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Postindustrialism and postmaterialism? A critical view of the new economy, the information age, the high tech society and all that

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Harold L. Wilensky

Postindustrialism and Postmaterialism?

A Critical View of the "New Economy",
the "Information Age", the "High Tech Society",
and All That*

February 2003

- * This paper is excerpted from Harold L. Wilensky, *Rich Democracies: Political Economy, Public Policy, and Performance*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 187-208, 51-61, 680-681. Full citations and data are in that book. Cross-references are to chapters and tables in *Rich Democracies*. A short version was presented at a session of Economy and Society (RCO2) at XV World Congress of Sociology, International Sociological Association, Brisbane, Australia, July 7-13, 2002. For further information, <<http://go.ucpress.edu/wilensky>>.

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Abstract

The theory of postindustrial society and postmaterialist culture can explain neither the structural uniformities of modern society captured by convergence theory nor the national differences captured by theories of democratic corporatism and the mass society. Its depiction of structural changes is superficial: the service sector is too heterogeneous to describe occupational and industrial trends; the idea of technocratic dominance is overblown and misses big national differences in the location and role of experts and intellectuals. As for postindustrial values, they apply to a small population, a minority even of college students. That these attitudes fluctuate so much with shifting economic conditions and political agendas casts doubt on the idea of a basic shift toward “postmaterial values”. The literature documenting such shifts is plagued with problems of survey validity. It goes up against a heavy weight of evidence showing that older issues of security, equality, civic order and crime, economic growth and stability are dominant in the politics and mentality of modern populations; that cohort effects are weak to non-existent; that political generational effects are rare and soon fade away; that family life cycle, if carefully delineated, has an impact across a wide range of attitudes and behavior. Most important, differences in national mobilizing structures shape both mass and elite responses to the dilemmas and problems of modern life. Assessing related images of modern society - “the information age”, the “high-tech society” - the paper finds these equally misleading. This paper is based on chs. 1 and 4 of H.L. Wilensky, *Rich Democracies: Political Economy, Public Policy, and Performance* (University of California Press, 2002).

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POSTINDUSTRIALISM AND POSTMATERIALISM?

A Critical View of the “New Economy”, the “Information Age”, the “High Tech Society”, and All That¹

Among the widely accepted myths about the shape of modern society is the idea that a new “postindustrial” order is emerging in which intellectuals, scientists, managers, and experts in command of theoretical knowledge dominate the political system, while service occupations (the “tertiary sector”) dominate employment and production, and “postmaterialist” values dominate the culture.² In other words, a vanguard of educated people, occupied in ‘health, education, research, and government’ (Bell, 1973, p. 15), is already decisive in every modern political economy, and it is the carrier of the “cultural revolution.” Older issues are giving way to newer issues, in a major shift in values — shift from the work ethic to freedom and expressiveness (“do your own thing”), from intellectual calculation to impulse and ecstasy (as in drugs and rock music), from hierarchy to equality and participatory democracy, from a competitive rat-race to a quest for community, from economic growth and consumerism to environmentalism and a concern with the quality of life (cf. Davis, 1971; Turner, 1976), all with profound political effects (Huntington, 1974). Another version of postindustrialism accents the emergence of an “Information Age” or the “Hi Tech Society”. More recently there was a burst of related talk about the “New Economy”, which quickly faded with a worldwide recession.

In this paper I shall first evaluate evidence of the limits of the structural aspects of postindustrial theory and then deal with the even more limited cultural aspects. I shall argue that its account of industrial and occupational trends is too gross to be useful; its account of shifts in values and beliefs does not square with the evidence; and its view of the politics of modern democracies misses great variation among them. The major structural and cultural trends in rich countries are better captured by convergence theory with its accent on the universal and specific effects of continuing industrialization (chapter 1). Insofar as “postindustrial” means the rise to power of experts in command of theoretical knowledge, it is not a common feature of modern societies; it applies best to corporatist democracies and, as we have seen, misses the mark for the least-corporatist, most fragmented and decentralized democracies such as the United States (chapters 2 and 3).

Occupational and Industrial Trends

Labor Force Trends. Using the U.S. as the most advanced economy, we have already traced the well-established trends in the occupational composition of the labor force (chapter 1 and Figure 1.2): a drastic decline in farm people; a steady increase of white-collar and professional and administrative employees; very fast growth in the newer professions and a host of semi-professional, semi-technical occupations; growth in the proportion of “non-farm proprietors, managers, and officials”, especially since 1940; a small decline in the “working class” from 1910 to 1988, accelerating since then but within it a sharp drop in laborers and the semi-skilled, some growth in low-paid service workers, and stability in skilled craftsmen, repairmen, and foremen. These trends are common to all modern societies. The net effect has been a general upgrading of the whole population, reflecting both the average skill and educational level required. All these trends were evident from 1910 (the earliest date for good data comparability) to 1950 (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958, pp. 90-94); they cannot be called postindustrial. They are merely occupational changes induced by continuing industrialization.

Common Trends in the Organization of Work. These are also the effects of continuing industrialization. Two are most obvious: the decline in hours of work and the spread of “contingent labor”. Two are less obvious: occupational trends do not fit the idea of the “high tech society”. And whether the spread of unconventional schedules and unstable careers is an American peculiarity requires comparative data not now in hand. A word about each.

Hours. A steady decline in yearly average hours of work from the late 19th century to about 1960 has been followed by divergence as the leisure rich countries got richer and the leisure poor got poorer. The bottom five in working hours (leisure rich) are democratic corporatist — Norway, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The hardest working six (leisure poor) in descending order are the USA, Japan, Canada, the UK, Italy, and France; except for Italy they are either least-corporatist or corporatist-without-labor — in other words they lack the bargaining arrangements that foster left-labor power. Only in recent trends in hours of work is the U.S. a genuine exception. From 1960 to 1994 all countries for which we have data evidence substantial declines in annual hours, except for the U.S., which starts at the top and declines only 2.9 percent (chapter 1, p. 52 and fn. 49).

The Spread of Contingent Labor. In my book I argue in detail that “flexible specialization” (or “post-Fordist” methods of manufacturing) are not new, that they come in many forms, cover only a small portion of the labor force, and several of the most celebrated cases in Sweden and Northern Italy have disappeared. But there is one major shift that is very likely convergent - the spread of “contingent labor”, part-time, temporary, or subcontracted workers

in both services and manufacturing. The U.S., Canada, and Australia lead the way in this high-turnover, low-training job creation, but other rich democracies are also moving in this direction (Wilensky 1992b). The trend may reduce labor costs, enhance management flexibility, and increase choice for some workers. But at the same time it increases the risk of job and benefit losses and decreases investment in human capital. It is a new source of insecurity and instability — not confined to low-paid, low-skilled workers — that will play out in the politics of labor and public policy. Those countries that resist the trend will have an edge in both long-run productivity and social consensus. While downsizing, outsourcing, and workplace restructuring encourage this trend everywhere, the legal and industrial relations context varies among nations and creates different national responses. This may be a trend like total hours of work — moving in the same direction but because of labor-left resistance both to long hours and contingent labor, divergent in the speed of change and hence the portion of the labor force affected.

Is Modern Society “High-Tech”? The current obsession with “high-tech” jobs and the image of the “high-tech society” run up against uncomfortable facts about where people work and what occupations are growing fastest. “High-tech jobs” generally connotes something new that requires substantial upgrading of knowledge and skills. The U.S. is said to be the leader in high-tech products and services — especially if we include military R&D — or it is at least one of the top three or four if we do not. This is symbolized by high-growth centers such as Silicon Valley (California), Route 128 (Boston-Cambridge), the Research Triangle Park (North Carolina), and federal facilities in space and defense around Cape Canaveral (Florida), Huntsville (Alabama), and Oak Ridge (Tennessee). Recent trends in occupational structure in the U.S., then, might be taken as a sign of things to come if the “high tech society” is more than an illusion. But consider the ten largest detailed job categories in 1983 that also grew substantially from 1983 to 1997. They are, in descending order of employment in 1983, sales supervisors and proprietors; truck drivers; janitors and cleaners; cashiers; cooks; sales representatives (commodities except retail)³; registered nurses; elementary school teachers; nursing aids, orderlies, and attendants; and carpenters. Waiters and waitresses would make the top 10 list (about 1.4 million) but grew only 1 percent. Each of the 10 began the period with more than about 1.2 million employed. Not one is “high tech”. Together these ten categories added 6.49 million jobs 1983-1997 and employed 23,723,000 people by 1997. Or take another cut at reality: Of the 16 fastest-growing occupations for the same period only one — computer systems analysts and scientists — was unambiguously high tech (960,000 jobs added). More ambiguously we might add “management analyst” (255,000 added), and even “securities and financial services sales” (217,000 added). These three added only 1,432,000 jobs over the 14 years, bringing their total 1997 employment to a mere 2,054,000, 1.59 percent of the total employed. (My calculations from U.S. Department of Labor, January 1998, table 11; January 1984, table 22.) In short, statistically speaking, modern society remains “low tech” or “no tech” in the experience of vast majorities, whatever the privileged position and power of highly-trained elites.⁴

No comparable detailed labor-force data are readily available for many rich democracies. If we examine gross categories such as those from OECD Labor Force Statistics, we find gross similarities in the percentage of employment in industry or services (with Germany, Austria, and Switzerland having an edge in “industry”, North America in “services”). Comparing five of our rich democracies, John Myles (1991) found that the richest four (Canada, U.S., Sweden, Norway) are similar in the proportion employed in goods production, distributive services, and public administration, but sharply different in business services (financial, legal, and clerical), where the U.S. and Canada have about twice the percentage of Sweden and Norway, and health, education and welfare (where welfare-state leaders employ many more than the U.S. and Canada). A later section returns to these trends in industrial structure. Despite these data limitations, the likely convergent trends in general occupational structure and stratification (chapter 1) suggest that the U.S. profile — excluding the very rich and the poor — is not exceptional. Whatever the impressive contribution of high-tech industries (computers, software, drugs, medical instruments, telecommunications, aerospace, etc.) to the GDP or productivity of rich democracies, the modern labor force as a whole remains low tech or no tech. Many high-tech consumer products are made with low tech methods. And truck drivers, janitors, short-order cooks or nursing aides in Silicon Valley are like their counterparts in central Chicago.

Are the Rise in Unconventional Schedules and Unstable Careers American Peculiarities? A consequence of the changing occupational structure and the emergence of contingent labor is an increase in unconventional schedules of work. A thorough study of nonstandard days of work (e.g. Sunday, Saturday, variable) and nonstandard hours of work (evening, night, irregular) in the United States by Harriet Presser (1995, 1997) shows an extraordinary concentration in the fast-growing occupations discussed above. She defines standard hours as working fixed-day schedules the week before the survey interview. All others — fixed evening, fixed night, irregular day, irregular evening or night, irregular (no hours given), and rotating shifts — are nonstandard. The percent of employed adults with nonstandard work schedules in 1991 was a whopping 42.1. By 1997 the figure had risen to 44.6 percent (Presser, 1999, p. 1778). Such schedules are pervasive throughout the occupational structure but are concentrated in parts of the service sector, and especially in growing occupations. Consider the percentage of adults with nonstandard schedules who were employed in 1991 in the 10 occupations with the largest projected absolute job growth 1994-2005 (Presser, 1997, p. 33, Table 5). Eight of the 10 are very high in nonstandard schedules. They range from about 9 in 10 of waiters and waitresses and home health aides to 6 in 10 of the janitors and cleaners, with cashiers, salespersons, registered nurses, guards, and nursing aides, orderlies and attendants in the middle of that range. The two exceptions in the top 10 big-growth categories are systems analysts (only 18 percent nonstandard) and general managers and top executives (41 percent). Who works in such schedules and why? Seven of the top 10 growth occupations are disproportionately female. Job characteristics (e.g. the evening and weekend hours required in retailing or 24-hour hospital and nursing care) are stronger determinants than are characteristics of the employee, although least-educated women, including single mothers, are disproportionately represented in occupations characterized by

unconventional schedules. Presser shows that least-educated single mothers work such schedules much more for labor-market reasons — they have no other options — than for personal reasons such as a desire for flexible hours to care for parents or children (*Ibid.*, p. 29). Among men, high rates appear in all the occupations listed above, plus technical and related support occupations and, for non-day work only, operators, fabricators, and laborers — except those in construction where daylight is needed (Presser, 1995, p. 588, Table 3). The health consequences of deviant schedules include sleep disturbances, gastrontestinal disorders, and chronic malaise; the social consequences include increased family breakups.⁵

These somewhat chaotic schedules are matched by the newer unstable careers of college-educated executives, engineers, and middle managers, which combine both unconventional schedules and contingent labor. In the U.S., because of the increase in divestitures, mergers, acquisitions, joint ventures, joint research or marketing agreements, and a change in top managers' personnel policies, there has recently been an acceleration of corporate and even government downsizing, outsourcing, and subcontracting. Consequently, we see an increasing percentage of college graduates who are not employees of large, complex organizations; they are contractors, consultants, part-timers, and "temps", often constituting a service network of itinerant executives, engineers, and consultants. Corporations increasingly outsource information systems, maintenance, housekeeping, data processing, and even business management. Frequently they lay off in-house staff and executives who had expected lifetime careers and replace them with younger cheaper workers or hire them back as temporary workers with no job security or benefits, and often at less pay. A joke in Silicon Valley regarding these high-tech nomads: "What does CIO (Chief Information Officer) stand for?" Answer: "Career Is Over". Peter Drucker notes that the number of temporary employment agencies in the United States doubled in only five years — from 3,500 in 1989 to 7,000 in 1994 (*Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 1995). Many of these "new-age nomads", especially specialists in computer software applications, make very big fees, at least for a time. But most, especially the older (40s, 50s) consultants, have joined the ranks of the downwardly mobile in a growing Darwinian market (*Wall Street Journal*, August 19, 1996). They have their counterparts in the roughly 45 percent of all teachers in postsecondary institutions who are now part-time, non-tenured.

Again there are no comparable data to test the idea that other rich democracies are moving toward the American pattern of work. However, we would expect countries with the largest service sectors (the USA, the UK, Canada) to have the highest rates of workers in nonstandard schedules. If there is convergence of other countries toward social, personal, and distributive services as a share of total employment, there will be convergence in both contingent labor and unconventional schedules — or at least parallel development. (See Table 4.1 and discussion of industrial trends below.) And if European business enterprises continue their trend toward downsizing and subcontracting, then their college-educated employees will increasingly join their American counterparts — a growing minority in unstable careers. But numerous counter-pressures in Europe should at minimum slow down any trend in this direction: the much greater unionization of service occupations; labor laws restricting weekend work and even evening hours; restrictions on employers' autonomy to

fire at will; the higher wages, restrictive entry rules, and subsidies of small retail businesses common in Japan, Italy, France, and Austria that block the low wages, frequent startups, and high bankruptcy rates of distributive services in the U.S. Countries that avoid the high rates of solo-mother poverty characteristic of USA, Australia, Canada, and Ireland (Table 8.4) will also retard the trend. If there is movement in the Anglo-American direction it will not be speedy.

Occupations by Industry

But what about a post-industrial shift in the types of industries in which modern populations work? Are these trends recent? At some threshold of development are they universal? Does the label “postindustrial” fit the facts? Data available on the percentage distribution of employment for seven rich democracies from 1920 to 1992 (Table 4.1) cast doubt on the post-industrial thesis. I concentrate on three categories that have shown substantial trends or notable national differences and are most relevant to the theory of post-industrialism: “transformative industries”, “producer services”, and “social services”.

1. “Transformative” (almost all of this is manufacturing). It includes machinery, construction, food, textiles, metals, chemicals, miscellaneous manufacturing and utilities. The pattern in Table 4.1 is a rise in percentage employed in these manufacturing industries from 1920 to 1970 in Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and stability in Anglo-Saxon countries (UK, US, Canada). (Was this the coming of post-industrial society?) Then, after 1970, there was stability in Japan, and a decline in the rest ranging from small declines in Germany (47 to 40%) and Canada (27 to 22) to large declines in the UK (47 to 27) and Italy (44 to 30). What is significant is that the end point (circa 1990) for Canada, France, and Germany is about where they began in 1920 while Japan and Italy increased the manufacturing share of employment. Only the UK and the USA evidence a decline. Can increases in manufacturing jobs or a 1990s return to the manufacturing share of 1920 for 5 of these 7 advanced industrial societies over 60 years be called “post-industrial”?
2. “Producer Services”. Manufacturing vs. Services is a false dichotomy. Throughout the history of industrialization, the two have been inextricably meshed. The section “Producer Services” in Table 4.1 includes insurance, banking, real estate, legal services, accounting, engineering, and miscellaneous business services. Very few of

these occupations are new to the postwar II period, let alone to the 20th century. They were essential to 19th century industrialization and accelerated along with manufacturing. Lloyds of London did not spring forth in some post-industrial era. Its members were covering risks of trade and manufacturing as early as 1734. And the Philadelphia gentlemen, educated as scientists and engineers, who gathered in the railroad shops of Pennsylvania as design consultants in close collaboration with skilled machinists and craftsmen to forge the new steam locomotives of the 1830s, were hardly “post-industrial” (Green, 1972).

Thus we would expect what we see in Table 4.1: For as long as we can find data, manufacturing and producer services grew together, the latter faster than manufacturing, as specialized services grew to serve the needs of increasingly complex organizations. That Japan and Germany have a lower share of employment in this category than the USA, UK, and Canada may be a statistical illusion. These two high-productivity manufacturing leaders have internalized producer services in large companies and in integrated networks of suppliers rather than contracting them out, so they are not enumerated separately. I think Italy’s very low figures also reflect difficulties in classification as well as its larger agricultural sector, its less-developed regions, and an abundance of small businesses. The celebrated flexible production networks of small producers pooling resources for expert help in finance, R&D, and marketing account for only a small portion of total Italian employment (chapter 1). Similarly, where technology is truly new, the old ambiguity of the distinction between material goods and intangible services remains. Castells and Aoyama note this ambiguity for computer software, genetic engineering-based agriculture and many other modern products; they ask “Is a software programme sold as a disk a ‘good’ but, if sold online does it become a ‘service’?” (Castells and Aoyama, 1994, p. 8)

3. Social Services. There is nothing new or uniformly “post-industrial” about the growth of social-services employment. As I show in our 19-country analysis in chapters 5 and 9, the welfare state, which generates such employment, is more than a century old; it accelerated after World War II; and its rate of growth slowed since the mid-1970s or early 1980s. However, both its efficiency and program emphasis, and hence public employment, vary across nations and time because of national differences in affluence, left power, types of political economy, minority-group cleavages, and rates of mobility. There is nothing in this picture of substantial variation among rich democracies to suggest a post-industrial trend; merely a continued universal growth of the welfare state. The remaining national variations in spending, finance, and program emphasis are rooted in politics as well as the level and timing of economic development and its demographic correlates. For an explanation of why the U.K. and the U.S. have an abundance of social-service employment despite their modest welfare states, see my treatment of the welfare mess (chapter 8) and of bureaucratic bloat (chapter 9).

I have excluded three categories from Table 4.1: “extractive” industries, “distributive services”, and “personal services”. They either show no trend or are irrelevant to the concept, “post-industrial”. (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958, pp. 93-94.) Extractive industries, or what Colin Clark called “primary”, include agriculture and mining. These industries, with remarkable increases in efficiency, everywhere decline in employment as they increase in output. Figure 1.2 shows that in the U.S. the percent in agriculture is down to 2.0%. In 1992, in the seven countries of Table 4.1 all extractive industries’ employment ranged from UK’s 3.3% to Italy’s very high 9.5 percent. It is a universal, long-term trend of all rich countries, a product of continuing industrialization. “Distributive services” includes transportation, communication, and wholesale and retail trade; with small variations, they account for a more-or-less stable percent of employment from 1920 to 1992, ranging from a fifth to a quarter of all employment, again belying assertions about a post-industrial pattern. Finally, I have excluded “personal services”. It includes domestic service, hotels, eating and drinking places, repair, laundry, barber and beauty, entertainment, and miscellaneous personal services. There is no pattern either in trend or cross-national comparisons. For instance: from about 1920 to 1992, “personal services” as a percent of employment roughly doubled in Canada, France, and Japan; increased somewhat in the U.S. but was stable or dropped in Germany, Italy, and the UK. What can be said with certainty about this heterogeneous category is that domestic servants steadily decrease with industrialization; as mass standards of living climb, fewer people are willing to serve the persons or households of others. With mechanization, laundry services show a similar decline. These declines are offset by stability in the percent employed in hotels, repair services, entertainment, and barber and beauty shops (beauty salons become innovative and mechanized and grow while barber shops stagnate and decline). The most important offset is the sharp climb of jobs in eating and drinking places — if we can take the U.S. experience as typical (Castells, Aug. 1984, Table 13, p. 58).

A major problem with the idea of post-industrialism is the great heterogeneity of “services” — heterogeneity in income, status, power, freedom on the job, skill levels, and related political orientation and life styles. If the purpose of this theory is to connect changes in occupational structures with shifts in culture, politics, the nature of work experience, or anything important, “the service economy” is both vague and hopelessly heterogeneous. For instance, “retail services” include the big-ticket salesperson in a posh department store and the entrepreneur of the hot dog stand; the manager of a large auto-repair shop and the owner of a mom-and-pop grocery store; the maitre de at NYC’s Chanterelle and the hamburger flipper at McDonalds. “Services” embrace a computer scientist and an urban dog walker; the full-time, stably-employed office supervisor in the headquarters of a drugstore chain; a part-time temporary worker at the check-out counter in the supermarket whose wages place her among the working poor; and a high-tech consultant in a firm selling software for financial managers and a no-tech salesperson in a local dress shop; a corporate lawyer in a firm with 200 partners and associates and a solo lawyer with an ethnic clientele. In practically every routine of life that is important to people — the nature of their work and use of their skills, their income, status, security, and opportunities for upward mobility, their family life and leisure style — these pairs are in different worlds, as we have seen in my

discussion of opposing trends in the organization of work and the limits of a stratification model of modern society (chapter 1).

Regarding the theme of technocratic dominance, my discussion of types of political economy above and elsewhere (1983, 1997) shows that while it is true that experts and intellectuals multiply with economic development, their influence — their integration with men and women of power — varies with the political and economic context within which they work. These differences in expert influence by type of political economy are elaborated in chapter 2 [Types of Pol. Ec.]. The role of economists is discussed in chs. 11 [Party Decline, especially in the case of New Zealand] and 17 [Globalization, section on central bank autonomy].

In short, if all the occupational and industrial shifts now labelled “post-industrial” amount to is a continuation of more than a century’s rise in the level of education, an increase in the skill, discipline and perhaps knowledge of the average worker, and the increased employment of experts then we should talk about those long-term trends and not impose an elaborate superstructure of dubious claims about the revolutionary character of these gradual shifts.⁶

Postindustrial Values?

Postindustrial theorists argue that since the Great Depression there has been a major shift in values in all rich countries toward “postmaterialist”, “postindustrial” values of self-expression, personal freedom, creativity, self-actualization, belonging, and participatory democracy. The acquisitive, materialistic values of the past, embraced by older populations who grew up in less affluent societies, they say, will fade away as younger political generations raised in the affluence of the postwar era come to power and dominate the culture.

Writers who see this vision of a postindustrial era vary in their depiction of the exact content of these values and the generating forces. But they usually mention the growth of service sectors, mass education, affluence (high levels of GDP per capita), and high rates of political participation as root causes. They all assert that postmaterialist values are especially strong and prevalent among vanguard groups — the educated, young, affluent, secure, and mobile — who are in a position to demand still more freedom, still more comfort, still more sense of community. With generational turnover the “postmaterialist” consciousness of the possibilities of human liberation is presumably spreading to the masses of people in every rich democracy. The new values are said to be durable because they are learned early in

childhood and teenage years and are little affected either by subsequent political or economic changes (“external” or “objective” events and situations) or by later socialization.

Such themes are familiar from a spate of counter-cultural books of the 1960s. Because Ronald Inglehart has attempted to trace these shifts empirically in two summary books, The Silent Revolution (1977) and Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society (1990), I shall concentrate on his formulations and subsequent comparative research using the same measures. Inglehart bases his conclusions on a series of surveys conducted between 1970 and 1973 in six West European countries and then for every year from 1976 to 1988 (1990, pp. 75, 84) for nine European countries and the U.S. He also analyzes data gathered by other researchers for up to 20 rich countries and occasional non-rich countries such as Mexico and Hungary. The measure of materialist and postmaterialist values is a pattern of answers when representative samples of citizens were asked to rank the following goals by their importance to them (an asterisk marks what Inglehart considers “postmaterialist”):

- A Maintain order in the nation
- *B Give people more say in the decisions of the government
- C Fight rising prices
- *D Protect freedom of speech
- E Maintain a high rate of economic growth
- F Make sure that this country has strong defense forces
- *G Give people more say in how things are decided at work and in their community
- *H Try to make our cities and countryside more beautiful
- I Maintain a stable economy
- J Fight against crime
- *K Move toward a friendlier, less impersonal society
- *L Move toward a society where ideas count more than money

For most of his analysis Inglehart uses the first four items as his value priority index. Respondents who chose both “more say” and “free speech” are termed “postmaterial”; those who chose both “maintaining order” and “fighting rising prices” are labeled “materialist”. Because that index is so often used in both Inglehart and subsequent studies of values and value change in contemporary democracies, I shall focus on it, although my assessment holds true for the longer list of indicators as well.⁷ Leaving aside almost-fatal weaknesses in these measures for later discussion, here are the main findings:

1. As a percentage of all those surveyed in Europe from 1970 to 1986 pure “materialists” (Ms) outnumber pure “postmaterialists” (PMs) in every one of 12 countries in every age cohort except for those born in 1956-65 in the Netherlands (20% Ms to

27% PMs) and West Germany (22% Ms to 26% PMs). In 1986-87, however, post-materialists outnumbered materialists in the Netherlands and West Germany and among the young in Denmark and Great Britain (1990, p. 93). Most respondents are mixed types: In 1986-87, for instance, in the combined samples for 12 nations (EC & U.S.), 53.4% were neither postmaterialist nor materialist (calculated from 1990, p. 93). For Eurobarometer surveys of 1986-87, if we weigh the results by country populations, we get only 15% pure postmaterialists to 30% pure materialists (Ibid.).

2. The locus of these pure postmaterialists is younger, more educated respondents, especially students (1990, pp. 91, 93, 318-322).
3. Clearly, however, in the entire population, materialists outnumber the postmaterialists by hefty margins. Much of Inglehart's case rests on trends in postmaterialist responses from 1970 to 1988. Based on the 12-item measure, materialists outnumbered postmaterialists three to one in 1973. By the late 1980s the ratio was two to one. (Using either the 4-items in 1986-87 calculated from Table 2-4, p. 93 or the 12-items in 1988, pp. 97-98 the ratio is two materialists for every one postmaterialist.)
4. Inglehart argues that the "Postmaterialists are no longer concentrated in student ghettos ... they are as numerous as the Materialists (or even more numerous) among those in their 30s and well into their 40s. They have moved into positions of influence and authority throughout society" (1990, p. 319). The picture from the crude occupational breakdowns available (his Table 9-10, p. 319), however, shows that the mass publics of the EC countries surveyed from 1980 to 1986 (9 countries, N = 124,291) are by his measure decidedly "materialistic".⁸ Only in the upper-middle class aged 15-49 ("top management and civil service" and "professional") — comprising only 3.25 % of the total sample — do the postmaterialists outnumber the materialists. Even the students under 35 (9.4% of the total) were split 24% PM to 20% M, hardly overwhelming. In all other categories (from white-collar and manual employees through the unemployed, retired, and housewives) the materialists outnumber the PMs by substantial margins even among the presumably counter-cultural cohort who entered the labor force from 1965 to 1974 (who when interviewed in 1980-86 were probably a majority of the "under 35" respondents).

Put another way, in this study the best case for postmaterialist penetration of vanguard elites is weak. If we assume that all "top management and civil service" and "professional" and student respondents from age 15 to 49 are "elites", and assume further that if they endorse "protect freedom of speech" and "give people more say" as important goals they are "post-materialist", then all we can claim is the following: first, of the total sample only 0.79% are non-student elites under 50 with postmaterialist values; second, only 24% of the students are postmaterialist. That leaves 76% of

the students in these nine European countries who are classified by Inglehart's measure "materialist" or "mixed". That suggests special attention to what happens to the orientations of the (minority of) young people and especially college students who come on as postmaterialist now when they are 18 or so as they move to adulthood — as they enter the labor market, marry, and have children. Because this question goes beyond the issue of postindustrial value shifts, it will be saved for an assessment of the relative effects of political generation (or period), age cohort, and family life cycle below.

5. Despite all these caveats, the finding (1990, p. 95) that during the 15 or so years of surveys postmaterialism increased in most rich democracies would be impressive if it were not for one serious flaw — the poor face validity of the measures of "values" on which most of Inglehart's conclusions ride (maintain order and fight rising prices vs. protect free speech and give people more say in government decisions). First, it is not obvious why it is materialist to worry about rising prices and post-materialist to worry about free speech, a concern of the American founding fathers. Surely some of the respondents might expect that their government could at once protect free speech and fight inflation, which may be one reason that for 1986-87 surveys, 53% of the sample are mixed types. Second, the general problem with asking people to rank their goals in surveys is that the respondents typically under-rate the goals they have already achieved but still cherish: "money", says the high-wage worker earning the area or industry rate for his occupation, is "less important" than "intrinsic job satisfaction;" "income", says the high-paid professional who has a lot of it, is less important than "self-expression;" safety is not important to the already safe, and so on. Similarly, in the study of post-materialism, upper middle-class educated respondents living in safe neighborhoods will often say maintaining "order" is not one of the two "most important goals" while "giving people more say" is because they already have safety.

In other words, the social and economic context of the survey question mightily shapes the response. Consider the respondents who rank "protect free speech" as the "most important goal;" presumably a sign of their postmaterialist values. As Herbert McCloskey has conclusively shown (1983, pp. 48-55), if one moves from such abstract questions about freedom of speech to questions about the exercise of speech in particular situations, the level of support drops off sharply among the same people who love free speech in the abstract.⁹

Finally, ranking the goal of "fighting rising prices" is peculiarly sensitive to two contexts: whether inflation is high or low, moving up or down; and whether the particular respondent is among the debtor majority who win from inflation or the creditor minority who lose. Dealing with changes in the inflation rate Inglehart finds that the sharp price rise in the mid-1970s and 1979-80 brought an increase in materialism in

the six West European countries he analyzes — a finding confirmed by subsequent studies using the same measures (Clarke and Dutt, 1991, p. 911; Duch and Taylor, 1994, pp. 816-817). Inglehart's data do not permit analysis of the second effect (winning debtors vs. losing creditors). An ardent consumer with a heavy debt load whose wages or social-security benefits are indexed will not worry much about inflation. Does that make him a postmaterialist? This would be especially relevant in countries with easy credit and/or a history of moderate (not hyper-) inflation.

6. In fact, as Inglehart's tables show (1977), the issues that excite Western publics are overwhelmingly economic performance and political and civic order, a pattern that has not changed since the early 1970s (1990, p. 97). Asked in 1973 to choose the first and second most important of a list of twelve goals, the populations of these eleven nations ranked fighting rising prices as the leading goal, with economic growth and economic stability close by. Fighting crime and maintaining order were also typically near the top. In the aggregate, no postmaterial goal ranked higher than third in any of the eleven nations; the mean rating of "more say on the job", the most popular postindustrial goal, was only sixth; the mean ratings of "a less impersonal society" and "more say in government" were similarly low (1990, table 2-6, p. 98).

Slightly more recent data following the first big oil shock reveal that same pattern (1990, table 4-6, p. 149). In surveys conducted in nine rich democracies from 1974 to 1976 economic performance and political order were again the overwhelming preoccupation of mass publics, with the possible exception of Japan.

- Maintaining a stable economy was the leading goal for all but the populations of the Netherlands and Italy; for the two deviant countries it was fighting crime.
- Fighting crime was at or near the top for all countries.

In no country except the Netherlands, Finland, and Japan did postmaterialist goals rank above third. In the Netherlands "more say on the job" ranked a distant second to the fight against crime; in Finland and Japan "friendlier, less impersonal society" ranked a distant second to a stable economy; and in Japan "beautiful cities and countryside" ranked third.

- Averaging responses across the nine countries, no postmaterialist goal ranked higher than a distant third — far behind maintaining a stable economy and fighting crime.¹⁰

Finally, as Inglehart notes, while the most recent European community-wide surveys of 1988 showed that compared to 1973 in the 12-item list of goals "fighting rising prices" fell from first in 1973 to sixth rank in 1988, "materialist" goals held five of the top six positions with roughly the same rank order. There were only minor changes: Economic growth moved up from second to first place; fighting crime moved up from third to second, and so on (Inglehart 1990, p. 97).

The realism in this pattern of responses is refreshing. Not only is the achievement of these top priorities a necessary condition for the fulfillment of all other goals, but even the national variations make sense: for instance, the percentage of the Italians who ranked fighting crime as the top priority in 1974-76 was 59%; the percentage of Japanese was only 20% (Table 4-6 p. 149). Mass publics were reflecting real threats evidenced in high rates of crime in Italy (including a rising tide of Red Brigade kidnapping and murders) and low rates in Japan (see chapter 14); and when inflation was rampant, citizens expected their governments to fight it; when it was under control, they ranked some other basic goal higher.

Similarly, national differences in unemployment rates and their fluctuation over time shape these survey results. Although Inglehart does not include an item on anxiety about unemployment (an indicator of “materialism”?) it turns out in other studies using his measures that unemployment, like inflation, drastically shapes the scores on his 4-item “postmaterialist” index. The best of these (Clarke and Dutt 1991), covers the period 1976-86 using a pooled cross-sectional time series regression analysis of eight countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, and West Germany). It shows that unemployment has a puzzling effect: increases in the jobless rate bring large increases in postmaterialist responses. The researchers explain that in the 1980s, as unemployment soared and inflation came down, these European respondents abandoned the item “fight rising prices” and sought something else on the list. In the absence of an item on “fighting unemployment” many of them chose “give people more say in government” to express their preference for government action to do something about the problem at hand. (In fact, increases in unemployment strongly increase the “more say” response.). Thus, it is not any rise in postindustrial values that explain this shift: it is instead “the changing salience of inflation and unemployment on the issue agenda” (*Ibid.*, p. 913).

Clarke and Dutt also analyze stability in individual responses using more powerful panel data for Netherlands (1974-79), Germany (1974-1980), and the U.S. (1974-81) and replicating both Inglehart’s 4-item index and an eight-item measure of value priorities (E through L on the list above): Their conclusions: (1) There is “massive” response turnover among individuals (p. 915). Thirty-eight percent of the Dutch, 48% of the Germans, and 47% of the Americans change their value classification (materialist vs. nonmaterialist) across the two interviews. (2) The substantial country variation in their postmaterialist responses both in level and direction of change is explained by the sensitivity of these measures to short-term economic conditions and changing political agendas. Similar conclusions appear in Jackman and Miller, 1996.

Inglehart recognizes both the phenomenon of low rating goals you cherish and have secured, and the universal top ranking of old goals of economic well-being and safety — but he misses their meaning. If in attitude surveys vast majorities of modern populations (including the upper middle-class vanguard groups labeled “postindustrial”) give

top priority to economic security and growth, to civil order and the reduction of crime, if the upper-middle class in a position to act out those values by successfully seeking more income, secure jobs, and safer neighborhoods, while one in four of them tell interviewers that they like self-expression or participation (p. 319), we are missing the main story when we infer that there is a great groundswell of postindustrial “postmaterialist” values. Equally important, if modern citizens drastically change their answers to these “values” questions with short-term changes in economic and political contexts and agendas, it is doubtful that we are in the presence of a sea change in basic values.

The test for the existence of cherished basic values comes when they are threatened. It is when governments try cutbacks in universal welfare-state benefits to the majority or when a recession or industrial restructuring threatens the job-security of the college-educated that we uncover basic values. Upper-middle class citizens, presumably the vanguard of the post-material era, suddenly become terribly material, deeply concerned about earnings, security, dignity, and safety like everyone else. Thus, to say “they have it so they do not value it” is to obscure the meaning of basic values, which persist across generations through thick and thin.

Interlocking Cycles of Family, Work, and Social-Political Participation: A Comment on Age Cohort, Political Generation, and Life Cycle¹¹

A key assumption of theories about a new political culture dominated by postindustrial values derives from the seminal work of Karl Mannheim (1928) on political generations: historical conditions when one comes of age, say adolescence and early adulthood, have lasting effects on values, political orientations, and behavior. Thus the cohort that hit the labor market in the Great Depression will cherish job security for the rest of their lives; the 1960s countercultural generation who hit the college campuses during the Vietnam war will remain countercultural, postmaterialist, and antiwar. Early socialization casts the die for a lifetime.

Many scholars have tried to sort out the relative effects of birth or age cohort (the focus is on the size of the birth cohort and its common experience), political generation (the focus is on period effects or the unusual historical conditions present when a birth cohort came of age), and family life cycle (the focus is on universal changes during the life course — courtship, marriage, children, etc.). There is no consensus on their relative importance for a variety of outcomes that have been studied: life satisfaction, job satisfaction or alienation, political attitudes and behavior, social participation, fertility, crime, earnings and more.

Struck with the lasting power of the experience of the children of the 1960s, whose children in turn are presumably being trained in postmaterial values in the affluent society, Inglehart has argued that cohort effects are far more important than life-cycle effects. His data are age cohorts. He finds that successive age cohorts do not become more materialist for the 15 to 18 years for which data are available and concludes that life cycle effects are unimportant. He tries to test this by a multiple classification analysis of life cycle vs. cohort effects on values in which marriage, having a job, within-nation quartile family income, and having one or more children are weighed one at a time against age cohort and again claims that age cohort overwhelms family life cycle.

Two things are wrong with this. First, subsequent research taking account of economic and political contexts in later life fails to show the importance of cohort effects. Second, in real life, these events in the family life cycle occur together in stages not captured by age brackets.

Cohort Effects? Regarding adult contexts, three studies illustrate the weakness of cohort in explaining a wide range of value orientations and issue-specific opinions. Two are cross-national studies of postmaterialism. One is a study of opinion changes in the U.S. over three decades; it concludes that of all the theories to explain shifts in mass attitudes the weakest are the ones accenting generational turnover and social and demographic shifts. The strongest hypothesis is that public opinion responds to external events in the worlds of government, public policy, politics, and the mass media.

In a multivariate analysis of postmaterialist values based on surveys carried out from 1973 to 1984 in eight West European societies, Duch and Taylor conclude that “once you control for education and inflation at the time of the survey the cohort effects become trivial” (1994, p. 819 and the exchange between Duch and Taylor and Inglehart and Abramson, 1994). A study of secondary-school students living in depressed and prosperous areas of the U.S. and Germany concludes that economic conditions during preadult years are poor predictors of postmaterialism — another indication that birth cohort contributes little to these value orientations (Trump, 1991). In a test of the theory that American public opinion changes because of population turnover — the entrance of new cohorts into the adult population and the gradual dying off of older cohorts — William Mayer (1992, pp. 156 ff., 174 ff.) found that from 1960 to 1988 generational replacement had little effect on attitudes toward foreign policy, the welfare state, economic affairs, or even crime and abortion. (It does explain some of the total change in attitudes about race, the role of women, and sexual mores, again reflecting values anchored in very long-term structural changes described in chapter 1 above.¹²)

Life Cycle Squeeze and the Morale Curve. When family types are more precisely delineated we find that family life cycle explains a wide range of attitudes and behavior, including variations in morale or life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and social and political participation. The outlook and morale of the vast majority of modern men and women is shaped by normal strains of family transitions as they are intensified or lessened by variations in taxes, debt, and real income as these in turn, affect the balance between aspirations and

rewards. From a review of research using age or life cycle variables and from social-psychological theory about the effects of imbalance between aspirations and rewards, in an early paper (Wilensky, 1961b) I inferred a hypothetical morale curve for the general male population of modern society. I located stages of the life cycle where people experience least job satisfaction, lowest participation in community life, greatest financial and family burdens, and greatest psychological tension — a condition of “life cycle squeeze”. The essence of my theory is that job satisfaction and, indeed, life satisfaction are:

a function of disparity between rewards (what we get in income and job status) and aspirations and/or expectations (what we want in goods and services and job status); both pay-off and demand are likely to show a chronology linked to family life cycle and work history. Leaving aside the college crowd and the unusually ambitious, the young man fresh from high school, for a few years at least, finds himself with a happy combination of modest aspirations, limited responsibilities, and an income that seems large.

A sharp change occurs, however, when home and children come into focus. As family pressures mount, the demand for credit in the product market and income in the labor market begin their swift ascent. The appetite for consumer durables and the demand for money and job security reach a peak in the 30’s among married men with children ...

But the peak in actual income and security is seldom reached in this critical period ... For the manual worker, who is most subject to instability of employment, seniority protection is as yet weak, and for all categories the period of maximum economic rewards comes later. A working wife is one solution, but the double-earner pattern is least frequent among the very families that feel squeezed — young couples with children at home ... The result: a morale trough which lasts until job aspirations and family pressures decline, rewards increase, or both. When children leave home and debts are paid off, job morale, indeed all satisfaction unconnected with child-rearing, should climb. Later, with retirement impending, the morale curve will vary, depending ... upon type of career and strength of work commitment, but a final sag in morale seems most frequent. (Wilensky, 1961b, 228-229)

The general hypothesis, pictured in Figure 4.1, is that points of maximum “life cycle squeeze”, and hence low morale, occur on average among couples with preschool children, older couples, especially those prematurely retired, and solitary survivors. Of course, with more women working now than at that time and the education level rising, the dual-earner family is today typical and the high-school graduate has given way to those with less than a four-year college degree (Levy, 1987). But the life cycle squeeze appears with much the same timing and effect for vast majorities of Americans — all but the upper-middle class. It now takes two or three more years of education and two jobs to match the standard of living of the non-college majority of the early 1960s.

The idea of interlocking cycles of family life, work, consumption, social participation, and morale is complex and yet parsimonious. It enabled me to reinterpret contradictory results of studies of job satisfaction — studies that ignored massive forces off the job that determined responses to work, whatever the alienating or non-alienating character of that work. It very likely can explain findings on age or life cycle differences in general life satisfaction, income dynamics, and cynicism about government. Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) investigated the general life satisfaction of a 1971 sample of over 2000 Americans aged 18 years and older. Their findings by stage in family life cycle match closely the morale curve of Figure 4.1. The most satisfied are young married couples without children; the least satisfied are married couples with preschool children, the widowed, and the divorced or separated. Although women in these “happiness” studies are typically equally satisfied or more satisfied with the quality of their lives than men (see citations in Estes and Wilensky, 1978), in general they evidence the same life cycle curves as men. It can be argued that women more often than men say — and even feel — that they are “happy” at the same time as they admit to clinically suspect symptoms. But none of the studies which systematically compare men and women, controlling for life cycle stage (or even age), has so demonstrated.¹³

If we concentrate on the income component of the interlocking cycles idea, we find further support in two detailed studies of income dynamics. A five-year panel study of some 5000 American families (Morgan et al., 1974, pp. 37-79) shows that changes in a family’s well-being are almost exclusively rooted in changes in family composition and labor force participation; that young people starting new families typically become relatively worse off (compared with young singles or childless couples, they evidence slower rates of improvement in an “income/needs” ratio); that people moving into their prime earning years gain little because of increasing family financial pressures; but that, again, the economic base for improved morale is strongest for the middle-aged. After the age of 40 or so the head of a household starts to see more improvement in the family purse as children begin to leave the home and in many cases the spouse is freed of home responsibilities and gets a job. Retirement, the authors find, means a drop in income with no proportionate decrease in needs. Analyzing 1960 census data on earnings patterns by age and type of family separately, Oppenheimer (1974) adds an important elaboration: the imbalance between income and family needs varies only moderately by occupational group and category. For instance, “no matter how their economic fates subsequently diverge, low earnings were characteristic of most young men, whatever their occupational group” (p. 235). Only in very high-level professional, managerial, and sales occupations — a small minority of the labor force — do average earnings peak when family income needs are peaking.

A more up-to-date simulation model of 4,000 representative British life histories gives a similar picture. It is based on data from the actual 1985 British population, but applied across complete lives to give a profile analogous to a complete longitudinal survey of incomes, taxes, and benefits for a single cohort (Hills, Glennerster, and Le Grand with others 1993). It shows a peak in living standards in late middle age (*Ibid.*, pp. 27 and Figure 7), around 50-55. Similarly, a thorough study of changes in American standards of living from

1949 to 1985 (Levy, 1987, pp. 199-206) found that the deterioration of real earnings and changes in family structure as well as changes in government transfers are root causes of the drift toward inequality since 1973. The breakdown by family types implies some slight shift in the morale curve: the position of younger couples since 1973 has remained unchanged (because the increase in double-earner families does not offset the deterioration in their earnings); the position of elderly families has improved (the sag in the morale curve is thereby delayed); and the position of female-headed families has worsened (intensifying their already strong life-cycle squeeze). Since the late 1980s several rich countries have experienced a rising level of unemployment and under-employment among young people; this is now intensifying their normal economic squeeze and related discontent.

Research I reviewed on rates of social and political participation in the U.S. before 1961 showed a participation curve matching the morale curve of Figure 4.1 (Wilensky, 1961b); this finding is affirmed in recent research. Leaving aside voting, people of middle age (30-55) have the highest rates of political participation — they are most likely to join a political party, work in a political campaign, attend a political meeting and/or work in their community to influence politicians and solve common problems — while the oldest (56+) and the youngest (under 30) have the lowest participation rates. (See the five-nation study by Nie, Verba, and Kim 1974 and the replication in another group of five countries by Marsh and Kaase 1979, p. 111, Table 4.4, and in Israel by Wolfsfeld 1993 with the same curvilinear results. A 15-country study by Curtis, Grabb, and Baer, 1992, shows the same result for active participation in voluntary associations.)

Finally, if we consider political stance — an aspect of life more remote from the family and its earnings — we see a similar curve. There has been a 34-year (1958-1992) slide in confidence in government institutions among the general adult population of the U.S. with only a slight uptick in 1970-72 and a brief surge in 1980-84 (Citrin and Green, 1986, p. 435, updated by NES data from 1988 and 1992; cf. S. C. Craig, 1993, pp. 1-18). Within that context, “trust in government” has been least among American men and women over the age of 50; older persons have been the most cynical and estranged in every election since 1958, followed closely in 1964 and 1972 by the youngest age category studied (21-24 years). On the whole, people in their middle years have been and remain the most optimistic and trusting about Washington, DC (Miller, Brown, and Raine, 1973). Jennings and Niemi (1974, p. 278) report almost identical findings for Americans with high school education but variation for other educational categories.

This is a case where attitudes roughly match behavior. Voter turnout in the U.S. roughly follows the morale curve of figure 4.1: a low at 18 or so climbing to a peak in middle age, staying high or increasing after children leave, declining with retirement and especially after age 70 (Wolfinger and Highton, 1994, Figure 2).¹⁴ In early studies of voting turnout in the U.S. the turning point for a decline in voting among older citizens begins earlier than 70 (e. g. Hout and Knoke, 1975) and is still earlier for women than men (Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, p. 43). With the trend toward gender equality that gap may disappear. Consistent with the morale curve, the lowest voting rate by age and marital status is among those living alone — young singles or the divorced, separated, or widowed (*Ibid.*, pp. 44-45;

Converse and Niemi, 1971, p. 461). Just as higher education smoothes out the morale and participation curve, however, so does education reduce or even reverse the decline of voting for the aged and increase the (still low) rate for the young (Verba and Nie, 1972, p. 144; Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, pp. 44-49). Maturity has a much greater impact in increasing voting among the least-educated than among college graduates (*Ibid.*, pp. 58-60). The resources for political participation — skills, information, knowledge, interest in complex political issues — are abundant for the college crowd, meager for the high-school graduate or dropout. But adult life experience — work, family — allows some later catch-up in political resources for those denied higher education (Converse and Niemi, 1971, p. 449).

In short, the life cycle squeeze hypothesis can embrace a wide range of behavior and attitudes, from the most personal satisfaction with the most local institutions (e.g. marriage and the family) to the most impersonal response to the most distant symbols (e.g. national politics).

Aware of possible “class” (i.e., education) differences, we applied this hypothesis to a sample of 73 employed and 157 unemployed professionals in the San Francisco Bay area (Estes and Wilensky, 1978). We excluded the divorced, the separated, and the singles over 30 who had never married. We interviewed them in 1971-1973. Using an index of emotional stress (validated by independent clinical judgments) and an index of economic deprivation, we found that unemployed professionals experiencing high levels of financial stress fit the morale curve of the general population. Morale drops among couples with very young school-age children and among solitary survivors. These hard-pressed unemployed professionals display a sense of relief when children leave. For the continuously employed professionals, however, and, most surprising, even for unemployed professionals experiencing little or no financial stress, the morale curve is smoothed out; they show more balance between rewards and aspirations over the life cycle than most Americans; their morale stays high even after losing the spouse. The study suggests that the advantage of highly educated professionals in a solid economic position — having a professional identity embedded in a social network — functions as a buffer against social insecurity which, in turn, protects them from the intense psychological strains typical of the rest of the population. Employed or unemployed, they are cushioned against the standard shocks both by their privileged positions and by their anticipations for the future — in other words by the personal continuity afforded by a life plan.

To say that family life cycle explains a wide range of attitudes and behavior is not to deny that generational change (successive birth cohorts) explain large social-political trends. For example, while intact families in the middle years of life may be more participatory, trusting, and civically engaged, generation after generation, an entire society may simultaneously evidence a long-term decline in civic engagement, as chapter 3 and Robert Putnam’s analysis of United States data suggest (1995, pp. 43-45). These are complementary theories.

Subjective and Objective Well-Being. We are now in a position to resolve the puzzle that appears in many of these studies — the recurrent finding in several countries that subjective life satisfaction or sense of well-being is more or less unrelated to objective conditions or the level of living (cf. Allardt, 1977; Inglehart, 1977; Argyle and Martin, 1991, p. 80).

To deal with each major pattern of behavior — family, work, consumption, community participation, and political orientation — separately is to ignore their interaction over the life cycle. When we focus on these interlocking cycles of “career” (work and its rewards), consumption (and related debt), family life, and participation as they vary by group over time, we find that the objective conditions of living are closely connected with a variety of measures of life satisfaction and discontent. To understand the connections, however, we need a sense of the flow of time not only in the structure of societies but in the biographies of persons variously located.

Subjective satisfactions and discontents are anchored in changes in family composition, consumption pressures, job patterns, income flows, and debt loads as they interact and vary over the life cycle. The imbalance between aspirations and rewards is most oppressive among displaced homemakers (divorced, separated, widowed), young couples with preschool children, and the aged, especially solitary survivors with limited income. However, as one would expect, the minority of more affluent, secure, and educated elites, blessed with challenging careers, evidence a higher level of morale over the life cycle and a somewhat different morale curve — less of a drop (and in some cases a boost) for couples with pre-school children; hardly any drop for older couples and lone survivors. Elites and masses alike are thus responding to objective life circumstances most of the time.

Regarding public opinion and issue-specific attitudes, there are both stable structures of opinion and feeling common to all rich democracies and substantial national differences, both short-term and long-term. The similarities can be explained by the convergent tendencies mentioned at the outset in education, family structure, work and stratification, the welfare state, and the minority group thrust for equality. As we shall see in chapter 10 [Backlash], there is a fairly stable structure of issue-specific public opinion that varies little across nations — e. g., the popularity of pensions and national health insurance, the unpopularity of public assistance to the nonaged poor, property taxes on households, and income taxes.

The national differences in short-run public opinion and fluctuations in “values” can be explained by short-run differences in economic performance and politics; the long-run differences by differences in types of political economy — national bargaining arrangements discussed in chapter 2 — and related public policies. In fragmented and decentralized political economies most vulnerable to mass-society tendencies, there often appears to be no stable organization of attitudes for many issues other than the welfare state; modern masses in these countries increasingly respond to their perception of immediate economic circumstances and their leaders’ shifting political agendas as amplified by the mass media.

Whatever the similarities of issue-specific opinions and whatever the short-run fluctuations, however, rich democracies display sharp differences in the way they channel public opinion and shape mass political behavior. Those differences in mobilizing structures —

governments, political parties, interest groups, mass media — account for national differences in the volatility of politics, public policy and public opinion (see chapter 11).¹⁵

If we had good cross-national data on family types and the life course, we would probably find substantial national differences in the amplitude and timing of the participation and morale curve. For public policies can ease the strains reflected in the morale curve. Investment in education, training, job creation and placement can reduce unemployment and increase the productivity and incomes of young workers: chapter 2 notes national differences in active labor-market policies and unemployment; chapter 12 assesses the role of education and related policies in economic performance; chapter 13 reports data on job creation. Our 19 countries differ greatly in their family policies — for instance in public support for child care, parental leave, flexible retirement, and child allowances; chapter 7 analyzes their sources. Chapter 14 [Mayhem] analyzes their effects. Rich democracies also differ in the generosity and scope of policies focused on the aged; Part II on the welfare state and social policy deal with these. Obviously social security and related policies shape the degree to which the aged have sufficient income and opportunities to work at least part-time; and both an active labor-market policy and a family policy can ease the life-cycle squeeze for young parents and make the morale curve and participation in community life look more like those of the upper middle-class. A final chapter gauges the degree to which any of these policies are transferable to the United States.

We lack the cross-national studies of life satisfaction necessary to link variations in public policies to life-cycle stresses. The best comparative study of general life satisfaction shows substantial differences among cross-sectional samples in the nine EEC countries studied in 1976. On various measures, Denmark and the Netherlands lead in average satisfaction while France and Italy are at the bottom.¹⁶ Where life satisfaction was lowest, feelings of social injustice were strongest. Although Sweden was not included, its social policies and outcomes are closer to those of egalitarian Denmark and Holland than to those of France and Italy. Crude age breakdowns, however, do not permit inferences about family life cycle variations. (Commission of the European Communities, 1977, 46-54.)

A Postscript on Political Generations. In their accounts of the mid-1960s revolt, most American sociologists, anthropologists, and to a lesser extent political scientists were profoundly parochial. They attributed the outburst to the alienation of workers and students from a uniquely oppressive American political regime, the Vietnam War, or both. Even a little systematic comparison would tell them that American citizens were and are far less alienated from their society and political system than citizens of Italy or France (let alone those of the former Soviet empire); that the counter-culture was bursting forth with varying amplitude during the same short period, 1965–71, in countries as diverse as Sweden, France, Belgium, Japan, Italy, Germany, and the U.S.; that it often took the form of ethnic, religious, linguistic or racial militancy in movements dominated by teachers and college students (a good review of this part of the evidence is Allardt, 1979); that it varied in intensity by the size of the baby-boom cohort reaching college or the labor market (society was like the proverbial python that swallowed a pig and suffered indigestion); and that it was everywhere compressed into less than six or seven years. The counterculture cried out for an

explanation rooted in cross-national observation rather than the navel-gazing sociology of the period.

For what was happening in all the rich countries having enough freedom of association to permit organized protest was a convergence of several powerful forces peaking in the 1960s:

- Mass education expanded apace, especially at the post-secondary level (a bit earlier and more vigorously in the U.S. but quickly followed by other modern societies).
- The expansion of education was a response to the postwar baby-boom cohort born 1946-60 and to the rising demand of their parents for more educational opportunity. Schools and then colleges became overloaded.
- Unusually swift economic growth 1950-65 enhanced mass appetites for a better life at the same time that social-political movements for minority rights gave urgency to the thrust for equality, for expanded opportunity. But, more important, just prior to the outbursts of the mid-1960s, college opportunities expanded at a rate much faster than opportunities for good jobs that could accommodate the baby-boom cohort, especially ethnic minorities among them, leaving many of the most ambitious and energetic with a sense of betrayal, ready to scream “discrimination” or “false promises”.

The demonstration effect of U.S. student protests amplified by television may have reinforced these convergent structural shifts among other rich democracies.

At the time, I was amazed at the projection of this brief moment of history onto the large screen of “postindustrial society” and “postmaterialist values”. This trendy social science led to an extraordinary over-estimation of the power of the counter-culture in American politics. Among Democratic politicians whose staff had read of this alienation and rising “postmaterialism”, many believed that there was a huge pool of voters of counter-cultural persuasion that could be tapped to win the American Presidency. Such political fantasies guided Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern (whose campaign manager was the yuppie philosopher of “new issues”, Gary Hart) to the biggest defeat in post-World War II history. Among intellectuals, a stream of research from Samuel Huntington (1974) to Ronald Inglehart (1977, 1990), following leads in David Riesman’s The Lonely Crowd (1950) and Daniel Bell’s The Coming of Post-Industrial Society (1973), concluded that postindustrialism had spawned a shift in basic values (discussed above) leading to a new politics.

There may be some political-generation effects that are long lasting. Efforts to locate them empirically, however, suggest that they are rare. Connections between political events in the coming-of-age years and present political and social orientations and behavior have been found for very small groups of activists or elites (Marwell, Aiken, and Demerath,

1987; Jennings, 1987). But they are generally both weak and limited in duration. For instance, analysis of college-educated Vietnam campus protesters and nonprotesters based on a national three-wave panel study of young adults surveyed in 1965, 1973, and 1982, showed that the activists mellowed during the period 1973-82, moving in a conservative direction (Jennings, 1987, pp. 380-381). More important, generational effects are typically absent for mass populations (Converse 1976; and Converse's reply to Abramson, 1979). Where they are visible, they fade, sometimes quickly. For instance, a well-designed study based on national data gathered both before and after the war with Iraq provides a neat test of the enduring effects of youthful experience (Schuman and Rieger, 1992). The authors compared the attitudes toward the Gulf War of the Vietnam generation with attitudes of the World War II generation. As we might expect, the Americans who grew up during or in the aftermath of World War II found analogies to that war attractive when they were applied to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, while those whose youth was influenced primarily by Vietnam found the Vietnam analogy more relevant. What is most important, however, is that within months the Vietnam generation swung over to support of the new war. Schuman and Rieger conclude, "Rather than past experience controlling the present, the present controlled the past, as most Americans of all generations came to accept the analogy to World War II — an analogy that justified massive military action against an enemy that was almost unknown a few months earlier" (*Ibid.*, p. 325).

As Frederick Weil (1994, p. 415) suggests, for there to be political generation effects the events must be strong, compressed in time, not overtaken by subsequent contrasting events, and what one predicts from the dramatic events of the cohort's youth must be relevant to those events. In a rare comparative study of political generations, Weil contrasts the post-1945 attitudes of cohorts socialized by the Nazi regime and the post-1989 attitudes of cohorts socialized by the East German communist regime. He found that the Nazi cohort lagged initially in embracing the new West German democracy after 1945 or 1949. But within 10 to 15 years their attitudes converged with the prodemocratic views of other cohorts as they observed the impressive performance of the new regime in both international and domestic economic affairs; the experience of the new overcame the memories of the old. Similarly, there were cohort effects in Eastern Germany in the three years studied after the fall of communism. But the effects are weaker. Weil explains: (1) "East German communism was a weaker generating event than Nazism, (2) it was more spread over time, (3) it is harder to ask interview questions about communism than the personalistic Nazi regime" (*Ibid.*, p. 415). Thus, even though East German attitudes were measured almost immediately after the fall of the regime, cohort effects were not as strong in post-1989 as they were in the West Germany of 1945-1955.

In short, if they are to persist at all, the effects of a political generation must be very strong, rooted in a rare conjunction of political and economic circumstances, events that are dramatic, if not traumatic. Even then, as the cases of Nazism and the American counter-cultural Vietnam generation suggest, the effect fades with new experience, new events. Life cycle effects, however, are universal, are recapitulated in only slightly modified form by everyone, and are more predictable.

Conclusion: Let's Drop "Postindustrial Society" from our Vocabulary

Relative to the older issues of "industrial society" (economic performance, equality, political order and safety), "post-industrial" goals are not urgent mass demands. If after a quarter century of surveys since Daniel Bell announced The Coming of the Postindustrial Society we still have to strain and stretch for evidence of these value shifts, if the Silent Revolution has not become more audible, perhaps we should abandon the phrase entirely. We should instead concentrate on changes in values and beliefs that can be more precisely anchored in major structural changes and for which the data are less ambiguous. Changing values anchored in real long-term shifts in social structures that have political import include the thrust for gender equality (a product of increasing rates of women's labor-force participation and declining fertility rates) and minority-group equality (a product of industrialization and democratization including the spread of the franchise and civil-rights movements), and the continuing demand for security and welfare-state protections. The political restiveness of the middle mass is a product of changes in the occupational structure and the trend toward mass taxes; it varies in intensity with government policies on types of taxing and spending (see chapter 10) and labor-market policies (chapters 2 and 18). The rise in environmental consciousness is perhaps another enduring change (a product of the interaction of education, science, population growth, and industrial pollution). And an ambivalent yearning for both community and individual freedom continues to provide cultural contradictions in modern societies. All of these shifts in structure and concomitant shifts in values have been in process for more than a century. There is nothing "postindustrial" about them.

Even the supposedly "postindustrial" environmentalism of Rachel Carson's Silent Spring is a continuous development from two strands of the "industrial" environmentalism of 100 to 120 years ago. Environmentalists such as John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club in 1892, the Pennsylvania reformer Gifford Pinchot, and President Theodore Roosevelt pushed reforms to preserve and conserve the land; they argued for sustainable development as well as the preservation of beauty. Urban environmentalists such as Jane Addams campaigned against the pollution and poisoning of workplaces and neighborhoods. Then as now upper-middle class women were prominent in environmental movements. These were not mere precursors of postindustrial Greens; they led active movements that accomplished much. Like their successors they were responding to the effects of continuing industrialization. Perhaps the main difference between the "new" and the "old" environmentalism is that today's Greens are more ideological and attack pollution globally while yesterday's settlement-house workers were experiencing pollution firsthand in the factories and slums where they worked. (Cf. Gottlieb, 1993; Shabecoff, 1993.) One can argue that the environmentalists of today pay less attention to scientific knowledge than their predecessors did (Ames, 1995 and chapter 15 below). A final sign that public concern about the environment may have little to do with

affluence, let alone “postindustrialism”, comes from a recent ranking of 39 countries by scores on an environmental protection index (four survey questions about the urgency of environmental protection and the willingness to pay more taxes or sacrifice income to fight pollution). Six of the top 11 in environmental consciousness are nonrich countries (S. Korea, Russia, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, China, Mexico); 14 of the top 22 are nonrich. Of the 17 countries showing least mass support for environmental protection, 10 are rich democracies (Britain, Canada, W. Germany, the U.S., Austria, N. Ireland, Ireland, Belgium, Italy, France). (Inglehart, 1995, p. 61, Table 4.) That less-developed countries have far more pollution than rich countries (Goklany, 1995) may account for their tendency toward environmental consciousness.

These weaknesses in the theory of postindustrial culture may explain why, when scholars have entered postmaterialist or similar values into multivariate analyses of political behavior or economic performance, they find that such values are of little or no importance. For instance, in a 16-country study Franklin, Mackie, and Valen (1992) show that postmaterialism predicts nothing of electoral volatility from the 1960s through the 1980s nor does it help explain left voting or voting for new parties. Jackman and Miller (1994) found that Inglehart’s version of political culture has nothing to do with voter turnout 1981-1990, political democracy, or economic growth rates. In 1975 (pp. 28-49) I showed why neither elite nor mass attitudes explain national variations in social spending (see also chapter 5 below), although if values are anchored in powerful mass-based political parties (e. g. Catholic or left) they have some influence. In chapters below I show why political culture and public opinion cannot explain national differences in tax-welfare backlash (chapter 10), party decline (chapter 11), or crime rates (chapter 14).

In sum: the theory of postindustrial society and postmaterialist culture can explain neither the structural uniformities of modern society captured by convergence theory nor the national differences captured by theories of democratic corporatism and the mass society. Its depiction of structural changes is superficial: the service sector is too heterogeneous to describe occupational and industrial trends; the idea of technocratic dominance is overblown and misses big national differences in the location and role of experts and intellectuals. As for postindustrial values, they apply to a small population, a minority even of college students. That these attitudes fluctuate so much with shifting economic conditions and political agendas casts doubt on the idea of a basic shift toward “postmaterial values”. The literature documenting such shifts is plagued with problems of survey validity. It goes up against a heavy weight of evidence showing that older issues of security, equality, civic order and crime, economic growth and stability are dominant in the politics and mentality of modern populations; that cohort effects are weak to non-existent; that political generational effects are rare and soon fade away; that family life cycle, if carefully delineated, has an impact across a wide range of attitudes and behavior. Most important, differences in national mobilizing structures shape both mass and elite responses to the dilemmas and problems of modern life.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is an elaboration and update of my critique of ideas about postindustrial structures and “postmaterialist” values in Wilensky (1981, pp. 235-237, 255-262). I am grateful to Val Lorwin and Olaf Palme for critical comments on the first version.
- 2 Thus Bell (1973, 1976) and Galbraith (1967); their work draws on themes in Weber, Veblen, Schumpeter, and Burnham. For more empirically grounded arguments regarding such trends, see Inglehart, 1977 and 1990 and citations therein.
- 3 The U.S. Census Bureau creates 12 categories of retail sales people. If we aggregated them instead of sticking to the most detailed classifications, “retail sales” would be the largest fast-growing category in 1997, with 6,887,000 workers and a growth rate of 25 percent from 1983 to 1997.
- 4 If projected growth 1994-2005 is preferred, the picture is even more low or no tech. The 16 occupations with the greatest percentage increase (moderate estimates of 119 percent to 52 percent growth), in descending order of growth, are personal and home-care aides; home health aides; computer systems analysts, engineers and scientists; electronic pagination systems workers; physical and corrective therapy assistants and aides; occupational therapy assistants and aides; physical therapists; residential counselors; human service workers; occupational therapists; manicurists; medical assistants; paralegals; medical records technicians; teachers in special education; and amusement and recreation attendants. The list is dominated by the medical-industrial complex discussed in chapter 16. Again, only a couple of these can be seen as high tech. If we instead examine occupations with the largest total job openings due to estimated growth and net replacement, the picture is the same. (Jacobs, 1997, pp. 166-174.)
- 5 Presser finds that “among couples with children, when men work nights (and are married less than 5 years) the likelihood of separation or divorce 5 years later is some six times that when men work days;” the odds for women in that situation are three times as high. And such schedules are the cause not the effect of family breakup; spouses in troubled marriages are not more likely to choose night work. (1999, p. 1779.) The gain, if we view fathers’ involvement in child care as desirable, is that split-shift parenting among dual-earner couples increases fathers’ caregiving — that is, if the marriage lasts.
- 6 The Dunlop Report (Commission on the Future of Worker-Management Relations, 1994, chapter 1) presents a useful summary of these trends and their policy implications.
- 7 Inglehart notes that he gets less stable results from his 4-item index than from the 12- or 8-item index (1990, pp. 127, 131; Inglehart and Abramson, 1994, p. 339) but uses the short index much more often and generally reports results as if there is no difference.
- 8 The countries are Great Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, and Ireland.
- 9 In the strange congressional debate of 1995 on the merits of enshrining an economic theory in the U.S. Constitution, the Balanced Budget Amendment, its advocates invoked a poll showing 79% support for the idea. However, when the same respondents were asked a second, more concrete (and realistic) question, “Do you favor a balanced budget amendment even if it means cuts in Social Security?” support dropped to 32% (*New York Times*, February 28, 1995). Chapter 10 analyzes the difference between abstract ideology and issue-specific attitudes regarding the welfare state, taxes, and spending.
- 10 A similar conclusion comes from a review of many studies of American mass attitudes from the early 1950s through the early 1970s. Americans of every age cohort and every educational, occupational and class level rank two goals at the top of their concerns and the rankings show remarkable stability: first, family well-being and security; second, improving their standard of living — meaning their economic well-being (Hamilton and Wright, 1986, chapter 3).
- 11 This section summarizes and updates Wilensky, 1981, pp. 255-262.
- 12 Mayer reports that where cohort has most effect (survey questions on premarital sex), it explains only about 25 percent of the change in U.S. attitudes (*Ibid.*, p. 159).
- 13 A recent study of mental illness (Kessler et al., 1994) using a large national sample (N=8098) inter-

viewed in 1990-1992 is consistent with the morale curve: it shows a concentration of psychiatric disorders, broadly defined, among low-income persons age 25-34. But in this study women do have an edge not in life satisfaction but among the 14 percent of the sample showing severe pileups of mental disorders at age 25-34.

- 14 This study does not permit a test of whether a slump in voting rate occurs when non-college couples have pre-school children and a poor income/needs ratio. One would not expect there to be much of a slump, however, because young singles start from such a low base to begin with.
- 15 What issues parties and governments use to mobilize public opinion will also shape the "what's important" responses in surveys. Political context counts. For instance, there have been wild short-term swings in survey responses concerning "the #1 problem facing the nation" in the country with the biggest drug problem, the USA. In September of 1989, 43% of a U.S. cross-section named drugs the nation's #1 problem; in July 1990 only 13% did (Wall Street Journal/NBC poll, *WSJ* July 13, 1990, p. 1). In those 10 months the problem of drugs and related violence did not change; the pollsters suggested that the shift "demonstrated people's despair". It more likely reflected the many TV docudramas and news "analyses" that exposed (or exaggerated) the problem and the success of political demagoguery surrounding it in 1988-89. The media and the Bush administration turned their rhetoric to other issues in 1990.
- 16 A recent ten-country study of life satisfaction, which did not include Denmark and France, similarly showed that the Netherlands led all countries in life satisfaction while Italy was at the bottom among the six rich democracies studied. Life satisfaction was closely associated with objective living conditions. That is why Slovenia, Russia and Hungary rank very low. (Veenhoven and Saris, 1996.) A similar picture emerges from a single survey question asked by the International Social Survey Program in 1991 in 8 of our countries. "If you were to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are, on the whole — not at all, not very, fairly, very?" Twenty-two percent of both Italians and Israelis answered not at all or not very happy, close to the unhappy responses of East Germans and the depressed responses of Slovenes and Hungarians. The least happy of respondents in all countries were the least attached — the unemployed, the divorced, widowed, or separated, and the least educated. (Blanchflower and Freeman, 1997.)

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