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## Psychological Metaphor and Financial Crisis in Southeast Asia

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Abstract. This article presents several Issues in applying psychological constructs to political phenomena.

Psychology--as the study of mental processes and human behavior--contains a number of hypothetical constructs. A hypothetical construct is a concept whose meaning is consensually constructed, used, and shared as if there were a material reality within which it materially exists, to which it directly or indirectly corresponds, or out of which it possess nonmaterial ontological validity.

A hypothetical construct is also a metaphor, for the concept is created solely to designate an object that is assumed to have some material relationship-material existence, direct or indirect correspondence, nonmaterial ontological validity. A special case is the hypothetical construct whose concept is taken from the material object it ordinarily designates to designate another object only by analogy or some other implicit comparison.

Hypothetical constructs arise dependent on their utility in achieving goals in the perceived world--be they (1) a sense of meaning, coherence, and continuity, (2) food, water, and sex, or (3) control of other people. Unfortunately, hypothetical constructs often are hypostatized-as if their "as if" quality was modified into "is". They also often are decontextualized as if they are pure causal factors divorced from anything else. (Perhaps this has some bearing on constructs of love and holiness at times begetting the most atrocious violence.)

Hypostatization and decontextualization may impede knowledge and understanding. For example, Han Sung Joo, a former South Korean foreign minister, is cited as stating that if anger prevails, a certain presidential candidate will win upcoming elections because his platform is to renegotiate South Korea's International Monetary Fund agreement. However, if worry prevails, then another candidate will win on the platform of not renegotiating the agreement.

There are several problems with Han's comments. First, emotions are discussed as if they exist in some material sense as opposed to referring to some assumed material relationship with an assumed material reality. Second, emotions are discussed as if they are decontextualized, when as consensually used they have an object and include a social relationship. Third, emotions as consensually used relate as well to cognitions, motives, and behaviors. The result of these problems may be a lessening of a sense of individual, group, and collective responsibility for the election outcome. (One counter to this analysis might be advocating that Han's comments accurately reflect consensual usage of emotions in South Korea as opposed to other countries like the United States.)

In another example, William Greider, the national editor of Rolling Stone magazine, uses the metaphor of psychological disorder and related metaphors--"unhinged....from....reality, delusions of invincibility, binge, manias, depressed, therapy, and reckless illusions in describing individuals involved in events leading up to capital market dislocations in Southeast Asia. Besides problems of hypostatization and decontextualization, there is the too-frequent pathologizing of problematic behavior . Once viewed as pathology, the financial crisis is then deemed to be more responsive to certain interventions than

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others--better education, limits, procedures for individuals as opposed to necessary changes in social systems. Also the pathology metaphor--especially referents to mania--connotes people who are not in control and who are exhibiting extremely poor judgment. Surely, a strong case can be made that at least the larger investors knew exactly what they were getting into--an environment of corruption, cronyism, and nepotism that had been yielding high growth. Some investors got out in time, and some did not.

In conclusion, political psychology--study at the interface of psychology and political phenomena--is metaphor applied to metaphor. Even with consensual construction, use, and sharing, these metaphors may yield more smoke than heat or light. (See Allison, S.T., Beggan, J.K., & Midgley, E.H. (1996). The quest for "similar instances" and "simultaneous possibilities": Metaphors in social dilemma research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 479-497; Greider, W. (December 14, 1997). Economic 'flu' isn't Asia's alone. *The New York Times*, p. 12; Kristof, N.D. (December 13, 1997). Presidential candidates unclear on economic mandate for South Korea. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Palmer, I., & Dunford, R. (1996). Conflicting uses of metaphors: Reconceptualizing their use in the field of organizational change. *Academy of Management Review*, 21, 691-717; Westley, F., & Vredenburg, H. (1996). The perils of precision: Managing local tensions to achieve global goals. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 32, 143-159.) (Keywords: Hypothetical Constructs, Language, Metaphor.)