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The Politics of Intelligence

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Title: The Politics of Intelligence

Author: Editor

Here's what this article is not about. Not how politics influences how and how much a government's national security intelligence capabilities are resourced and funded. Not how politics influences the official findings of intelligence analysts, how much those findings are believed and transmitted, nor how much they affect a government's policies, initiatives, and consequent assessments. And not how much politics influences the approval threshold for clandestine and covert operations and their comparative ethics, morality, and legality. Instead, we address the politics of the *other* intelligence, viz., what constitutes the capability to adapt to challenge and how to influence and measure it.

The contemporary history of this latter intelligence commences with the political problem of identifying students who were less likely to adapt to common challenges of French society (1). The idea being, depending on one's politics, to better help them succeed through educational intervention; to help them succeed at least more than otherwise would be the case; or to take away resources from them which could be better used with students more likely to succeed. From the very beginning there was a tension between conceiving intelligence as how much one could have adapted in the past, could adapt in the present, and/or adapt in the future. And through the years, a tension on what constitutes adaptive capability.

Some scientific, applied scientific, and political authorities advocated for intelligence as one thing—a general cognitive factor labelled *g* and comprising elements of linguistic and spatial (e.g., mentally rotating and comparing specific shapes and sizes) degrees of expertise (2). Other authorities advocated for a crystallized *g* that was already being applied in one's daily life and a fluid *g* that represented a potential that was not yet applied but could be applied in the future (3). Still other authorities advocated for a *triarchic* intelligence—*analytic* (e.g., academic problem solving and computing), *creative* (e.g., imaginative and innovative problem solving), and *practical* (e.g., so-called street smarts and common sense) (4). Yet another approach was *multiple intelligences* embracing a grouping including but not limited to degrees of expertise in music, the interpersonal, understanding the natural world, as well as the logico-mathematic, linguistic, and even the kinesthetic (5). This last approach privileged external social behaviors as much as the earlier privileging of intellectualization.

As there have been many conceptions of intelligence, so has intelligence engendered many kinds of politics. There have been conflicts among the competing power needs of various intelligence advocates. These conflicts have been expressed in the development and sales of competing intelligence tests and associated academic curricula; the tracking of student groups into those more and less likely to succeed in life and types of life; and the hiring, tenure, promotion, reputation, mass media time and sales of books of often self-professed intelligence experts. On a continuum of

extremity, racism, ethnocentrism, and classism have been based on success and failure of intelligence estimates among groups leading to discrimination in school resources and later professional opportunities. Often enough, test results reflecting lives of abuse and minimal opportunity. And then to sterilization or extermination of members of groups deemed less intelligent.

Perhaps, following the French philosopher Michel Foucault, the construct of intelligence has largely been a tool of knowledge as power through constructing and acting on social categories (6). Perhaps, the truly intelligent realize that even with some documented benefits of helping people be all they can be, intelligence has been at least as successful in preventing this.

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Keywords: Adaptation. Foucault. Intelligence. Knowledge. Politics. Power.

Abstract/Description: This article describes the politics of the construct and applications of intelligence in the context of adaptation.

Disciplines: Other Psychology, Philosophy, Philosophy of Science. Political Science, Other Political Science, Psychology, Defense and Security Studies, International Relations

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