

Date: Tue, 08 Mar 2011 12:55:55 -0500

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From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

Subject: 245. Red Team: Brooks's New Meta-Analysis of Neuroscience, Policy Failure, and Humanism

Dear Dr. Fischhoff, Dr. Prewitt, Dr. Atkinson, Dr. Skocpol, and Colleagues:

It would be worthwhile to follow up David Brooks's meta-analysis of international and domestic policy failures across recent decades, summarized (from his new book) in his column in this morning's Times. There may be immediate implications for lesson-drawing, rapid learning, and new analysis methods.

This is an interesting and challenging list. Brooks is an alert observer of the assumptions that actually shape US domestic and international policy, especially on the Republican

side. I am not sure that misreading French political theorists v. English social theorists is the cause, but it could be a good way to talk about the problem.

Two brief comments:

1.) Brooks begins with the Russian failures. It *is* truly remarkable to compare the US-Russian relationship, now, with the commitment to new relationships with former enemies (Japan and Germany) after WW II. Even Richard Nixon said that the post Cold War relationship would be vital and that “we shouldn’t blow it.” There seems to be a residual psychological barrier to U. S.- Russian relations and the DNI Red Team probably needs to look at a much wider range of diagnostic ideas. [Also, the Harvard-designed project had egregious problems at several levels, beyond its simplistic ideas - and the Department of Justice filed a large lawsuit that caused the Harvard Board to terminate their Development Institute.]

2.) As a good academic, I agree with Brooks that one of the useful routes for policy learning is to revisit basic assumptions. Many years ago I designed and taught a multi-disciplinary course for MIT undergraduates, Human Nature and Public Policy, about more inclusive models of human nature that Brooks and neuroscience are helping to advance. My second book, Can Governments Learn? (re foreign policy mistakes and learning) discussed a dual-track framework in which imagination-based processes (e.g., a *hubris* syndrome) operated alongside the analytical/rational areas of the brain. [I also developed a set of bottom-up hierarchical psychodrama models whose policy implications are still pending for testing with new neuroscience methods.]

[So: Yes, the automatic non-conscious brain processes (Brooks) are more relevant than is recognized and integrated in many US domestic and international policy discussions. But - especially for political/power relationships - it also is worthwhile updating DNI analysis and our thinking about policy via humanist traditions and neuroscience discoveries about the role of the visual cortex and its (joint) constructions of hierarchical social/political drama and the self. And about the degree of self-absorption and *hubris* that may be

involved from "above" and the distinctive emotional and cognitive processes when one is "below" in these social and political dramas in the changing Islamic world (etc.)]

There is a growing, large, and exciting agenda for basic and applied research! I hope that a Red Team/National Academy of Sciences project can help to scope-out and move everybody's agenda quickly.

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March 7, 2011. NYTimes

The New Humanism

By [DAVID BROOKS](#)

Over the course of my career, I've covered a number of policy failures. When the Soviet Union fell, we sent in teams of economists, oblivious to the lack of social trust that marred that society. While invading Iraq, the nation's leaders were unprepared for the cultural complexities of the place and the psychological aftershocks of Saddam's terror.

We had a financial regime based on the notion that bankers are rational creatures who wouldn't do anything stupid en masse. For the past 30 years we've tried many different ways to restructure our educational system — trying big schools and little schools, charters and vouchers — that, for years, skirted the core issue: the relationship between a teacher and a student.

I've come to believe that these failures spring from a single failure: reliance on an overly simplistic view of human nature. We have a prevailing view in our society — not only in the policy world, but in many spheres — that we are divided creatures. Reason, which is trustworthy, is separate from the emotions, which are suspect. Society progresses to the extent that reason can suppress the passions.

This has created a distortion in our culture. We emphasize things that are rational and conscious and are inarticulate about the processes down below. We are really good at talking about material things but bad at talking about emotion.

When we raise our kids, we focus on the traits measured by grades and SAT scores. But when it comes to the most important things like character and how to build relationships, we often have nothing to say. Many of our public policies are proposed by experts who are comfortable only with correlations that can be measured, appropriated and quantified, and ignore everything else.

Yet while we are trapped within this amputated view of human nature, a richer and deeper view is coming back into view. It is being brought to us by researchers across an array of diverse fields: neuroscience, psychology, sociology, behavioral economics and so on.

This growing, dispersed body of research reminds us of a few key insights. First, the unconscious parts of the mind are most of the mind, where many of the most impressive feats of thinking take place. Second, emotion is not opposed to reason; our emotions assign value to things and are the basis of reason. Finally, we are not individuals who form relationships. We are social animals, deeply interpenetrated with one another, who emerge out of relationships.

This body of research suggests the French enlightenment view of human nature, which emphasized individualism and reason, was wrong. The British enlightenment, which emphasized social sentiments, was more accurate about who we are. It suggests we are not divided creatures. We don't only progress as reason dominates the passions. We also thrive as we educate our emotions.

When you synthesize this research, you get different perspectives on everything from business to family to politics. You pay less attention to how people analyze the world but more to how they perceive and organize it in their minds. You pay a bit less attention to

individual traits and more to the quality of relationships between people.

You get a different view of, say, human capital. Over the past few decades, we have tended to define human capital in the narrow way, emphasizing I.Q., degrees, and professional skills.

Those are all important, obviously, but this research illuminates a range of deeper talents, which span reason and emotion and make a hash of both categories:

Attunement: the ability to enter other minds and learn what they have to offer.

Equipoise: the ability to serenely monitor the movements of one's own mind and correct for biases and shortcomings.

Metis: the ability to see patterns in the world and derive a gist from complex situations.

Sympathy: the ability to fall into a rhythm with those around you and thrive in groups.

Limerence: This isn't a talent as much as a motivation. The conscious mind hungers for money and success, but the unconscious mind hungers for those moments of transcendence when the skull line falls away and we are lost in love for another, the challenge of a task or the love of God. Some people seem to experience this drive more powerfully than others.

When Sigmund Freud came up with his view of the unconscious, it had a huge effect on society and literature. Now hundreds of thousands of researchers are coming up with a more accurate view of who we are. Their work is scientific, but it directs our attention toward a new humanism.

It's beginning to show how the emotional and the rational are intertwined.

I suspect their work will have a giant effect on the culture. It'll change how we see ourselves. Who knows, it may even someday transform the way our policy makers see the

world.

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[The Policy Sciences Center, Inc. is a public foundation that develops and integrates knowledge and practice to advance human dignity. Its headquarters are 127 Wall St., Room 322 PO Box 208215 in New Haven, CT 06520-8215. It may be contacted at the office of its Chair, Michael Reisman (michael.reisman@yale.edu), 203-432-1993. Further information about the Policy Sciences Center and its projects, Society, and journal is available at www.policysciences.org.]