

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

Answers to Elliott White's questions about *The Nature of Politics*.

(1) **“Is the empirical analysis contained in *The Nature of Politics* consistent with its populational premises?”** A populational perspective is obviously necessary in assessing all aspects of “human nature,” including the way viewers respond to nonverbal cues. That is why our research has entailed comparisons from an early stage. We began with the contrast between similar viewers in France and the U.S. because, if one seeks to know human nature, the first need is to control for cultural variability. I grant, of course, the point about college students. But one has to start somewhere: we started with local students because they were accessible, no one had done research like this in biopolitics, and we had limited funds (with no money for subject fees). Since conducting the experiments described in Chapter 2 of *The Nature of Politics*, we have done work with adults (both lower class and upper class) and with students in radically different kinds of colleges (Grambling State University, a black open-admission school; BU; SUNY Potsdam; and Southern Illinois University). We have also used the same stimuli at different times in order to measure the effect of the social context and the status of a leader. In a review of these studies which Denis Sullivan and I are completing for the forthcoming *Handbook of Political Psychology*, we can now list no less than 16 different variables that seem to impact on the way humans respond to nonverbal cues. Among these, some are clearly population dependent, including socio-economic status and ethnicity (our samples aren't large enough to tease out the way each factor in this category impacts on the system), gender (see article in *Journal of Politics and the Life Sciences*), amount of information, political attitudes, and—for populational purposes most important—personality. This last is an especially intriguing factor, and I have high hopes of doing considerable further work, since as yet there has not been time to analyze fully the data from our subjects' Cloninger TPQ questionnaires (though one test suggests that there are some important effects on emotion that are attributable to personality). It is particularly important to realize that some of these populational attributes may interact in complex ways: socio-economic status seems to interact with gender, for example. Few social scientists deal with systems having as many as 16 variables (and I suspect there are more: we don't have good data on age, for example, because our adult studies were not on the same day as our college ones, and we now know that the time of a study is such a strong factor that the only way to test for other variables is to do the kind of simultaneous multi-sample design done for the first time in

November 1988). In fact, if one looks at the prevailing literature in social psychology, it is shocking to realize that our line of experimentation is relatively rare in the replication of identical studies with different populations varying in age, in nationality, and in socio-economic status. The question of populational approaches and the methods needed to measure them is thus an excellent one, and one that calls for more sustained research projects that can normally be funded at the present time.

(2) **“Is the study of politics an art as well as a science?”** The study of politics, like the study of medicine, is obviously *both* an art and a science. A science is necessary to generate generalizations or predictions of the nature of things. But nature is, as Aristotle put it, that which is “for the most part” or “usually” a certain way; especially in the life sciences, generalizations are at best probabilistic in nature (though recent advances in physics and mathematics make it evident that deterministic solutions are probably special cases even in inanimate systems). Since a scientific theory is thus based on probabilities, it is typically difficult if not impossible to make absolutely reliable predictions about single events in politics as in medicine. That is where the art comes in. Public policy must therefore be an art, like that of the clinical physician. The tension between the art (or applied science) and the pure science is inevitable; as the history of Aristotle's *Lyceum* should remind us, both have a long and honorable tradition in political science as in medicine.

(3) **“Is the study of politics a master art?”** That the art of politics is, in a sense, the “master” art will probably be more controversial: scholars never like to be told that their own discipline or “field” is lower in status than some other field (professors are, like howler monkeys, territorial animals). Still, one can make a strong case for Aristotle's articulation of the sciences, and therewith his claim of a special status for political science. This entails, however, a responsibility: to have a “master” or supervisory status over other sciences and arts, the political science would have to be practiced by those who knew all the other sciences and arts. We are so far from this today that it is probably best to be more modest about our discipline. After we require of all our students something like the curriculum of Book VII of Plato's *Republic*, I will feel better about claiming this type of status for the study of politics.

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The Michigan Journal of Political Science

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