Reflections
An impish perspective reprised

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These reflections attempt to revive the IMPPISH perspective; otherwise known as the interaction, mentalist, populational, process, intelligence, self selection, and hypertrophy approach. Despite the clever acronym, the IMPPISH perspective struggles to stay on life support. This essay takes a fresh look at the IMPPISH approach, and breaks down each tenet into three parts: its theoretical proposition, relevance to the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences, and research implications for biopolitics.

Interaction

Ernst Mayr's *Animal Species and Evolution* perhaps best expresses interaction: "Both environmental and genetic endowment make a contribution to nearly every trait."[1] This premise formed a key part of the head note to my 1972 *Journal of Politics* article "Genetic Diversity and Political Life."[2] Essentially, understanding actions requires understanding an individual's biological background and environmental context. The two components work together to shape action and decision making.

Political science as a whole remained quite oblivious to one of Mayr's "great truth(s) of population zoology." However, several of my colleagues, including Al Somit, Roger Masters, and Peter Corning readily embraced this position. Thus, the fledging field of biopolitics was born—and the scheduled papers at the 2010 annual meeting of the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences three decades later indicate that the integration of biology into politics, if not complete, is well on its way. This first of my propositions is the only one to meet with any real success.

Then as now, the implications of this interactional relationship between biology and politics remain profound. I realized in time that my doctoral work and first published articles on political socialization implied that this field is better described as "political learning." Political learning highlights the active role of the child against the passive role of the environment in the process of adult development. Small environmental factors do play a critical role in shaping strongly hereditable traits such as stature, but it is possible that a person's genetic make up very much influences future political actions.

Note here the use of the Weberian term "action" in preference to "behavior." Action is a more appropriate in this context because it incorporates inner thoughts and motives. Classifications of criminal behavior exemplify this distinction. Crimes such as first degree murder or libel depend on proving willful intent.

Mentalist

"In the brain model proposed here, the causal potency of an idea, or an ideal, becomes just as real as that of a molecule, a cell, or a nerve impulse. Ideas cause ideas and help evolve new ideas."[3] This position, staked out by R.W. Sperry, a Nobel laureate in neuroscience, influenced my venture into neuropolitics with the publication of *The End of the Empty Organism: Neurobiology and the Sciences of Human Action*.[4] Published in 1992, the book boldly moves into

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problematic and uncharted territory, and it is this innovative position that decreased the book's support. It is hard to tell when "consciousness science," one of the last outposts of the scientific endeavor, will finally unlock the link between neurology and actions. Countless attempts to understand the neurological influences of idea development assign the neurological component to a dependent role stemming from molecular, unconscious, or otherwise inaccessible processes.

The 2010 annual meeting of the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences included a number of papers that dealt with the important policy question of how best to deal with mentally incompetent or physically disabled patients, especially among the aged. On the former problem, it is well to remember that there are millions who suffer from serious brain diseases and disorders, such as Alzheimer's, stroke, or injury, that remove a person from the political sphere. The political implications of mental illness are paramount. At 83, Ronald Reagan had another ten years of life, but the onset of Alzheimer's took away his ability to remain politically aware and involved. Jimmy Carter, by contrast, turned 86 at the end of 2010 and remains fully politically engaged with his mental faculties intact.

Finally, while underlying genetic, biological and neuroscientific causes of one's actions are important, political scientists do not need to be experts in this field to engage in biopolitical research. An analogue might be the influence of economics on politics. A scholar trying to understand democratic elections must take into account such critical economic facts as the rate of unemployment, but the scholar need not be an economist. A caveat to relying on research in biology is that, like economists, biologists often reach different conclusions. With this in mind, it is still important for political science to find ways to incorporate biological research into studying political life.

Populational

"No two individuals are alike" was another of Mayr's "great truth(s) of population zoology." It is true biologically even for identical twins. Mayr stresses that a premise underlying Darwinian evolution is the genetic diversity of all animal populations. Mayr contrasts this "populational" emphasis with a "typological" one, which stresses the uniformity within each species. This proposition tries to balance the uniqueness and similarities between individuals. Genetically, a species shares a certain set of traits and characteristics; however, on an individual level each being is still unique.

The continuing genetic revolution highlights the presence of individual differences within populations; efforts to personalize such areas as medicine and nutrition reflect this development. In his recent book, *The Checklist Manifesto*, Atul Gawande writes that "individuals are individual... No two pneumonia patients are identical. Even with the same bacteria, the same cough and shortness of breath, the same low oxygen levels, same antibiotic, one patient might get better and the other might not. A doctor must be prepared for unpredictable turns."[5] A "one size fits all" approach does not work for policy nor does it work for science. Too many of us shirk the challenge this poses.

While many of those involved in the Association for Politics and the Life Sciences share similar beliefs about the nature of political action, each scholar offers individual insights. This premise of uniqueness applies to any other population. When first proposing both an international and populational approach in my aforementioned 1972 paper, I called for two big paradigmatic shifts that predictably met with great resistance.

Of all specialties, biopolitics should be at the forefront in recognizing the significance of genetic diversity. Likewise, political scientists must acknowledge that politics arises out of competing individual differences, and these differences have a biological basis. This awareness calls for a less typological, and hence homothetic, approach—and a more idiographic one. One example is to identify the careers of emerging political leaders in a more systematic way. In *The End of the Empty Organism*, I proposed the idea of an ongoing political biography.

Process

C. H. Waddington, the eminent English biologist, contended that many definitions of the phenotype—any observable characteristic of individuals—do not "clearly express the most fundamental and basic characteristic of phenotypes, namely that they change

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over time."[6] Children change through adolescence into adulthood, and this process of growth and development persists well into adult life. Certainly, this was a fact in 1968 and still holds true today. The very concept of evolution embodies change and is nonexistent without it. Nothing ever stays the same over time, and certainly not thoughts and opinions, least of all in the political realm.

What Harvard economist N. Gregory Mankiw wrote in the *New York Times* applies fully as much to the world of politics as to the world of economics: "The one certain thing about the future is that it is far from certain."[7] The one certain thing about political opinions and election polls is that they change over time. At the beginning of 2004, few predicted that a little known African-American Illinois state senator would, within five short years, be elected President of the United States. Illustrated here is not only the need to identify potentially significant political leaders early in their career, but also to follow their careers over time.

Intelligence

"Rather than continuing its historical pattern of denial and avoidance of theories perceived as illiberal, I believe sociology should view *The Bell Curve* as a challenge—a call to investigate human intelligence as a legitimate social outcome connected to other social outcomes rather than a pariah idea to be suppressed and circumvented."[8] *The Bell Curve*, published in 1994, controversially argues that inherited and environmental factors shape individual levels of intelligence.[9] Sociologist Douglass Massey's statement above urges applying this sort of inclusive approach to understanding intelligence, and this is a framework relevant for political science. This method is critical, but consistently neglected or undervalued in political science research.

My own interest in this approach began with my doctoral research using data from the Easton-Hess political socialization study in the early 1960s. I found that, using multiple regression, children with high IQs scored significantly higher on measures of political efficacy and interest than children of low IQ, even when holding social class constant. When I published the results in article form, they immediately faced challenges. I subsequently found indications that mental ability was a factor in the success of candidates running in the 1965 Philadelphia anti-poverty election. I reported this result in, among other places, my 1972 *Journal of Politics* article.

Unfortunately, this type of research opened up questions regarding racial differences in intelligence. Things came to the fore with the publication of *The Bell Curve* by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray. I subsequently introduced the issue into political science with the publication of the edited volume, *Intelligence, Political Inequality, and Public Policy*, which included contributions by colleagues Al Somit and Roger Masters.[10] Surely, the idea that not all people are of equal intelligence and ability is controversial. Yet, with the critical exception of ethnic and racial differences in intelligence, few dispute much of what Herrnstein and Murray argue in *The Bell Curve*. Indeed, one of their early chapters deals explicitly with political variables, and this is worth revisiting.

In *Genes, Brains, and Politics*, I developed the concept of mental space-time horizons and explored the possible political ramifications of differing individual and environmental influences.[11] Despite innate ability, individuals can be trapped by an environment that does not permit them to develop their native talent; or, they may be satisfied by their environmental situation. Finally, a person might be overwhelmed by the demands of their environment. How valid are these distinctions, especially in the case of being overwhelmed, and what might follow from them in political terms?

Self selection

Each individual, C. D. Darlington asserts, "seeks and selects the place, the environment that fits it best," a process which supports the impression that individuals "are molded by an environment which they have actually chosen."[12] Of course, individuals do not always succeed in finding the ideal environment, but to a surprising degree, most individuals do form their own environments.

Amplifying the self-selection concept is the research of such leading geneticists and psychologists as Robert Plomin and Sandra Scarr. They observe that different individuals occupying the same physical space or locale do not in fact inhabit the same *environment*. Siblings growing up within the same family experience the same

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environment differently depending upon such key individual differences as age, sex, temperament, and ability. The term psychogenetic indicates the effect genetic predispositions may have on resulting psychological attitudes. As active membership in any academic association illustrates, it is a purposive choice to receive a journal, read articles, and conduct research in an area of interest.

Genes, Brains and Politics, subtitled *Self Selection and Social Life*, explored the possible operation of self selection in the choice of religious identification and the political implications of such selecting tendencies. Many papers at the 2010 APLS gathering dealt with religious identification, an area ripe for the application of self selection. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, I explored the application of self selection to religion in a conference paper that showed how key Al Qaeda members, including Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Mohammed Atta, grew up quite unlike their other siblings.[13] As Steve Coll observed in his recent book, *The Bin Ladens*, "the beliefs and practices of Mohamed Bin Laden's daughters contrasted almost as greatly as those of his sons."[14] Of the some 50 half and full brothers and sisters in the bin Laden family, the range relative to Osama went from the more secular to the more religious.

Hypertrophy

"I interpret contemporary human social behavior to comprise hypertrophic outgrowths of simpler features of human nature joined together in an irregular mosaic." So wrote E.O. Wilson in *On Human Nature*.[15] In *The Fratricidal Global Village: The Theory of Hypertrophic Group Formation*, I defined hypertrophy within a populational framework as "the intensification and exaggeration of group characteristics when that group is the result of the successful self selection of likeminded individuals."[16] Such a concept might be viewed as a biosocial subset of Peter Corning's more all-embracing concept of "synergy."[17]

Hypertrophy differs from groupthink. Of course, there are group pressures to conform; but these typically result from the self-selection of likeminded members who act to reinforce those characteristics they bring with them. If they do not fit in, they may simply leave. Hirschman's concept of "exit" applies here.[18]

Hypertrophic groups theory is based on the mutual selection involved in bonding, which in turn can lead to the development of networks and clusters of the likeminded. Again drawing an analogy from the field, many involved in the association have professional and, in some cases, personal friendships based on mutual interests associated with this academic endeavor.

The analysis of hypertrophic group formation began with a chapter in *Biology and Bureaucracy* that Joe Losco and I coedited in 1986.[19] My offering explored the emergence of the mindsets that went into the Watergate scandal. *Genes, Brains, and Politics* adds a further analysis involving the Iran-Contra scandal. *The Fratricidal Global Village* deals with the role of the media in the Monica Lewinsky scandal, soccer hooliganism in Britain, hypertrophy in Heian, Japan, and within the World War II Manhattan project. The aforementioned conference paper extended the treatment to Al Qaeda.

It is easy to see from these examples that many more are available for study. One avenue of research is the ideological polarization underway in American judicial circles. Adam Liptak describes a process of mutual selection in which law clerks come to "form ideological clusters."[20]

Conclusion

The IMPPISH perspective is not an overarching theory. It aspires to no grandiose, all-embracing effort to explain the universe, or even social life. E.O. Wilson's ambitious concept of consilience differs from the IMPPISH perspective. However, I fully embrace his call for reconciliation of the life and social sciences. The very name, Association for Politics and the Life Sciences, implies just that.

We would do well to remember the injunction of Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that, "it is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just as far as the nature of the subject allows."[21] Since the study of politics necessarily focuses on particulars and not universals, virtually every generalization must be qualified. Acceptance of limits is therefore in order.

Mayr argues that a fixation with typological thinking delayed the acceptance of the theory of evolution, which necessarily rests upon a populational

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foundation. According to Mayr, such overreaching ideas are "retarding concepts" and get in the way of a true picture of reality. They are, in short, inhibiting.

The social world is further complicated if there is downward as well as upward causation. In other words, the reductionist force of the molecular world is counterbalanced by the holistic force of the social and the ideational. Take, for example, E. O. Wilson's concept of "biophilia," which he defines as "the inborn affinity human beings have for other forms of life." There is much merit in this insight. The problem comes with viewing human action too typologically. Placed within a populational framework, cultural, historical, and individual factors qualify as human behavior. Not everyone is equally enamored with pets, trees, and the wilderness. Finally, when Wilson urges policies consistent with biophilia, biodiversity, and consilience, he attempts to affect the thinking of others, a form of downward causation.

When I completed my 1972 *Journal of Politics* paper, much influenced by Ernst Mayr's "great truth(s) of population zoology," I sent him a copy. He kindly wrote back that "I was entirely right," but cautioned that "I was a voice in the wilderness." Forty years hence, only the idea of interaction has taken hold and, in at least this one regard, I can hear many more voices. But there needs to be more engagement with the remaining propositions proposed here. So I leave readers with the challenge: Which of these propositions would you reject—and what would you replace it with?

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