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Commentary on Philosophy and Aviation Security

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Abstract. This article outlines how the formal study of philosophy can be applied to aviation security, considering the merits of the inclusion of philosophers in the international working groups tasked with discerning and commenting on aviation security trends and their relevance for intelligence and security activities.

Belief. It is from the knowledge fields of security and intelligence technology, personnel security, human resource management, security and intelligence programs and procedures, and the like that an optimal security and intelligence posture towards aviation security threat and risk can be crafted.

Analysis. In contrast to this belief, an advocacy for the value of philosophy—epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics—may have considerable merit. What follows are some examples supporting this belief.

----Epistemology is the study of theories of knowledge—of how we may know what we may know. It can be applied to the question of whether an aircraft's cockpit crew should have weapons. Opponents to the policy often use the rhetorical device of asserting that the cockpit crew should stick to flying, and that weapons responsibilities get in the way of competent flying. Supporters of the policy rhetorically counter assert the difficulty of flying with box cutters sticking out of one's neck, head, or back. In fact, the conflict over cockpit weapons can be construed as one over the application of inductive logic—i.e., from specific observations or hypothetical examples reaching a generalization. Intelligence—no matter how relevant or valid—will lead to a security posture based on inductive style of the consumer that may be totally irrelevant or antithetical to the security threat. (And this same argument can be applied in analyzing the deterrent, operational, and cost-benefit values of employing air marshals on aircraft.)

----Metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality and existence. The most common theme in the history of philosophy includes the nature of correspondence between one's experience and some putative reality independent of one's experience. Philosophers have differed over whether this nature is one of a complete correspondence, a partial one, or one that is absent or irrelevant. Philosophers also have differed over whether there is no reality, one reality, or many realities—each affecting one person, some people, or all people. Such seemingly esoteric and even solipsistic concerns are relevant to the Issue of security-relevant construction and physical modification of airports and other loci of aviation. The philosophical theme and concerns can be conceived as whether security authorities' perception of aviation-related physical structure corresponds to that of the people behind a security threat—and whether the security implications of physical structure as perceived by security authorities (viz., as to operations, communications, physical, and personnel securities) correspond to those of the security threat. Correspondence analyses should form the substance of security evaluations of airports and other loci of aviation based on intelligence on the security threat. (A related Issue is that of semantic and other linguistic differences between security authorities and the security threat—e.g., what is safety to the security authority but security to the security threat creates an advantage for the security threat.)

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----Ethics is the study of what is good and what is bad. In the immediate post-9/11 environment, the quick and resource-intensive moves to create a Transportation Security Administration and to make bureaucratic modifications within existing Cabinet departments display a belief in bureaucracy as good against the badness of threat. Arrival at this belief is based on combinations of what one believes through sheer faith in what is good versus bad, of reliance on so-called authoritative human sources, unsystematic observation based on anecdote, and systematic observation bordering on the experimental with varying degrees of relevance to the matter at hand. Concurrent with this perspective are a combination of beliefs addressing whether one's intentions, the consequences of one's intentions, or the very essence or substance of one's action is most important in arriving at what is right or wrong. When coupled with the separate, ethical Issue of when bureaucratic creation and modification is purely a matter of self-interest or of advancing ideological and other political goals, irrespective of a security threat, it is difficult, indeed, to match bureaucratic threat with goodness in the face of security threat. (And this same argument can be applied in analyzing the quick and resource-intensive post-9/11 efforts to fund the development, fielding, and use of security technologies—efforts that seem to boldly assert the equivalence of corporate and national goodness. Yet other applications relate to the substance of various laws, regulations, and rules concerning the aviation security threat of legal and illegal immigrants versus citizens and of specific ethnic groups.)

----Aesthetics is the study of the arts in the widest sense, including the who, what, how, when, and why of art as meaningful, inspirational, beautiful, and their converse. Philosophical theories vary widely in assertions that specific forms and colors elicit specific psychological and spiritual reactions; that human action allows important unconscious beliefs, feelings, and motives to be expressed in disguised forms; and that human content have ethical consequences for the observer. The application for aviation security concerns the effects of today's mass telecommunications media as they impart intelligence and the nature of security threat. Concrete Issues include the parameters of a security-related color-coding system, public education on terrorism, documentaries and dramatized media products on aviation security, and so on. An upside of mass media aesthetics may be the transformation of the passenger and crew aviation security culture from passive to active and of security authorities' perspective on aviation security from only local to regional, national, international, and global. A downside may be cycles of public assurance, reassurance, confusion, and apathy that may not track actual security threat.

Yet another contribution from aesthetics is the notion of what constitutes culture and the potential clash of cultures. Aviation security-related areas meriting further exploration include the ascription of actions as perpetrated by freedom fighters versus terrorists, even when a person can be both or neither as well as one or the other; the ascription of Islamic Jihad as anything from a total war of physicalization against the alien other to a mental and spiritual struggle within a person for truth and living by it; standardization versus inconsistency of security postures based on formal dictate versus the actual security threat; the ethnopraxic similarities and differences between intelligence and law enforcement personnel; and terrorism as fueled by the poverty of economics versus that of self-actualization.

Recommendation. Aviation security—especially in the context of sophisticated aviation terrorism—and its challenge for the integration of intelligence are intrinsic and inevitable aspects of the world in which we live. An international working group with representatives of industry, government, and academia to provide commentary on aviation security trends and their relevance for intelligence and security activities would appear useful—even if and, perhaps, especially because one must recognize that the adversaries of aviation security will have access to this commentary as well. Philosophers might be useful members of such a group. (See Batteau, A. W. (2002). Anthropological approaches to culture, aviation, and flight safety. *Human Factors & Aerospace Safety*, 2, 147-171; Cooper, M. R., Fein, V. E.,

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