Cognitive Capitalism

Nations can vary greatly in their wealth, democratic rights and the wellbeing of their citizens. These gaps are often obvious, and by studying the flow of immigration one can easily predict people’s wants and needs. But why are there also large differences in the level of education indicating disparities in cognitive ability? How are they related to a country’s economic, political and cultural development? Researchers in the paradigms of economics, psychology, sociology, evolution and cultural studies have tried to find answers for these hotly debated issues. In this book, Heiner Rindermann establishes a new model: the emergence of a burgher-civic world, supported by long-term background factors, furthered education and thinking. It initiated a reciprocal development changing society and culture, resulting in past and present cognitive capital and wealth differences. This is an important text for graduate students and researchers in a wide range of fields, including economics, psychology, sociology and political science, and those working on economic growth, human capital formation and cognitive development.

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Cognitive Capitalism

*Human Capital and the Wellbeing of Nations*

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Preface

Why are we much richer today than our ancestors? Why in the last centuries so many nations have developed towards liberty, rule of law and peace? And why are some nations still on average much richer, freer and safer than others which lag behind? Why do countries and populations progress or regress, prosper or fail, fall or rise?

People as individuals as well as nations had and have to face large differences in given political and economic conditions. And peoples themselves, from historical and cross-country comparisons, largely differ in habits, values, preferences and, less known but importantly, in competences. All these characteristics are connected. Of course they are connected; simple correlational studies show empirical relations. However, mere descriptions of various indicators of development and of their usually positive associations are intellectually unsatisfactory. We want to understand why peoples and societal conditions are how they are, why they are interrelated, what causes are at work and what we can learn to improve the fate of societies. Big questions!

Big questions call for big theories. Nevertheless, for solid answers in the search for reasons and causes we need the nitpicky work on numbers led by epistemic rationality. This is even more important, as these questions are tangential to religious, cultural, ethical and political worldviews. In classical German philosophy and social science such worldviews were termed Weltanschauungen (Jaspers, 1919). They shape our perceptions of what happens around us and also influence our judgement in epistemic questions; in those questions in which answers have to be solely judged according to their approximation of truth and not according to their affinity to our likes and dislikes.

We consider ‘cognitive capital’ to be crucial for economic growth, especially in modernity. Cognitive capital is conceptualised as the ability to think, to solve problems by cognitive means, to reason inductively and deductively, to deal with abstraction, to understand and construct meaning, to learn, to acquire and use true and relevant knowledge. In psychology, this cognitive capital is termed intelligence, cognitive ability or cognitive competence. Cognitive capital has driven and continuously drives technological and
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cultural modernisation. For these macro-social processes, the level of high ability cognitive classes is especially important, shaping an intellectual climate, working through innovation and management, expressing itself in technology and companies, in law and politics, in science and the arts.

In historic development and in cross-cultural comparison, cognitive ability and its rise are related to the emergence of a burgher-civic world, supported by cultural factors furthering education and intelligence. Such a development includes mediated reciprocal effects, from culture via physical, societal and psychological environments to ability and back to environment and culture. This has led in the past and present to differences in cognitive capital and wealth.

However, this is not the only approach developed in the field. What impact do the accidental determinants of geography, climate and mineral resources and the less accidental circumstances of history, politics and power structures have? And what about evolutionary factors? The quality of political and economic institutions? The contribution of a scientific model cannot be sufficiently evaluated by mere empirical proof using data, statistics and causal modelling, but also needs a careful comparison to alternative, complementary or rival scientific approaches.

I hope this book will stimulate discussion and scientific progress. I could not have written it without the help of many others. First of all, every study is built on the work of many predecessors, whose work and discoveries enriched our understanding and thinking. Colleagues helped me through their research and stimulating, sometimes critical, comments. There is a vivid international scene; we remain close by reading the publications of our colleagues, by email and by exchanges at annual meetings. My work benefited from receiving stimulating ideas and extensive data sets. The best way to honour such contributions is by referring to and working with them. In particular, I give thanks to David Becker, Gregory Christainsen and Justus Sänger, who carefully checked earlier drafts of the book and contributed many valuable suggestions. Erich Weede and Garett Jones read my final drafts, which then turned out to be very preliminary versions as they were greatly improved by their advice.

Phil Good and Chris Harrison from Cambridge University Press supported me a lot with their always helpful and appreciative comments from the beginning to the end of the writing and editing of this book and my copyeditor, Kevin Hughes, made my book readable – thanks to you all! We do not come out of nowhere. My parents, Dr Karin and Dr Wigbert Rindermann, had a hard time educating a frequently difficult boy. Also, I remember the attic of my grandfather, Dr Joseph Rindermann, whom I never met; he died around the time of my birth. The attic was full of ancient books on science, humanities and philosophy. In the evening, after his daily strenuous work as a physician, he was an intellectual. Last, but not least, I want to thank my wife and our children for all their contributions to transforming mere existence into life.