

Review 4

Title: Political Psychology, Neuroscience, Genetics and Politics by George E. Marcus. NY, NY (2013) Oxford University Press, p. 314, ISBN 978-019537 064-5 Softcover

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This Political Psychology textbook is an excellent and extensive introduction to what political psychology is, as well as a thorough introduction to the field. Marcus covers the origins, evolution and possibilities of the field of Political Psychology. He also uncovers the deep historical roots from ancient times to the enlightenment up to the present time, thereby providing context and background for his introduction to the field. Along the way he explains how genetics, neuroscience, and cognitive sciences apply to politics. Student readers will enjoy the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological tools that Marcus provides to answer time-honored questions that deserve new answers today. This book is most useful for upper division and graduates in political psychology, behavior, communications, and public opinion analysis. These students will be challenged through the textbook format to demonstrate creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. They will be challenged to learn through direct experience, design, and problem solving.

In this review, I intend to approach the contents of this book from the perspective of what it is, how it relates to genetics and neuroscience, and politics through a short description of each of the ten book chapters as well as the major content and conclusions of the book.

In chapter one the author introduces readers to the full field of study, its core concerns, and the overall plan for the book. The social organization of the field of Political Psychology grows into an evolutionary scientific discipline with useful taxonomies, peer review, journals, conferences, and research archives which store the evidentiary documents and files collected from the political field in which no one person has the final privileged word or say. When an issue is on the disciplinary agenda, political psychologists are interested in it.

Marcus explains that just a few of the core concerns in Political Psychology are topics such as terrorism, fascism, and authoritarianism. Other concerns are how to live the good life and how to govern ourselves effectively. Political Psychology is also focused on theories, fields, problems and solutions in constructing a science of human behavior and human nature. As an illustration of the breadth of the field, Marcus provides a taxonomic list of 25 other topics on which scholars focus such as ideology, political socialization,

leadership, tolerance and social justice. Some of these items overlap or are, on occasion, out of vogue or style, waiting to return, such as human nature or political socialization. Marcus illustrates how Political Psychology is ingrained in human nature, for example through the writings from James Madison in 1787-1788 in defense of ratification of the proposed U. S. Constitution. Other insights on human nature come from a variety of sources such as Confucius, Hobbes, Wittgenstein and others are mentioned early in this text. How to practice political psychology as a science is also discussed. Processes such as theory, doubt and expanding theorization are used, along with rigorous sampling, hypothesis formulation, testing, path analysis, and mediating variables.

At the end of the introductory chapter, Marcus re-introduces the overall plan of the book, which includes useful end of chapter material, exercises, which reinforce the key concepts in each chapter, and chapter references which are extremely interesting and useful for additional study.

After the introductory chapter in section one, three more chapters on different subjects appear. Chapter 2 focuses on methodology, data gathering, evaluating variables, and how to conduct empirical analysis, treating subjects such as analogies, metaphors, sampling, incongruities, polling, measurement theory, modeling, observation, space, correlation and variance/covariance.

The next chapter (3) deals with the long history of human nature and politics. Whereas political psychology has only been around for a few decades, the questions raised have been with us for centuries. Marcus begins this chapter with a short history of a long tradition dealing with ideology versus empirical science, democracy and reason, faith and autocratic rule, and a fascinating discussion of the pre-Enlightenment and neo-post modern conception of time as steady versus dynamic, orderly versus revolution, predictable versus unexpected, and so forth. Other topics covered here are the Socrates/Plato (Glaucón) versus the Aristotelian argument about the Parable of the cave, human Enlightenment, rationality, conservatism, mental states, reason, interests, passion or emotion in politics. Conservatism is classically based on opposition to any important changes, endorsement of inequality, and meanness to inferiors. Here also the role of group think in decision making, psychoanalytical approaches, power of belief, mass opinion, and deliberative democracy are covered.

Chapter 4 is on neuroscience as applied to old, recent, and new theories, the brain, and the conscious mind in order to develop a new field of psychology, and politics incorporating pre-conscious, and post awareness dynamics of neural processes. We now know enough to challenge older conceptions of human nature, e.g. that thinking and feeling are neither temporarily nor spatially distinct. The pre-conscious mind is used to sort out when automatic responses can be deliberately set aside. Here, Marcus also explains the processes of affective approaches (novelty or anxiety, enthusiasm, and goal seeking success), and when aversion or challenge by a real foe exists. People live in a Darwinian world where challenge, change, threat, and response are universal and constant adaptation is inevitable, as is that of climate change, for example. However, Darwinian adaptation, even with new knowledge, is not likely to solve this problem in the midst of tendencies toward self-aggrandizement and self-censorship. Threats such as terrorism, intolerance, ethnic cleansing, poverty and so forth are serious but we need to apply threat analysis and solutions for finding how to control them as well as to remove global

contaminants which surround us. They will not go away by themselves; these threats come from many sources, some natural, and some human; sources that can kill from the micro to the macro-level, using biochemical, or nuclear sources, including viruses, which over time and territory are the most dangerous and the hardest to control. Our responses to these threats include consciousness, immunities, fear or even disgust which can be applied to war, riots, invasions, and medical responses or systems. Which responses are extra or extraordinary in terms of normal consciousness and which are broader than our personal visions is subject to our conscious control.

Section two also has four chapters and focuses on some main topics in the field of Political Psychology. Chapter 5 describes how new findings in neuroscience can be applied to the brains' functions and consciousness and focuses on split brain experiments and a theory of "affective intelligence". Chapter 6 teaches us that both established and new knowledge, methods, and theories can be used to explain human behavior and human nature, including manifestations of temperament or personality as this relates to our understanding of politics. The chapter deals with the uses and limits of the mind, blind spots, an introduction to pre-conscious appraisal and action, the pre- and unconscious, dualism, and the mind versus matter division. In Chapter 7 the emphasis is on an historical introduction to personality (types or taxonomies), the classic four humors which dominated life and thought for so long, recent personality research, psycho-biography, limits on trait conceptions, personality, pathology, and personality's future prospects. In chapter 8 the focus shifts to understanding democratic politics. The chapter introduces the topic of democratic politics, knowledge, dualities, morality, free will, manipulation, core concepts, gene-environmental action, motor action and behaviors, vision, memory, political attitudes, developmental processes and stage theory evolutionary accounts and probabilistic epigenesis, the basis for affective neuroscience, pre-consciousness and neural, social, behavioral, and decision making, and what can be learned from other seminal works on personality.

Section 3 (chapter 9) is on political and social psychology including decision making, political philosophy, the concept of framing and context, authority versus autocracy, collective action, normative or empirical stories, affective and taxonomic contexts. The concluding chapter (10) is a discursive discussion of political psychology and its limits, and a future agenda. The chapter provides a guide to the field for the young scholar seeking to do meaningful research in Political Psychology, and ends with how Political Psychology is useful for the citizens.

At the end of the book (after chapter 8), Marcus provides an extensive bibliography and bibliographic appendix (pages 244 to 256). While pages 244-248 are part of the regular end of chapter references, the appended reference section (coauthored with Peter Hatemi, pages 248-255) includes many interesting topics and research findings on themes such as personality, behavior, vision, genetics, neuroscience, consciousness, amygdala and probabilistic epigenesis. Outside the sources listed here, there is, however, no or very little discussion in the text of these matters except for some article and book titles and a brief note on the importance of these topics. This slight imperfection makes it a nearly perfect textbook on political psychology which volume provides excellent guidance for upper division and graduate students in the field.

In sum, this book is well written, very sophisticated in its references, scholarly research base and citations, and is balanced in presentation. Overall, the book has far more strengths than weaknesses. It is also fairly priced as a textbook and will not be soon outmoded since it is very current in re state of the art. One, perhaps insurmountable hurdle is that because of the high level of sophistication of the text, the average student may have trouble with some of the topics discussed, which may not be so easily grasped. This might mean more work for the instructor using the book, though this is still something to be seen and remains an empirical question which only time and practice will tell.