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# Problems with Political Types

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The authoritarian. The malignant narcissist. The concept of national character. Just three examples from political psychology involving typologies. The first two are often applied to research on political leaders, the first also to followers. The third often is employed--sometimes confusingly--to help explicate conflict between and among nation-states. (As the nation-state is a recent construct in the history of man's efforts to conceive, understand and control historical fate, one may wonder whether national character evolved as recently, or as the nation-state's precursor, or has always existed. Or has never had ontological viability.)

The problems with any typology comprise the heterogeneity of its characteristics and of its members to whom are ascribed these characteristics. A recent psychiatric commentary identifies these problems for the typology of autism. These days autism denotes a mental disorder characterized by impairments in social interaction and communication. It also denotes restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior and interests. Yet, there is still significant controversy over (1) the definition of autism, (2) whether it is indeed a syndrome (and whether there is such a thing as a syndrome,) (3) whether different collections of symptoms fall under the autism rubric, (4) how autistics may be otherwise clinically different, (5) how people with autism respond differentially to psychological and psychotropic intervention, and may indeed have differently functioning biological substrates, and (6) how specific behaviors of autistics may be differently interpreted by mental health professionals.

Analogous problems apply to political typologies. These problems create great complexities in trying to develop and employ procedures of understanding and predicting political tendencies and behaviors. They form the basis for the rather extreme position that the very construct of the trait--the foundation of a typology--is misleading and even useless. Does the continuous quest for psychiatric and political types reflect scientific or some epistemological progress, or a Sisyphean mire mirroring ontological insecurity? (See Author (1996.) Commentary. Archives of General Psychiatry, 53, 980-983; Spiro, M. E. (1993.) Is the Western conception of the self "peculiar" within the context of the world cultures? Ethos, 21, 107-153; Wolf, K. H. (1992.) Concatenation diagrams in personality typology: Examining enneagrams. Social Behavior and Personality, 20, 101-109.) (Keyword: Typology.)