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February 28, 2010

Dr. John Mark Hansen – Chair
American National Election Studies Board
University of Chicago
Office of the Dean – Social Science Division
1126 East 59th St. - SS 110
Chicago, IL 60637

Dear Dr. Hansen and Colleagues:

I am writing to ask if the ANES Board will support a recommendation for funds to apply the new paradigm of neuropsychology to American politics and electoral behavior? My perception is that this new paradigm is a cross-disciplinary breakthrough and a cause for celebration.

-Neuropsychology allows us, by functional imaging and new measures, to explore hierarchical psychodrama models and unrecognized mechanisms that may underlie political participation and costly social problems. For example: followership-dependency-submission mechanisms, activated and sustained in the human brain by hierarchical images and the same inherited, non-rational, brain mechanisms that can be observed in primates, may adversely affect motivation and the political, economic, and societal participation of lower status groups. They also may inhibit educational attainment in inner-city public schools.

Beyond these improved explanations, I also see further benefits for our understanding of politics:

I. Further Benefits for Political Science

A. A Better Theory of Political Ideologies

Among its other contributions the new paradigm contributes a better explanation of the emotional and motivational components of passionate and highly motivated American political ideologues. <1> It identifies the role of areas of the brain that are partly independent from rational analysis and it deepens our understanding of repetition and non-learning. It also (e.g., a discussion in the Cambridge UP chapter and in "President Reagan's Counseling") illuminates - beneath very different apparent diagnoses and reparative agendas - a shared, common goal of creating strong, health, self-starting individuals and several areas where evidence-based civic learning in the electoral process may become possible.

B. A Better Theory of Political Power

The new paradigm gives to political science what it has lacked - a better theory of political power. The cognitive and attitudinal measures used in the Converse/Verba traditions and the rationalist traditions never have demonstrated the capacity to explain strong power effects - e.g., the Milgram effects of achieving compliance from 2/3 of American adults. The new model of hierarchical psychodrama and backwardly linked brain mechanisms in the electorate can identify the brain pathways that are engaged in such strong power effects, with potential application to comparative politics and a wider range of phenomena. The new paradigm also probably can do a much better and more candid job of explaining the unrecognized, non-rational, brain mechanisms that establish and maintain social and political domination and acquiescence (including inhibited voting within lower status groups in American politics.)

C. An Empathy-Based Account of Pluralist Political Systems

Recognizing multiple (and radically different) hierarchical psychodramas offers to undergraduates a deeper, empathy-based account of politics, especially a better understanding of emotion and motivational effects. Working class or middle class Americans without a college education may experience American democracy as a very different psychodrama. The new paradigm also underscores the challenging idea that a core of the Republican Party might be misinterpreting (i.e., as a welfare state/dependency effect) behavior that is an unrecognized, induced effect of racism and lower status.

II. Additional Topics and Comments

There are many related lines of investigation. For example:

- A. Male-Related Political Psychology and Behavior. There is suggestive evidence (via primate studies, Marmot, and others) of endocrine changes in lower status populations, including experimental studies showing suppression or increases of testosterone in males accompanying changes in status and hierarchical power. Thus, there may be scientific connections to theoretical perspectives of Freud (and the Freudian Left) about the relationship of sexuality and male political psychology; and to other theorists of suppressed masculinity/political domination, revolution, and male-correlated political psychology (US and elsewhere).

- B. The Role of Religion. The role of religion may be more important than currently discussed in American politics/social science textbooks. The direct experience of a personal connection with a powerful, loving God may be a hierarchical psychodrama that elevates status and is politically and personally empowering. Thus - for example for discriminated-against Jewish populations or fundamentalist Christians, even in poverty or lower status objective circumstances - their religion may activate powerful brain pathways that limit damage [including adverse effects on the endocrine system and health] that otherwise would result from status mechanisms in secular society. By contrast, the current practice of interpreting religion as a set of Likert-scale beliefs, or measuring it by frequency of church attendance, may miss the protective and empowering pathways that are activated (e.g., via the visual cortex).

C. Predicting Individual Differences, with a Genetic Base. There are likely to be major individual differences in political behavior, with a genetic base, that can be predicted and identified quickly by the new paradigm. For example, the personality trait of field dependence/ independence (Witkin) or of imaginative suggestibility.<2>

D. Cross-cultural explorations. The model of hierarchical psychodramas frames a richer comparative study of political behavior and citizenship. For example, it can illuminate the deep and costly anomie that - by contrast with

the joyful celebration predicted by liberationist theorists - has afflicted Russian society since the advent of political freedom and individualist democracy.

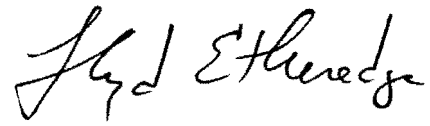
E. Connecting the Dots: Plato, the American Electorate, and Enlightenment. Plato's famous allegory of a cave, an entrapment within a world of projected images and echoes and an upward journey to Enlightenment, may be a good scientific theory of the American electorate - i.e., more than a metaphor. The new neuroscience model suggests that there is an actual baseline entrapment inside a world of hierarchical psychodramas and it also points to a key set of causal/brain mechanisms engaged in the process of good liberal arts education/ deconstruction/liberation in this Western tradition. The new paradigm can help students to see how the dots may be connected across their different courses: If it is right, the new paradigm suggests that the next generation of American politics textbooks will integrate Plato as a leading *scientific* theorist of American political and voting behavior, alongside Dahl, Converse, and Verba. <3>

III. Next Steps

In discussing the development of this emerging neuroscience/hierarchical psychodrama paradigm many years ago, with Ray Wolfinger, he told me that "We [i.e., American politics specialists] really don't know if there is anything up there." Until there is rigorous scientific testing, all of the hypotheses of the new paradigm can be obvious or highly implausible.

The entire profession will be in your debt if you can provide support with PCAST and other agenda-setting bodies. I have suggested to PCAST an initial \$50 million/year for pre-doc and post-doc enrichment investments - about 1,000 slots at (including overhead) \$50,000/year across four social science investment projects (of which neuroscience is one). This will build momentum and give employment in leading edge projects during the current recession. Next, there should be additional, direct infrastructure and research funds via NIH to institutions who want to organize rapid learning about this new paradigm for 21st century science.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lloyd S. Etheredge". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lloyd" being more prominent and the last name "Etheredge" following in a similar style.

(Dr.) Lloyd S. Etheredge

Cc: John Aldrich, Stephen Ansolabehere, Henry Brady, Brandice Canes-Wrone, Karen Cook, Catherine Eckel, Kenneth Goldstein, Donald Green, Vincent Hutchings, Paula McClain, Kathleen McGraw, Walter Mebane, Randy Olsen, Richard Petty, Vincent Price, Gary Segura, Daron Shaw, V. Kerry Smith, Lynn Smith-Lovin, Paul Sniderman

Notes

<1> These are outlined in the attached paper for the NSF Grand Challenges panel and the referenced chapter in the Cambridge UP volume. The companion (hierarchical psychodrama) analysis of several dozen recurring themes in liberal activism is online at www.policyscience.net.

<2> Re these traits and new theories of followership: Hierarchical psychodramas also may have powerful *arousing* effects on emotion and motivation. Visionary/messianic political leaders may generate motivation-arousing and -sustaining psychodramas for themselves and followers.

<3> David Winter et al. , *A New Case for the Liberal Arts* (Jossey Bass, 1981); see also the "Wisdom in Public Policy" chapter online at www.policyscience.net.