



## Was pre-modern man a child? The quintessence of the psychometric and developmental approaches

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### ABSTRACT

The essay integrates the psychometric intelligence approach with the cognitive-developmental approach or the stage theory erected by Piaget and his disciples. The latter led to Piagetian Cross-Cultural Psychology and the accumulation of an immense body of data. It shows that different IQ levels are indicative of the peculiar stages of cognitive and personality development that characterize pre-modern and modern societies, that is, the distinction between pre-formal and formal thinking. It reveals the true significance of low IQ scores and the rise of scores, known as Flynn effect, among modern populations.

The result is a Historical Anthropology that illuminates social evolution, history, law, economics, politics, morals, etc. This new anthropology contradicts the “official spirit” of the humanities and social sciences of the past decades, both its “cultural relativism” and “universality of rationality”. It resurrects the leading pre-war theories, which were based on developmental approaches, and improves, enlarges, and elaborates them.

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### 1. Introduction

The intelligence scores or cognitive stages of pre-modern peoples have always been low compared to those of modern nations. Therefore, the pioneers of developmental psychology, J. Sully, Henri Wallon, W. T. Preyer, Édouard Claparède, E. R. Jaensch, Pierre Janet, Stanley Hall, William Stern, James Mark Baldwin, Heinz Werner, Jean Piaget, emphasized structural similarities between pre-modern peoples and children. Heinz Werner and Jean Piaget in particular emphasized parallels in regard to logical, physical, social, and moral phenomena. Over the past 80 years, Piagetian cross-cultural psychology (PCCP) has evidenced that pre-modern populations do not reach the adolescent stage of formal operations. Recently, the dominant psychometric approach has shown that pre-modern people have very low IQs. But its researchers are largely not aware of the significance of these low scores: they are symptomatic of the childlike mental age of pre-modern man as compared to

the cognitive maturation of modern man. This essay demonstrates what they can learn from the developmental approach.

In earlier times, a wide range of thinkers used developmental language. [Auguste Comte \(1840\)](#), the founder of sociology, based his theory on the childlike structure of pre-modern man and the psycho-cognitive maturation of modern humans, and considered the latter a prerequisite to the rise of modern society. The last representative of classical sociology, [Norbert Elias \(1982\)](#), built on the same foundation. Between the enlightenment and 1945, and to a lesser extent thereafter, psychoanalysts and historians, especially those who travelled to the Southern Hemisphere, took such notions as self-evident. They include most of the great names we revere today ([Oesterdiekhoff, 1997, 2011a, pp. 25–39, 2000, pp. 49–79, 2012a, 2012b](#)). As [Jahoda \(2000, p. 29\)](#) says: “The topos of the childlike nature of ‘savages’ runs as a constant thread through 19th-century literature and continues well into the 20th century... (the) early writers on child psychology such as Preyer, Sully, and Stern, often made comparisons between savages and children.”

After 1945, especially after 1970/1980, the ideological landscape changed. The World Wars, student revolt, and anti-

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colonialism engendered the ideologies of “cultural relativism” and “the universality of rationality”. The idea that all peoples have the same level of intelligence and rationality (universalism) and that all cultures are unique forms (relativism) overwhelmed the concept of the psychogenesis of humankind from lower to higher stages, and assumed the status of sacred doctrine. This is not the first time that history has crippled science. Roman intellectuals lost the ability to understand the superior science of Hellenistic times, physical science had to shake off the structures of medieval philosophers, Soviet social scientists had to work within the frame of Marxian ideology.

Fortunately, over the last 50 years, developmental theorists have continued their research and enhanced the evidence as to the lower level of pre-modern peoples. It is time to reject the fundamental premises of contemporary social sciences and humanities. It is time to resurrect the insights of the great scholars especially of the Twenties and Thirties. It may take several generations to repair the damage, but the result will be a better understanding of pre-modern and modern peoples in regard to reason, behavior, and morals (Oosterdiekhoff, 2011a, 2011b, pp. 206–220, 2012a, 2012b; Weiler, 2011; Valsiner & van der Veer, 2000).

## 2. Psychometric intelligence research

The peoples of the world show the following intelligence scores: Europe (25 nations) 97.48, Africa (17) 70.82, Asia (20) 91.50, North and South America (15) 87.13, and Oceania (4) 92.25 (Barber, 2005, p. 280). According to Lynn (2006), the average IQ of Eastern Asians is 105, Europeans 99, people from India and North Africa 84, people from Black Africa 67, and the IQ of the Khoisan is only 54. These scores reveal only the intelligence of contemporary generations. Research shows that the IQ of all populations fluctuates over time, when they are exposed to modernization pressure.

According to 1992 data (on Raven's Progressive Matrices), when Britons born in 1877 were scored against those born in 1967, 90% of them fell below an IQ of 75, that is they were below the 5th percentile. All age groups had made massive gains. Those aged 18–32 had gained at least 20 points over the last 100 years, those aged 33–67 had gained 30 points (Raven, Raven, & Court, 1993). Also on Raven's, the French gained 25 points between 1949 and 1974, the Dutch 21 points between 1952 and 1982. West German children gained 20 points on Wechsler tests between 1954 and 1982 (Flynn, 1987, p. 172–182). White Americans gained 25 points between 1918 and 1995, measured by Wechsler-Binet tests (Flynn, 1998, pp. 36 f). The phenomenon of rising IQ was observed in the USA early in the Thirties (Pintner, 1931) and later documented internationally by James Flynn.

One hundred years ago, Italians, Greeks, Spaniards, Russians, and East Europeans such as Baltic, Polish, Romanian, and Hungarian peoples scored 20 to 30 IQ points below the British, French, German, and Americans of that time. Compared to current British norms, their mean IQ was about 50, as low as the lowest-scoring nations of today (Pintner, 1931: 453; Sowell, 1994, pp. 159–166). One hundred years ago, the scores of the Chinese and Japanese were below the West, similar to the scores of the Southern and Eastern Europeans of that time (Lurija, 2002: 42; Sowell, 1994, p. 160). The scores of Chinese and Japanese, living in North America in the Sixties and

Seventies of the past century, were a point or two points below those of White Americans, according to the overview presented by James Flynn (1991). Today East Asians outscore white Americans (Lynn, 2006; Te Nijenhuis, Cho, Murphy, & Lee, 2012). Children aged 6 to 15 gained 20 points on the Wechsler test in Japan between 1951 and 1975 (Flynn, 1987, pp. 172–182).

The gap between Blacks and Whites in the US was greater some generations ago than today, as some authors believe (Neisser, 1998: 5), although other authors disagree. Black Africa has also made IQ gains. Its IQ of 70.82 is close to that of Western peoples 50 or 70 years ago, and better the scores of Eastern and Southern Europeans, Chinese and Japanese 100 years ago. There is no reason to doubt the Khoisan can exceed their present mean of 54. The first data from Latin America show massive IQ gains.

In 1900, no pre-modern or early modern population had a mean IQ above 75, against current norms. And today, no advanced industrial nation, such as South Korea, Japan, or France, has low scores comparable to pre-modern societies. According to Barber (2005), the extension of school attendance explains roughly two-thirds of IQ gains. Of course, many peculiarities of the modern culture have been factors: better maternal care and nutrition, the media, more cognitively-demanding occupations. But the introduction of mandatory school attendance 100 or 150 years ago in Europe and in the USA, the rise in the number of years of schooling, the spread of modern school systems, these were decisive (Flynn, 2007, 2008; Oosterdiekhoff, 2009a, pp. 82–97; Rindermann, 2008).

In what sense do pre-modern and illiterate people have lower intelligence? At first glance, “they can not deal with abstractions”, as test psychologist H. H. Goddard noted in 1913, with regard to immigrants in New York. They have not mastered the deductive and abstract forms of thinking necessary to cope with the usual intelligence test. This deficiency shapes everyday activities in pre-modern societies, although its effects are variable.

Low intelligence, devoid of important deductive and abstract reasoning abilities, has been the norm in world history. Only modern schools raise intelligence to a higher level, and these exist only in modern societies. There is a direct link between the historical and the developmental or ontogenetic nature of intelligence. Intelligence is not an ability complete at birth or a bit later, as was believed in the 18th century. In modern societies, and only there, intelligence rises throughout childhood, and peaks at the 16th, 18th, 20th year or even later. Individuals differ. There are some whose intelligence stops rising at 14 years, others boost their intelligence during the third decade of life. However, in pre-modern societies, most people make no intelligence gains after the age of 10, as I show below.

Children in modern societies do not have the same intelligence as adults but score far lower on IQ tests. Rindermann (2011, pp. 215, 218) showed recently that German children raise their intelligence during childhood and adolescence from 6 to 18 years by an average of 5.62 IQ points per year. The rates vary by age. Children between 6 and 9 raise their intelligence by 8.18 points per year, children from 10 to 14 by 5.77 points per year, and youths from 15 to 18 by 2.73 points per year. Children aged five have an IQ of 93

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