

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.

HEINER RINDERMAN is Professor of Educational and Developmental Psychology at Chemnitz University of Technology, Germany. He has published approximately 150 articles and books, and is a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science (APS). His research focuses on cognitive human capital from an interdisciplinary perspective, bringing together ideas on cognitive competence, cognitive development, productivity, politics and culture on individual and national levels.

Cognitive Capitalism

Human Capital and the Wellbeing of Nations

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Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page x</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xv</i>
1 Large Wealth Differences across Time and Nations	1
1.1 Measures of Production, Income and Wealth	1
1.2 Some Country Examples	4
1.3 Problems of Current GDP and GNI Approaches – and Possible Solutions	10
1.3.1 Differences between Various Sources of the Same Indicator	10
1.3.2 Hardly Believable Large or Small Values	13
1.3.3 Differences between GDP and GNI: Rich Countries Transfer Income and Poor Receive	14
1.3.4 Comparison with ECB and Credit Suisse Indicators of Wealth (Wealth in the Narrow Sense)	15
1.3.5 Differences between Statistical Indicators and Observations: Cuba and the United States as Examples	18
1.3.6 Validity Issues and What We Want to Know?	20
2 The Wellbeing of Nations	22
2.1 Health: Height and Life Expectancy	22
2.2 The Human Development Approach	26
2.3 Psychological, Environmental and Holistic Approaches	29
2.3.1 Gross National Happiness (GNH)	29
2.3.2 The Stiglitz–Sen–Fitoussi Approach	30
2.3.3 Happy Planet Index (HPI)	30
2.4 Including Political and Sociological Criteria	33
2.5 Why Still Use GDP?	38
3 Human Capital, Cognitive Ability and Intelligence	40
3.1 Terms and Definitions	40
3.2 Paradigms and Measurement Approaches	44
3.2.1 Education as a Proxy for Ability	44
3.2.2 Psychometric Intelligence Tests	45
3.2.3 Piagetian Cognitive Development	48
3.2.4 Educational Achievement	51
3.2.5 Cognitive Behaviour in Everyday Life and Its Sediments	54
3.3 Contentious Issues	56
3.3.1 Fragmentation and Compartmentalisation in Science	56
	v

vi	Table of Contents	
	3.3.2 Political-Scientific Concerns and Epistemic-Ideological Confoundings	57
	3.3.3 Not All Relevant Aspects of Education Are Covered	63
3.4	Cognitive Development and Its Determinants	64
	3.4.1 Description of Development across Lifespan	64
	3.4.2 Developmental Processes	65
	3.4.3 Genes	68
	3.4.4 Physical and Biological Aspects of Environment	73
	3.4.5 Psychological Aspects of Environment – Family	75
	3.4.6 Psychological Aspects of Environment – Neighbourhoods, Preschool and School	77
	3.4.7 Individual Behaviour	79
	3.4.8 How We Can Bring This All Together: Natascha Kampusch and the Productive Imagination of Malleability	80
	3.5 Furtherance of Cognitive Ability	82
	3.6 Can We Praise or Blame People for Cognitive Ability?	83
4	International Ability Differences and Their Development	85
	4.1 Historical Differences (FLynn Effect)	85
	4.2 National Differences	89
	4.3 Methodical, Political and Cultural Objections	101
	4.4 Everyday Life Evidence and Sediments	112
	4.4.1 Indicators of Cognitive Ability for Historical and International Analyses	112
	4.4.2 Quantitative Data for Statistical Analyses	116
	4.4.3 A Closer Look into Regions: A First Exercise in Cognitive Hermeneutics of Everyday Life	126
5	Why Some Are Richer, Freer and More Democratic	165
	5.1 Internal vs. External and Idealistic vs. Materialistic Paradigms	165
	5.2 Traditional Explanations	167
	5.2.1 Economic Freedom (Capitalism)	168
	5.2.2 Quality of Institutions	170
	5.2.3 Geography	171
	5.2.4 Dependency	172
	5.3 Interplay of Proximal and Distal Factors	175
6	History, Culture and the Burgher-Civic World	176
	6.1 Worldview as the Core of Culture	176
	6.1.1 Misunderstandings, Development and Components	177
	6.2 Religion, Thinking and Society	178
	6.2.1 One Example: Anshu Jain and Jainism	180
	6.3 The Burgher-Civic World	183
	6.4 Reciprocal Causality Leading to Modernisation	185
7	Why Cognitive Factors Are Important: A Theory of Cognitive Capitalism	188
	7.1 General Cognitive Ability Effects	188
	7.2 Higher Level Effects	192
	7.2.1 Society and Culture: Music as an Example	195
8	The Impact of Cognitive-Intellectual Classes	198
	8.1 General Cognitive and Specific Intellectual Class Effects	198
	8.2 Pilots, Airlines and Accidents	200

Table of Contents	vii
8.2.1 Chesley Sullenberger and US Airways Flight 1549	201
8.2.2 Contrasting Examples: Costa Concordia and Ramstein	202
8.2.3 Airline Safety in Statistical Cross-Country Comparisons	204
8.2.4 Accidents, Ruling Classes and Airlines in Turkey	205
9 Methodological Research Problems and Solutions	211
9.1 An Epistemic Rationality Approach to Research	211
9.2 Measurement Problems	215
9.3 Causal Assumptions	216
9.4 Relationship between Individuals and Higher Order Categories (Levels)	218
10 Causes of National and Historical Differences in Cognitive Ability – and Reciprocal Effects	224
10.1 Wealth	225
10.2 Health	233
10.2.1 Parasites, Nutrition and Hygiene	233
10.2.2 AIDS as an Example: Effects and Causes	234
10.3 Politics	242
10.3.1 Peace	242
10.3.2 Rule of Law, Political Liberty and Democracy	244
10.3.3 Meritoric Orientation and Management	248
10.3.4 Fragmentation of Power	251
10.3.5 Demographics: Migration	252
10.4 Modernity and Modernisation	255
10.4.1 When Did Modernisation Begin? The Transition of the Thirteenth Century	258
10.5 Education	261
10.5.1 Reciprocity between Education and Ability	262
10.5.2 Educational Quality	263
10.5.3 Summary on Educational Quality and Methodological Considerations	281
10.6 Geography and Climate	284
10.7 Evolution and Genes	287
10.7.1 Indirect and Tentative Evidence on Genetic Determinants	288
10.7.2 Evolutionary Theories and Indicators	298
10.7.3 Recent Evolution among Humans: Evolutionary Acceleration?	309
10.7.4 Consanguineous Marriages and the Genetic Effects of Culture	313
10.7.5 The ‘Race’ Issue (Biological Categorisation within Species)	316
10.7.6 Summary on Evolutionary Explanations	322
10.8 Culture and Worldviews	323
10.8.1 Animism	326
10.8.2 Judaism	328
10.8.3 Christianity	330
10.8.4 Islam	345
10.8.5 Hinduism	359
10.8.6 Buddhism	360
10.8.7 Confucianism	361
10.8.8 Impact on Cognitive Development and Burgher World	363
10.8.9 Empirical-Quantitative Findings	367
10.9 The Interplay of Determinants	368

viii Table of Contents

11	Global Models for Education, Cognitive Capital, Production, Wealth and Wellbeing	371
11.1	Economy: Produced Income (GDP) and the Wealth of Nations	373
11.2	Politics: Democracy, Liberty, Rule of Law and Gender Equality	377
11.3	Explaining National Wellbeing Differences between Countries	381
11.4	The Impact of Education and School Education on Cognitive Ability	382
11.5	Summary on National Wellbeing Differences	385
12	Challenges of Future Development and First Predictions	388
12.1	Rising Complexity	388
12.2	Demographic Changes	391
12.2.1	Ageing	391
12.2.2	Differential Fertility Effect: Lower Birth Rates among Higher Ability Adults	392
12.2.3	Immigration	396
12.3	Resource Reduction	399
12.4	Climate Change	400
12.5	Rising Inequality within Societies	400
12.6	Predictions in Research	403
12.6.1	Historico-Philosophical Ideas of Progress Versus Cyclic Theories of Rise and Fall	403
12.6.2	Keynes' Famous Prediction from 1930	404
12.6.3	Current Predictions from other Researchers	407
12.6.4	Problems of Predictions	412
13	Models for Cognitive and Wealth Development in the Twenty-First Century	414
13.1	A First and Simple Model: Prediction of Rising Education Leading to Favourable Ability and GDP Development	416
13.2	Sophisticated Model for Ability Development	420
13.2.1	General Assumptions	420
13.2.2	Continuing Environmental Improvements	421
13.2.3	Migration Effects	421
13.2.4	Asymmetric Children Rates and Generation Lengths	424
13.2.5	Identical or Different Cognitive Ceilings: Train or Sailboat Model	428
13.2.6	Intelligence of the Future – Results	432
13.2.7	FLynn Effects Based on Expected Environmental Improvements	439
13.2.8	Combining Birth Rate, Migration and FLynn Effects	442
13.3	Model for Wealth Development	450
13.3.1	Past Growth and Wealth	450
13.3.2	Cognitive Determinants	450
13.3.3	Cognitive Determinants and Baseline Economic Growth	452
13.3.4	Including Further Factors	453
13.4	Wealth at the End of the Twenty-First Century	468
13.4.1	Comparisons with other Models	474
14	Summary, Comparisons and Suggestions	480
14.1	Summary on Results of This Study	481
14.2	Comparison with Alternative and Complementary Approaches and Their Insights	485

Table of Contents	ix
14.2.1 The Relevance of Enlightenment, Elites and Innovation (Margaret Jacob and Joel Mokyr)	485
14.2.2 Institutions: Economic Rights and Freedom (Douglass North, Daron Acemoglu)	486
14.2.3 Economic Freedom (Mises, Hayek, Friedman, Rothbard, Hoppe)	488
14.2.4 The Human Capital Approach within Economics (Eric Hanushek and Colleagues)	489
14.2.5 Effects of Intelligence for the Economy (Garett Jones)	491
14.2.6 The Climate Approach (Jared Diamond)	492
14.2.7 The Genetic-Economic Approach (Gregory Clark)	493
14.2.8 The Psychometric and Genetic-Psychological Approach at the International Level (Lynn & Vanhanen)	493
14.2.9 The Economic History Approach (David Landes)	495
14.2.10 Culture (Lawrence Harrison)	496
14.2.11 The Burgher World as Bourgeois Dignity (Deirdre McCloskey)	497
14.2.12 Interplay of Cognitive Psychogenesis and Sociogenesis (Georg Oesterdiekhoff)	501
14.2.13 Integrative Model: Evolution and Culture as Background Determinants, Cognitive Ability and Institutions as Crucial Intervening Factors and The Burgher World as the Societal and Ideological Frame, All Combined in a Reciprocal Network	503
14.3 What Can Be Done: Human Capital Policies and Burgher World	503
14.3.1 Health	505
14.3.2 Family Environment	506
14.3.3 Formal Education	507
14.3.4 Cognitive Training	514
14.3.5 Welfare Policies	515
14.3.6 Demographic Policies	516
14.3.7 Immigration and Emigration	517
14.3.8 Political and Institutional Reforms	522
14.3.9 Culture	523
<i>References</i>	525
<i>Index</i>	571

Figures

1.1 Income (annual GDP/c) development in different regions from 0001 to 2008 (data from Maddison, 2008)	<i>page 9</i>
1.2 Wealth around the world (annual GDP 2010, Penn V7.1, per capita ppp, $N = 188$ countries)	9
2.1 Life expectancy development in different regions from 1950 to 2010 (data from UN, 2013)	26
2.2 National wellbeing around 2010 (built upon wealth, health, psychology, security-stability, politics)	38
3.1 Raven Matrices-like tasks	46
3.2 Sketch of Piaget’s three mountains task	49
3.3 PISA 2000 Lake Chad task	52
3.4 Development of fluid and crystallised intelligence according to the model of Cattell	65
3.5 Increase of cognitive competences and of individual differences from form 1 to form 9 in the constant norms of form 1	67
3.6 Illustration of positive or negative running, spiral-shaped, dynamical developments	67
3.7 Proportions of variance attributable to genetic and shared and non-shared environmental effects depending on age in cognitive ability	70
3.8 Determinants of cognitive ability of primary school students	82
4.1 Comparison of older and newer data on cognitive ability levels of nations	91
4.2 G factor of international differences in cognitive ability scales	95
4.3 Cognitive ability levels around the world; darker represents higher values	101
4.4 Top cognitive ability level and cognitive achievement across millennia for 99 countries	125
4.5 Core regions of top intellectual achievement within Europe 800 BCE to 1950 CE according to Murray	135
6.1 Macrosocial process of development including worldview, society and the individual	186

List of Figures	xi
9.1 Possible causal paths between two and more related variables	216
9.2 Path analysis with adult educational level, cognitive ability and wealth	217
10.1 Cross-lagged effects; stronger cognitive effect in the raw-GDP analysis; stronger wealth effect in the log-GDP analysis	229
10.2 Cross-lagged effects; stronger wealth effect on cognitive capital in the poorer country sample	231
10.3 Wealth is relevant for the cognitive development of the poor and cognitive ability is relevant for the wealth development of the rich	232
10.4 Influence of education and cognitive ability on health behaviour resulting in health of HIV-infected persons and diabetics (following Goldman & Smith, 2002)	238
10.5 Education, cognitive ability, political modernity, economic wealth, percentage of Muslims and HIV-infection rate N = 143 to 146 nations	239
10.6 Cross-lagged effects; stronger reducing cognitive effect on HIV than of HIV on cognitive human capital	241
10.7 Main results from cross-lagged analyses with rule of law, political liberty and democracy and cognitive capital controlled for wealth	245
10.8 Results from cross-lagged analyses with rule of law, political liberty and democracy and cognitive capital controlled for wealth; stronger cognitive effect on politics than of wealth on politics or of politics on cognitive capital	246
10.9 Effects of meritoric principles on cognitive capital development controlled for past ability and annual GDP/c	250
10.10 Effects of technological, societal-cultural-political and cognitive-intellectual modernity on cognitive capital development controlled for former cognitive capital and GDP	258
10.11 Cross-lagged effects between cognitive ability (as measured by student assessment tests, SAS) and education (years at school), 1970 to 1990	263
10.12 Discipline and students' cognitive competence for 93 countries	283
10.13 Direct instruction and students' cognitive competence for 80 countries	284
10.14 Prediction of cognitive ability by using two haplogroup sets as genetic markers of evolution and by a general development indicator of society (HDI)	292
10.15 Prediction of proximity in cognitive ability by proximity in latitude, longitude, HDI and genes	293
10.16 Cladistic model of the evolution of human populations following Andreasen (2004)	321

xii List of Figures

10.17	Theoretical model for effects of religion on cognitive ability and the development and preservation of a burgher world	324
11.1	Global wealth model	373
11.2	Global politics model (political wellbeing)	378
11.3	The wellbeing of nations and its determinants	381
11.4	Model for education	383
12.1	Relationship between assumed (linear) genotypic intelligence development and (zigzag) innovation over time ($r = .88$; Woodley, 2012)	395
13.1	Education-based estimated cognitive ability development in the twenty-first century	418
13.2	Estimated GDP/c development in the twenty-first century	419
13.3	Migration-ability paradox exemplified for two countries with a $d = 1$ (15 IQ) gap (similar to US and Mexico, France and Tunisia, UK and Trinidad, Germany and Turkey)	422
13.4	Simulation of combined fertility and generation length effects on population development	426
13.5	Simulation of combined fertility and generation span effects on cognitive ability development	426
13.6	Train model of twenty-first-century cognitive ability development	428
13.7	Sailboat model of twenty-first-century cognitive ability development	429
13.8	Same-boat-but-different-team model of twenty-first-century cognitive ability development	430
13.9	Estimated migrant share development in the twenty-first century	436
13.10	Estimated ability development in the twenty-first century based on migrant model 2	437
13.11	Estimated cognitive ability development in the twenty-first century based on FLynn effect and gap closing	442
13.12	Ability changes due to migrant share changes	444
13.13	Final integrative model predictions for the twenty-first century	446
13.14	Effects of the three factors on cognitive development in the West in general, in selected regions and countries and in Qatar in the twenty-first century	447
13.15	Predicted GDP per capita development in the twenty-first century	469
13.16	Predicted economic growth development in the twenty-first century	471
14.1	Summary on education	514

Tables

1.1	Income differences across time and continents (annual per capita GDP and GNI in comparable units)	<i>page 5</i>
1.2	Income differences across time and regions (annual per capita GDP and GNI in comparable units)	7
1.3	Differences in GDP ppp per capita 2000 between Maddison and Penn	12
1.4	Wealth means and differences across regions (assets from Credit Suisse per adult in 2013 US dollar)	17
2.1	Height and life expectancy	25
2.2	Human development indices 1870–2010	28
2.3	Happy Planet Index 2012 and three subindices	32
2.4	National wellbeing index (around 2010)	37
4.1	Results of older student assessment studies (SAS)	90
4.2	Correlations between national measures of cognitive ability	97
4.3	Cognitive ability estimates	100
4.4	Indicators of cognitive achievement in historical development	118
4.5	Indicators of cognitive achievement in modern times	119
4.6	Correlations between cognitive ability estimates and indicators of cognitive achievement in past and present	122
5.1	Paradigms for national differences in wellbeing	166
8.1	Correlations between cognitive ability estimates and technological safety measures	204
9.1	Correlations between variables at different data levels	219
10.1	Correlations between wealth and cognitive ability indicators	227
10.2	Cognitive ability averages, natives and migrants and gains (or losses) for receiving countries	254
10.3	Correlations of modernity ratings and estimates (and meritoric principles)	256
10.4	Correlation between cognitive ability and educational variables	262
10.5	Correlations between educational indicators and cognitive ability	266

xiv List of Tables

10.6	Correlations of geographical indicators and cognitive ability (compared with wealth)	286
10.7	Correlations of skin lightness and cognitive ability and GNI	296
10.8	Correlations between brain size (cranial capacity) and cognitive ability and GNI	301
10.9	Percentages of consanguinity and correlations	314
10.10	Correlations among three genetic indicators	316
10.11	Religions and ability and education	364
10.12	Religions and enlightenment, society and politics	369
11.1	Correlations between background compared to ability and historical indicators of intellectual achievement, wealth and democracy	380
12.1	Wealth increases indicated by GDP/c (\$) from 1930 onward	405
12.2	Correlation of Figure 11.1 2010 wealth determinants with wealth increases from 1930–2010	406
12.3	Hart's chronology of human intelligence and 2100 prediction	410
12.4	Average annual growth rates and achieved GDP 2050	411
13.1	Education, cognitive ability and GDP/c in 2010 and 2100	417
13.2	Cognitive ability and theoretical finishing lines	431
13.3	Cognitive ability prediction 2100 (only based on assumptions on asymmetric fertility)	433
13.4	Cognitive ability prediction 2100 (only based on assumptions on migration), new immigrants with same or different ability levels	434
13.5	Cognitive ability prediction 2100 (based on assumptions on Flynn effect and no changes in migrant shares)	440
13.6	Cognitive ability prediction 2100 (based on assumptions on Flynn effect and changes in migrant shares)	443
13.7	Cognitive ability prediction 2100 (final integrative model)	445
13.8	Cognitive ability predictions (models 2018 and 2011 compared for 97 countries)	449
13.9	GDP per capita in 2010 and 2100 (different models)	451
13.10	GDP/c in 2010 and 2100 (different cognitive models)	454
13.11	GDP/c in 2010 and 2100 (different demographic models)	457
13.12	GDP per capita in 2010 and predicted for 2100 (modifying factors: advantages of backwardness, complexity burden, risk factors, regional Umfeld-neighbourhood)	461
13.13	Correlations of background factors and cognitive ability with growth and production estimations in the twenty-first century	472
13.14	Economic predictions (models 2018 and 2011 compared for 88 countries)	475

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

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 Sanger, who carefully checked earlier drafts of the book and contributed many valuable suggestions. Erich Weede and Garrett 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.