward to working with you in 2009. As always feel free to contact us at any time with questions, ideas, or concerns.

—Bruce Dayton, Executive Director

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As we look toward our annual ISPP meeting—this time in Dublin, Ireland, July 14-17 (see page 11)—we have a number of things to report.

Conference Program Chairs Orla Muldoon and Neil Ferguson have been busy working with section chairs to finalize the Dublin program. The ISPP website includes maps and photos of the Trinity College campus, our conference site, a brochure, and other information, including a link to reserve accommodations on the Trinity

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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College campus. (See <http://ispp.org/meet.html>.) On-line registration for the conference and a preliminary schedule will be available soon. Please check our website and watch for email notification. We hope many of you can join us at this conference, which seems to get better every year! A huge thank-you goes to Neil and Orla, section chairs, Linda Patten and her staff, Radell Roberts of the Central Office, and all involved!

Speaking of political psychology conferences, we had a terrific mini-conference on “The Interface of Politics and Psychology in the International Context” on January 29 at Stanford University, co-sponsored by ISPP. Speakers included Sam McFarland, Felicia Pratto, Orla Muldoon, Lisa Butler, Kristen Monroe, Kent Drescher, Daryn Reicherter, and David Redlawsk. Topics were diverse, e.g., political decision-making, identity and moral psychology, and coordination between enemies, among others, and there was considerable discussion.

Thank you Bruce Dayton, our Executive Director, for doing such a great job guiding our plans for ISPP’s mid-winter meeting at Stanford University January 30. We also appreciate Radell Roberts for her preparations and minutes and Sam McFarland for leading the meetings. One decision confirmed was the funding of political psychology initiatives. Of the nine proposals received and reviewed by the Allocations Committee, given our limited available funding, our Governing Council was able to approve funding for two.

One of the proposals approved for ISPP funding is *A (bi)annual Conference in Political Psychology, Theory and History*, submitted by student member Zeljka Buturovic from Columbia University and Zogby International, and including an interdisciplinary team from Belgrade, Serbia: Dr. Slobodan Miladinovic, sociologist; Zeljka Martinovski, psychologist, and Jovana Papan, ethnomusicologist. “The purpose of the project is to establish a regular (annual or biannual) conference in political psychology, theory and history to be held in Belgrade. The official languages of the conference would be Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and English.”

The second proposal chosen for funding is *Humanism and Democracy Across Borders of Countries and Disciplines*, submitted by Martina Klicperova-Baker, from

the Institute of Psychology—Prague, Czech Republic and San Diego State University, USA. This proposal is for encouraging networking and producing and publishing a monograph by persons from underrepresented regions and populations, specifically, Belarus, Russia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Islamic countries, women’s professional organizations, and NGOs involved in countries of the “third world” and in regions stressed by violence, oppression, and poverty.

A major transition is planned for our Society’s journal, *Political Psychology*, which moves every few years to a new location and editorial leadership. Serving on the editorial team is a major contribution to ISPP, and those currently serving at the University of Stony Brook are Stanley Feldman, Leonie Huddy, Howard Lavine, and Charles Taber. With the help of the Publications Committee, chaired by Rose McDermott, the Governing Council has approved the next editorial team. At the beginning of 2010, current editors will work with Alex Mintz, Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, Israel, and his team of editors for different divisions to include Paul ‘t Hart, Helen Haste, David Redlawsk, Steven Redd, Eran Halperin, and Jim Sidanius. Thanks to Rose and the Publications Committee: Fred Alford, Ann Crigler, Jerrold Post, Daniel Bar-Tal.

Under the leadership of Nadia Khatib, the Junior Scholars Committee is working to enhance the involvement of junior scholars in political psychology and ISPP. Chris Weber and Rune Slothuus are creating a blog to provide a forum for junior scholars to upload and discuss working papers, network, and become familiar with ISPP. Nadia is also working with previous Chair Monica Schneider to create a handbook/manual for the committee with mission statement, committee positions, procedures for forming committees, and timeline/deadlines. The committee is also planning to recommend a new chair soon to shadow the current chair.

The Governing Council has confirmed Melinda Jackson as our new *ISPPNews* Editor, taking over for Andrea Grove. Thank you Andrea and now Melinda!

Best wishes to all throughout 2009 and beyond. May our upcoming conference in Dublin play a special role in making this an especially great year for many of you.

—Cheryl Koopman, ISPP President

ISPP ANNOUNCEMENTS

2009 ISPP Elections Underway

All current (2009) ISPP members are urged to **vote by May 1** for 5 members to join the Governing Council to begin 3-year terms after the Dublin meeting in July. Ballots (a link to an online survey) have been sent via email or by post. Governing Council members serve a critical role for ISPP. The Council meets twice a year—at the annual scientific meeting in July and at a mid-winter meeting—and members are in communication via email throughout the year to advance the agenda of ISPP. Council members:

1. Adopt an annual budget and authorize expenditures;
2. Approve the site of the Annual ISPP Meeting and any other general meetings of the Society;
3. Approve rules consistent with the ISPP Constitution for conducting the annual Business Meeting, for holding elections, and for submitting proposed amendments and resolutions to members;
4. Serve on the Nominating Committee (in the 2nd and 3rd year of office) to choose Vice President and President of ISPP, and nominate 10 candidates for 5 seats on the Governing Council;
5. Elect the Executive Director, Treasurer, Councilor, and editors of any publications of the Society as needed;
6. Decide questions pertaining to Society publications.

This year's candidates for Governing Council are:

Jason Barabas, Florida State University, US
Esra Çuhadar Gürkaynak, Bilkent Univ., Turkey
Jamie Druckman, Northwestern University, US
Eva Green, University of Lausanne, Switzerland
Thomas Holbrook, University of Wisconsin, US
Jennifer Jerit, Florida State University, US
Jeff Karp, University of Exeter, UK
Michael Krasner, Queens College, US
Tasha Philpot, University of Texas at Austin, US
Shimon Samuels, Simon Wiesenthal Center, France

For President (uncontested):

Leonie Huddy, Stony Brook University, US

For Vice-President (uncontested):

Paul Nesbitt-Larking, Huron University College, Canada

See: <http://ispp.org/09Elections.html>.

Ballots due May 1, 2008.

JSC NEWS

Travel Scholarships for Dublin Meeting

The Junior Scholars Committee announces a competition for travel scholarships for Junior Scholars (graduate student or untenured person, within 8 years of their degree) for the 2009 ISPP Annual Meeting in Dublin. First preference will be given to current dues-paid junior scholar ISPP members presenting papers in Dublin. Applications received by April 20 will receive priority. Recipients will be notified by May 10. Please see <http://ispp.org/jsc/annualmeeting.html> for details.

Junior Scholars Events at Annual Meeting

The Junior Scholar Committee has a number of exciting events in store for this year's meeting. The JSC will host the Junior Scholars Social Hour (July 14) to give junior scholars an opportunity to meet and mingle. We also will be announcing the winner of the Best Dissertation Award at the awards ceremony (July 16).

The JSC is organizing a number of roundtables and other opportunities for professional development. This year's Career Development Roundtable will focus on the issue of grant-writing, an increasingly critical facet of a successful academic career. The JSC is once again hosting the Publishing Roundtable to provide information on publishing in *Political Psychology*, including such topics as the manuscript submission process, peer-review, and editorial decisions.

Finally, junior scholars will have the opportunity to meet one-on-one with a senior faculty mentor within their particular field of interest. **All juniors (and senior scholars) interested in participating in the Mentorship Program (to meet July 15) must sign up on the conference registration form. Those who sign up before May 1 will be guaranteed a match.**

Roommate Matching Service

The Junior Scholars Committee will provide a roommate matching service in order to facilitate networking among junior scholars at the annual meeting. Please see <http://ispp.org/jsc/annualmeeting.html> for more information, and send a request with details (noting "roommate matching" in the subject line) to Minou Mebane at minoutauro@yahoo.it.

PROFESSIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

2009 Summer Institute in Political Psychology

Stanford University will host the 2009 Summer Institute in Political Psychology (SIPP) this coming summer (July 12-31). Directed by Stanford Professor Jon Krosnick, SIPP is a three-week intensive training program introducing graduate students and professionals to the world of political psychology scholarship.

The 2009 SIPP curriculum will be designed to accomplish one preeminent goal: to produce skilled, creative, and effective scholarly researchers who would do more and better work in political psychology as the result of their attendance at SIPP. To achieve this goal, the training experience is designed to: 1) provide broad exposure to theories, empirical findings, and research traditions; 2) illustrate successful cross-disciplinary research and integration; 3) enhance methodological pluralism; and 4) strengthen institutional networks. The schedule of activities mixes lectures with opportunities for students to talk with faculty lecturers and with each other in structured and less formal atmospheres. On-line applications are currently being accepted. For more information, see www.stanford.edu/group/sipp.

Excerpted from the ISPP announcements webpage:

Events, Workshops, Institutes

• **Durham International Affairs Conference (DIAC)**
"Informal Empires, Past and Present"
(<http://www.dur.ac.uk/sgia/events-new/?eventno=4958>)
April 1-2, 2009

School of Government and International Affairs,
Durham, UK

• **Decision Processes Summer School 2009**
"Decision and time: Reconsidering the past, anticipating the future" (<http://www.dm.ucsc.psycholab.net/>)
June 30-July 3, 2009 (**Application Deadline: April 5**),
Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Milan, Italy

Calls for Papers, Proposals, Studies

• **3rd Annual CICA-STR International Conference**,
"Political Violence and Aggression: Considering the Past, Imagining the Future" (<http://ispp.org/announcements/CICA-STRconf09Flyer.pdf>)
2-5 September, 2009 (**Proposal Deadline: March 31**),
University of Ulster, Northern Ireland

See <http://ispp.org/announcements.html> for more!

PUBLICATIONS

Book Announcements

**Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies:
Contestation and Symbolic Landscapes**
Marc Howard Ross, Editor

University of Pennsylvania Press, February 2009

From cartoons of Muhammad in a Danish newspaper to displays of the confederate battle flag over the South Carolina statehouse, acts of cultural expression have set off political conflicts and sometimes violence in recent years. These and other expressions and enactments of culture—whether expressed as music, graffiti, sculpture, flag displays, parades, religious rituals, or film—regularly produce divisive and sometimes prolonged disputes. What is striking about so many of these conflicts is their emotional intensity, despite the fact that in many cases what is at stake is often of little material value. Why do people invest so much emotional energy and resources in such conflicts? What is at stake, and what does winning or losing represent? The answers to these questions explored in *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies* view cultural expressions variously as barriers to, or opportunities for, inclusion in a divided society's symbolic landscape and political life.

Though little may be at stake materially, deep emotional investment in conflicts over cultural acts can have significant political consequences. At the same time, while cultural issues often exacerbate conflict, new or redefined cultural expressions and enactments can redirect long-standing conflicts in more constructive directions and promote reconciliation in ways that lead to or reinforce formal peace agreements. Encompassing work by a diverse group of scholars of American studies, anthropology, art history, religion, political science, and other fields, *Culture and Belonging in Divided Societies* addresses the power of cultural expressions and enactments in highly charged settings, exploring when and how changes in a society's symbolic landscape occur and what this tells us about political life in the societies in which they take place.

Marc Howard Ross is William Rand Kennan, Jr., Professor of Political Science at Bryn Mawr College.

PUBLICATIONS

**Nonproliferation Norms:
Why States Choose Nuclear Restraint**
Maria Rost Rublee

University of Georgia Press, February 2009

Too often, our focus on the relative handful of countries with nuclear weapons keeps us from asking an important question: Why do so many more states not have such weapons? More important, what can we learn from these examples of nuclear restraint? This book argues that in addition to understanding a state's security environment, we must appreciate the social forces that influence how states conceptualize the value of nuclear weapons. Much of what Rublee says also applies to other weapons of mass destruction, as well as national security decision making in general.

The nuclear nonproliferation movement has created an international social environment that exerts a variety of normative pressures on how state elites and policy-makers think about nuclear weapons. Within a social psychology framework, Rublee examines decision making about nuclear weapons in five case studies: Japan, Egypt, Libya, Sweden, and Germany.

In each case, Rublee considers the extent to which nuclear forbearance resulted from persuasion (genuine transformation of preferences), social conformity (the desire to maximize social benefits and/or minimize social costs, without a change in underlying preferences), or identification (the desire or habit of following the actions of an important other).

In addition, the book uses social psychological research to pinpoint nine different mechanisms through which norms can influence state elites. Then, case study evidence is used to see if these mechanisms exist and are visible in nuclear decision-making. Rublee finds that several of the psychological mechanisms do indeed seem to play a role in creating and maintaining nuclear restraint.

The book offers bold policy prescriptions based on a sharpened knowledge of the many ways we transmit and process nonproliferation norms. The social mechanisms that encourage nonproliferation—and the regime that created them—must be preserved and

strengthened, Rublee argues, for without them states that have exercised nuclear restraint may rethink their choices.

Bringing in the Future: Strategies for Farsightedness and Sustainability in Developing Countries
William Ascher

University of Chicago Press, March 2009

Humans are plagued by shortsighted thinking, preferring to put off work on complex, deep-seated, or difficult problems in favor of quick-fix solutions to immediate needs. When short-term thinking is applied to economic development, especially in fragile nations, the results—corruption, waste, and faulty planning—are often disastrous. In *Bringing in the Future*, William Ascher draws on the latest research from psychology, economics, institutional design, and legal theory to suggest strategies to overcome powerful obstacles to long-term planning in developing countries.

Drawing on cases from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Ascher applies strategies such as the creation and scheduling of tangible and intangible rewards, cognitive exercises to increase the understanding of longer-term consequences, self-restraint mechanisms to protect long-term commitments and enhance credibility, and restructuring policy-making processes to permit greater influence of long-term considerations. Featuring theoretically informed research findings and sound policy examples, this volume will assist policy makers, activists, and scholars seeking to understand how the vagaries of human behavior affect international development.

William Ascher is the Donald C. McKenna Professor of Government & Economics at Claremont McKenna College. The latest of his books are *Guide to Sustainable Development* and *Environmental Policy and Revitalizing Political Psychology*.

Mark your calendars for the 2010 ISPP meeting:

**7-10 July 2010 at Mark Hopkins Hotel
San Francisco, California, USA**

Info available soon at: <http://ispp.org/meet.html>

PUBLICATIONS

Genius 101
Dean Keith Simonton, PhD
 Springer Publishing, The Psych 101 Series,
 February 2009

Keith Simonton, the world’s foremost authority on genius theory, presents *Genius 101*, the only psychology based book that explores what it means to be a “genius.” Simonton provides a theoretical and historical overview of “genius,” with analyses of the very first genius theorists, including Freud, Galton, and Ericsson. He also consults contemporary theorists, such as Guilford, Sternberg, and Gardner.

This unique book investigates the following:

- What is genius?
- Is genius generic?
- Is genius born or made?
- Is genius individual or collective?
- Where will genius science go?

Dean Keith Simonton is Distinguished Professor and Vice Chair of the department of psychology at the University of California, Davis.

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KUDOS:

Marc Howard Ross Book wins ISA Award

At the 2009 International Studies Association in New York, Marc Howard Ross’s recent book, *Cultural Contestation in Ethnic Conflict* (Cambridge University Press) received the Best Book Award in Ethnicity, Nationalism and Migration from the Ethnicity, Nationalism and Migration Studies Section. Publisher Cambridge University Press says, “Marc Howard Ross examines battles over diverse cultural expressions, including Islamic headscarves in France, parades in Northern Ireland, holy sites in Jerusalem and Confederate flags in the American South to propose a psychocultural framework for understanding ethnic conflict, as well as barriers to, and opportunities for, its mitigation. His analysis explores how culture frames interests, structures demand-making and shapes how opponents can find common ground to produce constructive outcomes to long-term disputes.”

MEMBER COMMENTARY

Predicting the Obama Presidency
 By David G. Winter, University of Michigan

Many people in the US and other countries greeted the election of Barack Obama with pride, hope, energy, and optimism—even as the United States faces the worst economic crisis in over 70 years, as well as a daunting array of international and domestic problems. After his inauguration come the questions: What kind of president will he be? Will he succeed or stumble? What are his special strengths and vulnerabilities?

In making predictions, campaign platforms and 12-point plans are of very limited value, because they quickly become obsolete after colliding with political opposition or unexpected and rapidly-changing conditions. Instead, some political psychologists try to extrapolate from a new president’s past political performance. Since the presidency is not comparable to any other office or experience, they are sometimes surprised: positively (for most people) by a Harry Truman, negatively (for many) by a George W. Bush.

When presidents are faced with the need to make decisions and take action in novel and complex situations they do not fully understand, they fall back on what historian James Joll called “unspoken assumptions.”¹ Some of these assumptions take the form of “implicit motives”—that is, networks of images and meanings operating in a twilight territory between unconscious and rational calculation. Implicit motives reveal themselves in words—not explicit goal statements, but rather the nuances and images in which these statements are expressed. Implicit motives can be grouped into three broad categories: *achievement* (concern for excellence, unique accomplishment, overcoming failure), *affiliation* (warmth and close relations), and *power* (having impact or prestige). Researchers have developed highly reliable ways of coding people’s implicit motives in their speech or writing. Over the past several decades, I have applied these coding systems to score the motives of political leaders from news conferences and speeches, including presidential inaugural addresses.² (Of course presidents’ speeches are mostly written by speechwriters, but presidents choose wordsmiths adept at crafting words that sound “natural” when put into their mouths.)

So what are Obama’s implicit motives? Compared to

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first inaugural addresses of other 20th and 21st century US presidents, Obama scored about average in achievement (“wield technology’s wonders to *raise health care’s quality*”), above average in affiliation (“*we will extend a hand* if you are willing to unclench your fist”), and quite high in power (“You cannot outlast us, and *we will defeat you*”). In quantitative terms, these scores were $-.02$ standard deviation units below average (50th percentile) for achievement, $.55$ *SD* units above average (70th percentile) for affiliation, and 2.07 *SD* units above average (98th percentile) for power.

Generally political leaders show a consistent motive profile over time;³ however, Obama’s February 2007 speech announcing his candidacy scored much lower in power motive imagery ($-.3$ *SD* units below average) than his inaugural address. This may be an artifact of using a different comparison group (the other major 2008 presidential candidates) for standardizing raw motive imagery scores. On the other hand, it may have been strategic: an African American male beginning a competition against eight White candidates (one of them female) might be well advised not to emphasize power motivation. Speaking as president in the midst of a growing crisis, however, an assertion of leadership is welcome.

What does Obama’s inaugural motive profile of average achievement, high affiliation and quite high power mean for predicting his presidency? His high affiliation score is consistent with his public image as a unifier, “reaching across the aisle” to bring Democrats and Republicans together. However, his very high power score suggests that he also enjoys and is adept in the ways of politics—as one would expect from someone schooled in “Chicago politics”. Both of these motives were sequentially evident in his early success getting the stimulus package passed by Congress, as well as in the way he is beginning health care reform (gathering together political leaders of different opinions, rather than convening a panel of “experts” working in secret to design the perfect plan, as did achievement-motivated Bill Clinton).

Based on past research about presidential power motivation and performance, we can make several predictions. Obama’s high power and only average achievement motivation suggests that he will continue to demonstrate political effectiveness and charisma.

(Achievement motivation often leads to success in business, but usually is associated with frustration and failure in politics.) His sense of humor and ability to take pleasure from being president will likely tide him over the inevitable frustrations of office that dragged down more achievement-motivated presidents such as Jimmy Carter. In addition, presidents scoring high in power motive imagery are prone to aggressive policies, often leading the nation into military action. Obama has consistently advocated withdrawing American forces from Iraq, but is willing to escalate in Afghanistan. Depending on circumstances, it is possible that the US could become militarily involved in other potential trouble spots, such as a collapsing Pakistan, a nuclear-armed Iran or North Korea, or even chaos in Mexico.

Presidents with high affiliation scores work at making peace and limiting arms. On the downside, they are vulnerable to political scandals on the part of their cabinet and staff—perhaps because they tend rely too much on friends and cronies for advice.

Another way to make predictions is to calculate his profile similarity to previous presidents. Since the three motives are theoretically orthogonal, each president’s profile can be expressed as a point in three-dimensional space. The closer the “points” of any two leaders, the more similar their motive profiles. For Obama, the closest modern US presidents are Harry Truman ($.92$ *SD* units), whose path into politics also began in an urban political machine without himself being tarnished by scandal, and John F. Kennedy (1.34 *SD* units).

Motives aren’t everything. While aggression and political scandal may be vulnerabilities of Obama’s motive profile, they may perhaps be mitigated by other aspects of his personality: for example, he is extraordinarily open to experience, a trait fostered by his growing up in Hawaii and then spending several years in Indonesia. He is intelligent, and not threatened or put on the defensive by expert advice and the intelligence of others. His calmness or emotional stability—partly temperament, partly a style that is adaptive for African Americans in a racist world, and partly reinforced by his experience of Harvard Law School—is legendary. He is highly intelligent, conscientious, and possessed of a strong sense of morality and responsibility. Each of these aspects of his personality could protect against vulnerabilities and

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channel his motives into positive outcomes.

In the end, however, such predictions are really “if/then” possibilities, because they will surely be affected by events that no one can now foresee. In the words of Charles Dickens, they are “shadows of the things that may be.” So check back in 2012 (and perhaps 2016), for a report on what is at the moment an “Obama Presidency that is yet to come.”

Endnotes

1. Joll, J. (1968/1972). 1914: The unspoken assumptions. In H. W. Koch (Ed.), *The origins of the First World War: Great power rivalry and German war aims* (1st ed., pp. 13-29). London: Macmillan.
2. For a summary of this research, see Winter, D. G. (2002). Motivation and political leadership. In L. Valenty & O. Feldman (Eds.), *Political Leadership for the New Century: Personality and Behavior among American Leaders* (pp. 25-47). Westport, CT: Praeger.
3. Winter, D. G. (1982). Motivation and performance in presidential candidates. In A. J. Stewart (Ed.), *Motivation and society* (pp. 244-273). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

PERSPECTIVES: CHINA

Note from the Editor: In this column, we seek to publish perspectives on political psychology from around the world. This includes overviews of political psychology programs and associations, and short scholarly pieces addressing new developments in political psychology. Recent Perspectives columns have focused on Hungary, Russia, the UK, and Poland. We invite further submissions from other areas of the world!

**The Political Psychology of Lao-Tzu:
“Aim at the Cultivation of Human Nature”**

By Bo Wang
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Political psychology has a short history but a long tradition. One genuinely unexplored area of early Chinese thought is that of psychology (Roth, 1991). I will single out some of the earliest political psychological theories

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of Lao-Tzu from “Tao Te Ching”, in which the origins and aims of politik were explained, although he did not use the modern term political psychology. (*Tao te ching*, He Shang Gong’s Annotations of Lau-Tzu, 1991; Arthur Waley, 1958).

According to Karl Jaspers (1974), Lao-Tzu is an axial philosopher whose insights have shaped the course of human development. He is as mysterious as his book. The identity and life of Lao-Tzu himself are shadowy and are still being debated. Confucius is recorded as commenting after his meeting with Lao-Tzu, “In him that I have now seen the dragon. The dragon coils itself up, and there is its body; it unfolds itself and becomes the dragon complete. It rides on the cloudy air, and is nourished by the Yin and Yang!” (Guo, 1998)

1. The Origins of Politik: Inherent Evil of Human Nature

Lao-Tzu claims the necessity of politik lies in the tendency towards degeneration inherent in human nature. The degeneration is caused by the evolution of history towards social institutionalization. The purpose of politik is not only to keep a safe and harmonious society, but also to pursue the natural and ideal condition of life and self characterized by moral meanings. The ideal condition of the self should be an “Un-carved Block” (blankness): “He [mankind] returns to the state of the Un-carved Block. Now when a block is sawed up it is made into implements” (Chapter XXVIII). “Once the block is carved, there will be names” (Chapter XXXII). The ideal condition of life as Un-carved Block degenerates into the inferior condition of implements through institutionalization including confusion caused by various material possessions such as fame and wealth (names). The complete institutionalization sets up the disciplined world of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, trustworthiness, and wisdom. This causes blindness and crisis because people begin to pursue fame and wealth and to forget their ideal condition of the Un-carved Block (Xu, 2005).

The body is the implement of the institutionalization and is ruled by it. “The only reason why I suffer hurt is because I have body; if I had no body, how could I suffer?” (Chapter XIII).

Worse still, this institutionalization of the world builds

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up the hegemony of knowledge of the body and differentiates evil, goodness, beauty and ugliness. This causes two serious problems. First, the wholeness of Un-carved Block is broken into the fragmentation of the knowledge of the body: “Foreknowledge may be the ‘flower of doctrine’, but in fact it is the beginning of folly” (Chapter XXXVIII). People take themselves as omnipotent and the owner of ultimate truth. It sneaks up on us as if we are really masters of our destiny and everything else. This arrogance develops into the will to govern others and is a cause of ideological disaster. Thus, the world is divided into conflicting groups unable to be conciliated and alienated as atomic society.

Second, hegemony of knowledge and its differentiation result in a hierarchical world of values. The desire of human beings is stimulated as soon as the knowledge of body forms the hierarchical pattern of values. One is motivated by the values of material desire, and the values of one’s own self or the blankness are belittled.

Society moves from the blankness of “A Small Country with Few Inhabitants”, the ideal country in Lao-Tzu’s opinion, towards becoming a land of vanity. The further history develops, the heavier human nature sinks into social disturbance and political turmoil.

Social turmoil and political disturbance arise from the degeneration tendency of human nature. Resources are exhausted to build up military power more and more fiercely, following the functions of political ideology. This causes the people to sink into great misery.

Confronted by this turbulent society, political authorities (called sages) should be set up to rescue society and bring peace. However, Lao-Tzu held conversely that political authorities would be as ineffectual a remedy as trying to stop water from boiling by scooping it up and pouring it back: “The more prohibitions there are, the more ritual avoidances, the poorer the people will be. The more laws are promulgated, the more thieves and bandits there will be” (Chapter LVII).

Thus, Lao-Tzu’s logic leads to the paradox that political turmoil cannot be reduced by political structures. On the one hand, Lao-Tzu deconstructs the politik into being ineffective because its effect comes from the degeneration of human nature. Politik arises to restore order but

brings up more disturbances. On the other hand, since politik causes troubles, why not get rid of the effects of politik and step into anarchy? Here lies Lao-Tzu’s other important argument on the moral role of politik, namely, his insights into the nature of Tao.

2. The Moral Role of Politik: On the Nature of Tao

The absolute nature of Tao in the essence of human nature and politik has not been contaminated by names. This kind of nature in essence is goodness.

“The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of it is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this makes water so near to the Way. And if men think the ground the best place for building a house upon,

If among thoughts they value those that are profound,
If in friendship they value gentleness,
In words, truth; in government, good order;
In deeds, effectiveness; in actions, timeliness—
In each case it is because they prefer what does not lead to strife,
And therefore does not go amiss.” (Chapter VIII)

The essence of politik is characterized by the double human nature as both the nature of Tao and the degeneration tendency of knowledge and desire. On one hand the political authorities should be preserved to shoulder the role of the nature of the Tao because of its existence; on the other hand politik will have to limit its action because of the original evil of human nature. The ideal politik becomes some faint, obscure and weak being. Consider Lau-Tzu’s mysterious sentence, “Rear them, but not lay claim to them; Control them, but never lean upon them; Be chief among them, but not manage them” (Chapter LI).

Lao-Tzu claims a minimal government which cannot be felt by the people:

“Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity,
Carries on wordless teaching,
But the myriad creatures are worked upon by him; he does not disown them...
He is not ejected from fruition of what he has done” (Chapter II).

(continued on next page)

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Political authorities of this kind are necessary based on his theory of the original evil of human nature. The purpose of them is to create some kind of peaceful life filled with the least desire where the disturbance of society and mind can be cultivated naturally into the order of Tao.

“Tao never does;
 Yet through it all things are done.
 If the barons and kings would but possess themselves of it,
 The ten thousand creatures would at once be transformed.
 And if having been transformed they should desire to act,
 We must restrain them by the blankness of the Unnamed.
 The blankness of the Unnamed
 Brings dispassion;
 To be dispassionate is to be still.
 And so, of itself, the whole empire will be at rest”
 (Chapter XXXVII).

Lao-Tzu’s political psychology starts from the desire of the original evil of human nature; however, it never ends with the original evil of human nature. His theory is not merely for wiping out this desire, but rather in pursuit of the natural life guided by Tao. Politik not only eliminates the demanding knowledge and desire, but also embodies the nature of Tao as its purpose which is beyond knowledge and desire. Lao-Tzu argued that on the contrary, politik will have to banish the institutions, namely the abuse of politik, to fulfill this purpose.

“So long as I ‘do nothing’ the people will of themselves be transformed.
 So long as I love quietude, the people will of themselves go straight.
 So long as I act only by inactivity the people will of themselves become prosperous.
 So long as I have no wants the people will of themselves return to the ‘state of the Uncarved Block’” (Chapter LVII).

On this point, Lao-Tzu’s political psychological theory should be identified as not instrumental but teleological which bears plentiful moral meaning.

3. Conclusion

The original evil of human nature makes the existence of politik necessary; however, the abuse of politik will worsen the tendency of this evil and bring about more social disturbance. Some political authorities (sages) embodying the nature of Tao can get out of this dilemma. These authorities cultivate the people into their ideal state of “blankness” and the realm of Tao wherein the society is peaceful and prosperous. However, these authorities should “do nothing” in order to fulfill this goal. This is the inner tension of Lao-Tzu’s theory. It is because Lao-Tzu does not end with the original evil of human nature but rather in pursuit of the natural life guided by Tao that his theory is teleological.

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Notes: The translations of Lao-Tzu’s text are mainly based on Arthur Waley’s *The Way and Its power: A study of the Tao Te Ching and Its place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove Press) compared to *Tao te ching (He Shang Gong’s Annotations of Lau-Tzu, 1991)*. I made some improvements at several places where the translations are not very satisfying.

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