International Psychology: Towards a Hermeneutic Metatheory

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Abstract

Due to the increasing growth of psychology across the globe, international psychology is quickly becoming a more recognized and relevant subdiscipline, both worldwide and in North America. However, the current status and trajectory of international psychology is still overwhelmingly Western, reflecting the values of Euro-American psychologists far above internationally-voiced and -negotiated problems and solutions. We propose that international psychology would be aided by a hermeneutic, or interpretive, conceptualization of culture, inspired by Clifford Geertz, Charles Taylor, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and other theorists who have been widely influential in the social sciences but typically only on the periphery of mainstream psychology. We first argue that a hermeneutic approach culture would better enable psychologists to think about culture as deeply embedded moral visions and folk psychologies within which persons make meaning and practice. Second, we discuss how Western individualism and epistemological dualism have impeded cultural understanding and dialogue in psychology by assuming a particular cultural orientation and closing itself off to others. Finally, we conclude with implications of working with a hermeneutical metatheory for international psychology.

Keywords: International psychology, cultural psychology, indigenous psychology, folk psychology, individualism, collectivism, hermeneutics

International Psychology: Towards a Hermeneutic Metatheory

If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come

because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us walk together.

(Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s)

Due to the large-scale growth of psychology globally, international psychology is quickly becoming a more recognized and relevant subdiscipline, both in North America and worldwide. A commonly cited reason for the growth of international psychology is a mounting, international dissatisfaction with Western psychology's reductionism, fragmentation, hegemony, and local irrelevance (Stevens & Wedding, 2004b). This dissatisfaction has resulted from the interplay between modern psychology's Euro-American origins and over a century of heavy exportation of Western psychological theories, methods, and measures, combined with the growing appeal of "indigenous" psychologies, which are increasingly viewed as more relevant to and empowering of local communities (e.g., Kim & Park, 2007; Moghaddam, Erneling, Montero, & Lee, 2007; Stevens, 2007; Stevens & Wedding, 2004b). Even within the U.S., the rise of indigenous psychologies is viewed as "an antidote to the uncritical application of Western psychology," in terms of a deeper theorization of culture, recognition of the inescapability of value-laden inquiry, and championing of a social justice agenda (Stevens, 2004b, p. 4).

For decades, farsighted American psychologists have hoped that increased cross-cultural contact and communication (the international growth of psychology) would challenge American psychology's historical ethnocentrism, promote greater dialogue with other cultural traditions, and improve the discipline's cultural diversity both at home and abroad (Marsella, 1982; Marsella, Tharp, & Ciborowski, 1979; Pedersen, 1979; Sue & Sue, 1977). To a limited extent, the growth of international psychology expands upon these concerns by critically addressing

problems of uncritical international reliance on Western psychology. We are concerned,

however, that in spite of the best intentions of international psychologists, the current status and

trajectory of international psychology is still overwhelmingly Western, as we briefly discuss

below. We suspect a key reason for this limitation is the lack of a metatheory that adequately

equips psychologists with appreciating, understanding, and negotiating cultural differences. In

this article, we propose such a metatheory, drawing from a hermeneutic conceptualization of

cultural understanding that has heretofore existed only on the periphery of mainstream

psychology. We argue that a hermeneutic approach to conceptualizing culture will better meet

the contemporary demands of an international psychology in the spirit of what pioneering

multicultural scholars have envisioned.

The Unrealized Promise of an Internationalized Psychology

International psychology focuses primarily on "communication and collaboration among

psychologists worldwide in the areas of teaching, research, practice, and public service" (Stevens

& Wedding, 2004b, p. 1). Its goals include improving international relations, addressing global

problems through internationally cooperative efforts, promoting social justice and capacity

building, and assessing cultural dependency on dominant models of psychology. An exhaustive

review of international psychology is well beyond the scope of this article. As we mention

above, we applaud the goals and efforts of international psychologists. However, based on our

review, we are concerned that the promise of a truly internationalized or globalized[1] psychology

is hampered by a reliance on predominantly Western solutions.

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[1] International psychology is sometimes used synonymously with *global psychology*, as the two
subdisciplines overlap considerably in their goals, research agendas, and predominant theorists.
However, whereas international psychology is concerned with relationships between two or more
nations, global psychology is predominantly concerned with relatively worldwide affairs, such as
greater attention to problems and solutions associated with globalization (e.g., intergroup conflict

We outline three concerns here, albeit very briefly, citing examples from the international psychology literature. First, much of the international psychology literature focuses inordinately on the growth of professionalized psychology, with minimal consideration of its interplay with local customs. For example, chapters in the *Handbook of International Psychology* (Stevens & Wedding, 2004a) typically measure the growth of psychology in professional terms familiar to the West, such as education and training (e.g., enrollment, degree programs, and curriculum) and credentialed practice (e.g., number of practitioners, licensure, organizational roles, and relations with other helping professionals and non-professionals). In some cases, this focus is coupled with an implicit denigration of indigenous practices (e.g., reliance on family and community networks, spiritual healers, and shamans).[2] Second, global problems are often cast primarily in terms of Western solutions. For example, in spite of the existence of culturally indigenous approaches to ameliorating environmental degradation (Dove, 2006; Mercer, Dominey-Howes, Kelman, & Lloyd, 2007), Stevens (2007) asserts that Western "reductionistic psychology is germane to a comprehensive understanding of and solution to global environmental problems" (p. 15). Third, international psychology too often relies on Eurocentric ideals embodied in mainstream psychology. For example, Kim and Park (2007) extol indigenous knowledge but only in terms of what appears to be a (Western) positivist philosophy of science, in which the

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and peace solutions; Stevens, 2007, pp. 6-7). This article pertains to both subdisciplines, although we primarily use the term "international psychology."

[2] To cite just a couple examples from the *Handbook of International Psychology*, Ahmed (2004) states that psychotherapeutic practices from Egyptian physicians, clergy, and indigenous healers are "*fortunately* . . . on the decline" (p. 399; italics added); and Boratav (2004) notes that most Turks "*still* tend to rely on their strong family, kinship, and friendship networks . . . for social support"—implying that professionalized social support is either inevitable or normative (p. 214; italics added).

goal of indigenous psychology "is to create a more rigorous, systematic, and universal science that can be theoretically and empirically verified" (p. 151).

As a result of these concerns, we worry that the "psychology" part of "international psychology"—a predominantly Western psychology—may be the primary motor of the subdiscipline, not internationally-voiced and -negotiated problems and solutions. Although there may be many reasons for this problem, we suggest a major culprit is psychology's difficulties with conceptualizing culture. Culture is typically isolated in psychology as a variable, setting, and/or entity that is presumed to be readily understandable by theories and observations that are themselves culture-free and/or value-neutral. The upshot, as many have observed, is that epistemic and moral values of Western culture, including the context of scientific inquiry, are seen as normative or even acultural in nature. As a result of these problems, psychology lacks the cognitive structures required to take culture seriously while self-consciously resisting the impulse to propagate Western models (Maruyama, 1992). (For critiques of how the concept of culture is treated in psychology, see Adams & Markus, 2001; Christopher & Bickhard, 2007; Cole, 1996; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Jahoda, 2002; Kashima, 2000; Poortinga, 1997; Ratner, 2000; Shweder, 1991).

Hermeneutics as a Means of *Thinking Culturally*

The advantage of a hermeneutic metatheory for international psychology is that it fosters what has been lacking in mainstream psychology: an ability to *think culturally*. Although it was originally employed in textual studies, influential scholars (e.g., Clifford Geertz, Charles Taylor, Martin Heidegger, and Hans-Georg Gadamer) have extended hermeneutics as a unique approach for the human sciences, and as an alternative to the positivist science that continues to dominate psychological theories and methods. As reflected by its etymology (from the Greek *hermeneuein,*

"to interpret"), the task of hermeneutics is an inherently interpretive one, concerned primarily with practical understanding of everyday lived experience (i.e., local, engaged experience), in distinction from mainstream psychology's primary task of developing acultural and ahistorical explanatory and predictive models (i.e., universal-aspiring, disengaged abstractions; Packer, 1985; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999).

In terms of international psychology, a hermeneutic view of culture provides not only a rich model of culture but also a means of thinking interpretively about cultural meanings and discerning how they manifest in everyday life. This emphasis on thinking culturally is, we argue, a crucial corrective to psychology's tendency to reify culture into a "thing" or "entity" and thus stereotype, homogenize, and/or essentialize cultural difference (see Adams & Markus, 2001). As part of this corrective, hermeneutics carries crucial reflexive and critical dimensions for furthering the work of international psychology: Psychologists are better equipped to *reflexively* explore how they are individually and institutionally shaped by culture, and that all systems of psychological science are cultural artifacts, in spite of efforts to be objective, neutral, and culture-free. This increased cultural awareness naturally requires *critically* considering other cultural perspectives, including folk and indigenous psychologies of non-Western people and their contributions towards understanding well-being and the psychological dimensions of life. As a result, psychologists would be less likely to pathologize the culturally diverse or blindly impose theories and interventions upon them, as well as be more likely to learn from other cultural understandings and thus revise their own outlook in the process. In short, a hermeneutic metatheory would help us to see that *all psychology is indigenous psychology*.

We begin by considering a hermeneutic view of culture as meanings that structure human existence. We argue that what makes cultural meanings compelling is that they entail a moral

framework or ethos that orients us, often implicitly, to what is good or desirable. We note that a subset of cultural meanings have to do with psychological issues and contend that all people, including psychologists, have folk psychologies. Second, we argue that Western psychologists often struggle to conceptualize culture in a hermeneutic fashion due to a taken for granted ontological individualism. Third, we draw on hermeneutics to posit a non-dualistic view of agency that we believe offers a more 'culture-friendly' view of the person that is more compatible with a wealth of cultural traditions. Finally, we discuss specific implications of a hermeneutic conceptualization of culture for the future of international psychology.

Ethnography of Everyday Life: Folk Psychology and Cultural Ethos

One of the most important and pervasive functions of culture is to orient us to our worlds (Geertz, 1973). This orienting occurs through the cultural values and assumptions that always undergird human activities. According to hermeneutic thinkers, there is no escape from cultural influences. One implication is that psychology can never be culture-free, value-neutral, or ahistorical. Western scientific psychology will always be significantly shaped by Western values and assumptions. As former APA President Janet Spence (1985) concluded, "whatever their intentions, scientists are products of their society and time, and their construction of social reality is shaped by the world view and values of the culture in which they were reared," and these "can influence all phases of research . . . from choice of problem to interpretation of results" (p. 1285).

One way to think about how culture influences scientific psychology is to begin with the hermeneutic premise that the patterns of interaction and social practices we learn and take over from infancy onward are loaded with cultural values and assumptions. Or, better put, they only arise and make sense because of the cultural meanings they presuppose. This means that prior to becoming a self-defined "I," all people have been *thrown* into, to use Heidegger's (1927/1962)

phrase, and then take over, cultural meanings, including the subset of cultural meanings that have to do with psychological phenomena. Jerome Bruner (1990) used the term *folk psychology* to refer to this subset of cultural meanings, defining it as

> a set of more or less connected, more or less normative descriptions about how human beings 'tick,' what our own and other minds are like, what one can expect situated actions to be like, what are possible modes of life, how one commits oneself to them, and so on. (p. 35)

Behavior, emotion, and cognition at the individual level, and social practices at the interpersonal level, necessarily presuppose a local or folk psychology.

In philosophy and some of psychology, the concept of folk psychology is often treated pejoratively and equated with myths, prejudices, and irrational beliefs. But, as Bruner (1990) uses the term, folk psychology refers to important presuppositions about the self that orient us in life and allow us to function in society. As Heelas (1981) argues, "it is not possible to live as a human being without having an idea[3] of what it is to be a human being" (p. 3; see also Taylor, 1988, 1989; Geertz, 1973). By doing an "ethnography of everyday life" we can see how these seemingly simple everyday activities are organized around core ontological and normative assumptions. For instance, analyzing a particular social practice, like going to McDonald's (Christopher, 1996; Ritzer, 2000), or an emotion, like anger (Solomon, 1989), can reveal psychological presuppositions. Consider how most Americans, by the time they are pre-teenagers, know how to go into a fast food restaurant and successfully navigate the menu, order, be served, and eat. Implicit in being able to successfully navigate the social practice of fast food dining is a world of assumptions and values: for instance, the assumption that choice or "having

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[3] Though we would suggest "presupposition" is a better term than "idea" as most of the time these "ideas" operate implicitly.

it your way" is a good thing, the importance of speed, "value" items, cleanliness, and uniformity

of experience across the different restaurants in the chain. And correlative to these assumptions

and values is a certain kind of self.

Beginning with Bourdieu (1977), social practice theorists contend that much of the

conduct in professional contexts, as in everyday life, is *not* "guided by the kind of rule-based

rationality that relies on abstract, universal rules, principles, or theories to tell them what to do

when they encounter particular situations or facts" (Richardson & Bishop, 2004, p. 183). Rather,

much of what transpires is best described as engaged practical activity, a kind of procedural

knowledge that is pre-conceptual and pre-theoretical (Polkinghorne, 2004). However, much

social science research "originates, instead, from non-deliberative, background understandings

that are embedded in our cultures and relationships" (Slife, 2004, p. 157). As a result,

> social science makes assumptions about the nature of persons, the nature of
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> society, and the relation between persons and society. It also, whether it admits it
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> or not, makes assumptions about good persons and a good society and considers
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> how far these conceptions are embodied in our actual society. (Bellah, Madsen,
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> Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 301)

Everyone is socialized into a culture and its folk psychology, psychologists included.

To extend this analysis of culture a step further, Geertz (1973) differentiates two

dimensions of culture (and, to extrapolate, folk psychologies): *worldview* and *ethos*. A *worldview*

could be thought of as a more cognitive aspect of culture or a folk psychology. It provides a

model of what reality is and how it works. This includes laying out views of time and space, the

nature of things, and causation. Within the worldview components of a folk psychology are those

ontological cultural assumptions about what a person or a self is. This defines what constitutes a

person; what a person's resources, faculties, and capabilities are; what states of consciousness are accessible to the person; and where the boundaries of the person are.

Although some attention has been paid in psychology to the worldview dimension of culture (e.g., Ibrahim, 1985; Koltko-Rivera, 2004), the second dimension—*ethos*—has been largely ignored or subsumed under worldview. Ethos is the moral, affective, and aesthetic dimension of human life. As Geertz (1973) describes, "the people's ethos is the tone, character and quality of their life: it's the underlying attitude towards themselves and their world that life reflects" (p. 127). It delineates norms, standards or parameters for desirable ways of functioning and interacting. The ethos dimension of culture or a folk psychology might be thought of as adding an affective, lived, and normative perspective on the folk psychology. Ethos guides the assumptions about how a person *ought* to behave, interact, think, and feel. Ethos also shapes expectations for human development by informing directions for growth and addressing questions concerning the nature of the good life or well-being. For example (as we argue more fully below), Americans are encouraged to be autonomous, self-directed pursuers of self-identified needs, satisfaction, and emotional happiness. But for those in many other parts of the world, the good or mature person might be one who prioritizes the good of the in-group, respects and defers to elders, and strives to harmonize with or adapt to existing social realities.

It is important to remember that worldview and ethos are in practice, in real life, always intertwined. Together these two elements of culture and folk psychology provide both a model *of* and *for* reality—in this way, cultures account for "not simply how things are but (often implicitly) how they should be" (Bruner, 1990, pp. 39–40). There is an interpenetration between the ontological and the moral/ethical aesthetic dimensions of culture and folk psychology.

Culture as Moral Vision

We believe that the implications of what Geertz termed the ethos dimension of culture, and by extension folk psychology, need to be further developed so that we can better appreciate what is at stake in working across cultures and attempting to internationalize psychology. In short, our claim is that the folk psychologies that cultures generate are moral frameworks. To help make this claim more salient and comprehensible, we have suggested that the folk psychology dimension of culture functions as a *moral vision* (Christopher, 1996, 2007; Christopher & Bickhard, 2007). We use the term moral vision to refer to those aspects of culture that shape ontological understandings of the person and normative understandings of the good life or what that person should be or become.

To more fully appreciate this moral dimension of human life, we have found Taylor's account of moral phenomenology to be invaluable. Taylor's (1988, 1989) claim is that all people exist in a moral space or moral topography. By moral, Taylor goes beyond the reigning Kantian views of morality as other-regarding behavior, a view that has its roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition in which morality serves to ameliorate inherent selfishness (Campbell & Christopher, 1996). Instead, for Taylor, the moral is associated with one's deepest understanding of what is good, worthy, and desirable (cf. Brinton, 1987). To provide a sense of what he means, Taylor (1988) describes what is felt when one violates his or her moral framework:

> This is conceptually expressed in a host of ways: as being lost, or condemned, or
> exiled, or unintegrated, or without meaning, or insubstantial, or empty, to name
> some common categories. Corresponding to each of these descriptions of
> breakdown is some notion of what it would be to overcome it, to have integration,
> or full being, to be justified, or found, or whatever. (p. 300)

Here Taylor is describing the experience we all have had of making a major mistake or transgression, resulting in a visceral sense of existential dread or terror (Kierkegaard, 1980; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). In response, we struggle desperately to find healing, redemption, or make reparations. Taylor sees this as a moral struggle. Our sense of meaning, purpose, direction, and worth collapse and we experience at a gut-level how our life is founded upon moral commitments that orient us to what is good in ourselves and life. And yet most of the time we take these commitments for granted. We do not notice our moral sources until we make a mistake or error that jeopardizes our movement towards the moral goods that animate our lives (like a rich family life, a successful career, meaningful friendships).

   A spatial metaphor is especially important for Taylor because he claims it is one's relative position within this moral space that determines identity and orients to what is taken to be the good life and the good person. The existence of some moral space is a "constant" for being human but the moral sources that form the coordinates of this moral space vary across cultures. American cultures, for instance, often encourage such moral virtues as autonomy, responsibility, and freedom, as well as the need to look inward to discern and anchor one's identity. In contrast, more collectivist societies often emphasize social harmony, duty, and belongingness, and find the horizons of identity outside of the individual. The moral sources that combine to form a moral space together define a particular culture's understanding of what constitutes the "good life" and "good person" and the "bad life" and "bad person." The moral space thus defines both what one should be (e.g., happy, positive, self-reliant, etc.) and should not be (e.g., weak, emotional, selfish, etc.). Arguably, scientific psychology also operates out of a moral space—but replaces virtues with notions like well-being, health development, and mental health and replaces sins or vices with psychopathology or stunted development

(Christopher, 1999). It is by our location in these moral spaces that cultures inform us about how

we are doing in life, where we are, how we are "measuring up," how far along the road we have

gone, and in what direction the road heads. It is for this reason that Taylor (1989) states,

"Selfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably

intertwined themes" (p. 3).

As another example of the pervasiveness of the moral dimension in every day, consider

Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller's (1987) account of social communication. They point out how

morally relevant interpretations of events by local guardians of the moral order

(e.g. parents) are typically presented and conveyed to young children in the

context of routine family life and social practices. Those moral premises are

carried by the messages and meanings implicit in the emotional reactions of

others (anger or disappointment or "hurt feelings" over a transgression). They are

carried by the verbal exchanges—commands, threats, sanction statements,

accusations, explanations, justifications, excuses—necessary to maintain routine

social practices. (p. 73)

One implication of Taylor's claim that these moral spaces are inescapable is that the

moral dimension of human life is not optional; it is not dispensable, nor can it be somehow

peeled off (or confined to the realm of the "subjective"). This again stands in contrast to the

typical Western outlook in which the self should be "self-defining" (Taylor, 1975, p. 7), an "I"

that comes to pick and choose his or her values (Bellah et al., 1985). For Taylor and other

hermeneutic thinkers it distorts our self-understanding if we think there is some core to the

person that is not already shaped by cultural values and meanings. We emphasize the moral

dimension of culture in this article because we are trying to encourage psychologists to see that

what is at stake in cross-cultural interactions is peoples' deepest sense of what life is about, what is good and worthy, and their deepest motivations in living.

Ontological Individualism: Getting in the Way of Seeing Culture

From a hermeneutic standpoint, we are not only inextricably embedded in local, moral, and practice-derived identities, but this embeddedness remains largely outside of awareness. As a consequence, we are unlikely to recognize the extent to which we are shaped by our own folk psychologies and their moral topographies. We are further unlikely to recognize our implicit folk psychology as simply one possibility among a range of other cultural constructions. And we are likely to perceive and judge others through our own cultural outlook, or what Gadamer (1960/1975) termed *prejudices*. These hermeneutic insights—which have long been consistent with arguments of influential philosophers such as Popper, Quine, Kuhn, and Wittgenstein—are now gaining empirical support from cognitive science. For instance, research on the adaptive unconscious (Wilson, 2002), automaticity (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999), and implicit cognitive processes (Banaji & Greenwald, 1995; Greenwald, et al., 2002) indicate that we have remarkably subtle and sophisticated cognitive abilities to function in the world and that many of these abilities remain outside of conscious awareness. Indeed, Wilson (2002) concludes that we are often "strangers to ourselves." These cognitive blind spots should raise special concern to the international psychologist in terms of highlighting the discipline's capacity to perpetuate and impose one cultural outlook at the expense of others.

One might argue that the solution to cultural myopia is to examine culture in an objective or detached manner. However, from a hermeneutic perspective, there is no way to become detached observers of one's own cultural traditions; any attempt to objectively "step back" from those traditions is simply making use of other perspectives within the same cultural tradition to

do so (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Indeed, the very attempt to bracket one's own culture is itself a part of the cultural imperative that helps define Western culture. And any distance that one does manage to get from culture is always temporary and provisional. So we might say that it is culture all the way down.

Perhaps paradoxically, we can best know ourselves, hermeneutic theorists would argue, "not by inward-turning and introspection" in the manner of Descartes, "but by catching sight of ourselves as we are engaged and preoccupied in everyday contexts" (Guignon, 1984, p. 232). Similarly, it may be psychology's very attempt to be culture-free and ahistorical that impedes its ability to recognize the way cultural values and assumptions do influence it (Cushman, 1995). By assuming that its rigorous methods would ensure objectivity, psychology has devoted few resources into developing the conceptual frameworks and the interpretive historical and cross-cultural methods necessary to develop our ability to discern the traces of our cultural outlook in psychological theory, research, and practice.

Hermeneutic theory challenges the traditional training in psychology and social sciences to bracket cultural values in the pursuit of objectivity, and instead resonates with the emphasis in multicultural training upon the never-ending quest to become aware of one's own cultural roots in dialogue with others. And yet, despite the best efforts by multicultural theorists and advocates to educate us about our own cultural backgrounds, the task of coming to cultural self-awareness is a Sisyphean struggle—especially for Americans. People in other parts of the world are frequently amazed at how Americans often do not recognize that they have a culture. What makes it so difficult for Americans to recognize the pervasiveness and power of culture? What contributes to us largely thinking that, as Americans, we do not have a culture?

There are many angles from which to view and respond to this question (from the United States' geographical layout to a long history of Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority and hegemony), but we focus here on the impact of a preponderant cultural outlook: individualism. An emphasis upon individualistic and dualistic assumptions in North American and Western European societies complicates the challenge of cultural theorizing by casting the person and culture as two separate entities—an interiorized self is sharply "bounded" against an externalized culture. Central to the cultural outlook of many parts of America, *ontological individualism* is an atomistic understanding of the person that portrays the individual as metaphysically separate from others, society, and nature. This outlook views "human beings atomistically—as discrete centers of experience and action concatenated in various ways into social groups, struggling to reduce inevitable conflicts with others through negotiations and temporary alliances" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 71). Our social participation, ties, and embeddedness come to be seen as secondary or derivative, as exemplified by the social contract theories of government that were so influential in the founding of the United States (Taylor, 1989, 2007).

This kind of individualism often goes a step further in morally advocating the importance of separation, individuation, and differentiation. As Americans, we are encouraged to reach a point in our development where we step back from our social commitments, our values, our lifestyle, and our beliefs and come to determine what we want, need, believe, and value (Bellah et al., 1985). We are expected to detach ourselves from whatever hold our culture has upon us and more consciously, rationally, and deliberately pick and choose what elements to incorporate. Berger (1979) captures the degree to which this is an especially modern orientation. Most people through history have lived in "worlds of fate" as the individual's role in life was typically laid out before the individual was even born; being the son of a baker, one became a baker. But one

of the distinguishing features of modernity in Western societies is that we increasingly live with what Berger termed a "heretical imperative," the need to *choose* our own worldview and lifestyle. And, as a number of theorists both inside and outside of psychology have pointed out, these normative expectations about being self-defined shape our psychological theories in terms of our sense of what constitutes well-being, maturity, or mental health (e.g., Christopher, 1999; Richardson et al., 1999). While these norms have been under attack for some years now by feminists, critical theorists, multiculturalists, and others, they are still arguably the status quo. As many articles in this journal and others attest, there can be little doubt that much of scientific psychology has been shaped by this ontological individualism.

As an example, many mainstream American psychologists lacking the kind of interpretive and critical hermeneutic skills we are advocating often fail to recognize that the realization of inner desires, wants, and needs is often not a moral imperative or marker of mental health for those raised in non-Western societies. Indeed for much of the world (and in much of history until the past 300 years or so), the source of meaning in life and the guidelines for living the good life come not from following inner dictates, but rather are provided by external sources: harmonizing with extended family, kinship, or society, as with familism and collectivism; obedience or faithfulness to God as in Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions; or aligning with the natural order of the cosmos as in Taoism, Confucianism, and Platonism and many Native American traditions. Some philosophical and religious thinkers are suspicious of the "humanism" in Western psychology; they express a deep concern that psychology fails to realize the extent to which it privileges the self. The good or moral or religious life in many traditions involves subordinating, dissolving, or transcending the self, not amplifying it (Taylor, 2007).

Another example of American psychologists' ontological individualism is the tendency to theorize from what Geertz (1973) called *stratigraphic* conceptions of the self. Stratigraphic conceptions portray human existence through a set of onion like concentric circles. Invariably the innermost circle is biological or genetic followed successively by the psychological, social, and (finally) cultural domains. The implication for the psychologist is that s/he can focus solely on the psychological "ring," leaving the other rings to other experts. Geertz's critique—published before Bronfenbrenner's influential ecological model, which is itself clearly a corrective to many of psychology's previously acultural theories—indicates that whether intentionally or not, subtly or not, it is difficult to not marginalize culture, to not place it on the periphery. Even in current psychological models that take culture more seriously, culture is often treated as one variable or one domain, one ring in the circle or one slice of the pie. But for Geertz and other hermeneutic thinkers, culture permeates all domains and cannot be reduced to a single variable. Stressing the hermeneutic ability to think interpretively, there is literally nothing in the social world, and now much of the natural world (e.g., Cronon, 1995), that escapes being an "expression of culture." Each individual is born into a culture and that culture always precedes the individual.

Hermeneutics and the Non-Dualistic Self

We believe that a compelling alternative to ontological individualism for international efforts in psychology can be found in hermeneutic views of the person. Heidegger's philosophical work, in particular, can be thought of as attempting to move beyond a dualistic understanding of the self in which what is essential is the "I," *the cogito* or thinking subject that can reason. One problem with the Cartesian dualistic self is that it is based on the premise that we can abstract ourselves from our lifeworld, our culture, our society, our values, and our beliefs. Such a perspective, according to hermeneutic thought, is not only mistaken, but it encourages an

outlook on life in which we are "bounded, masterful selves" (Cushman, 1995, p. 79), minimizing

all relational bounds but those relevant to our individual strategic functioning and purposes.

Heidegger (1927/1962) believed that this Cartesian over-identification with the rational

mind and conscious intention distorts our self understanding. In place of the "I," he proposed we

think of ourselves as most fundamentally *being-in-the-world*. Being-in-the-world is a pre-

dualistic rendering of our most basic phenomenology. And, instead of viewing "thought" as the

essential property of the self, Heidegger substituted engagement in social practices that are

imbued with cultural meanings. To gain a sense for this alternate view of agency, it is helpful to

turn to Heidegger's celebrated example of the phenomenology of the craftsman. For the most

part, a craftsman does not spend his day as a separate "I" set over and against a world of objects

(tools, wood, workshop). Instead, the craftsman works in more of what might be thought of as a

flow state. When in the midst of work, the craftsman treats tools as an extension of himself. A

hammer is not a separate object but something relatively seamlessly connected to him in a way

that facilitates progress on the task at hand. So if the craftsman is building a bookshelf, what is

salient is the project, the goal, not the discrete elements that help to constitute the project. Indeed,

Heidegger claimed we only notice the hammer as an object when it no longer suits the current

task. If, for instance, we are trying to do carpentry finish work and only have a sledgehammer,

then we become aware of the sledgehammer as a discrete and separate object and one that is not

appropriate for the current task. Heidegger believed we can create an abstract world of objects,

but such a world, what he considers the result of a *theoretical attitude*, is not

phenomenologically fundamental or primary: it is not our most basic way of being in the world.

Typically, Western culture and American thought is undergirded by dualistic assumptions

that take the form of a number of binary oppositions: mind versus body, reason versus emotion,

self versus object, subjective versus objective, fact versus value, man versus man, man versus

nature, and so on. In the phenomenological account of the craftsman, the craftsman subsumes

himself in the larger project (building the bookshelf) and in this there is a nondualistic rendering

of human life. While engaged in the flow of activity the craftsman does not yet create a separate

sense of self set over and against objects. In these moments of flow the craftsman does not

objectify his body; indeed, doing so, becoming self-conscious of his body, would likely interfere

with his skill and lead to a smashed thumb.

Significantly, in this nondualistic snapshot of life featuring the craftsman, the fact-value

dualism that has been so important in Western culture has also not emerged or been constructed.

For Heidegger (1927/1962) *being-in-the-world* is characterized by care, concern, and

signification. What he meant by this is that there is a kind of valuing process inherent in all of

human functioning. Care, concern, and signification are implicit in all thought, feeling, and

action. According to Heidegger, "we do not, so to speak, throw a 'signification' over some naked

thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it" (p. 190). Rather he is saying that

from a phenomenological perspective these things already show up imbued with significance.

But by "care" he does not mean primarily what we consciously care about as individuals. Instead

he is referring to care in the sense of what we care about as a society. So we care about highways

and automobiles, Wall Street, social security, indoor plumbing, and all of the other institutions

and social practices that constitute our societies—even if any given individual reports that s/he

does not "care" about or value that particular thing. For Heidegger, regardless of what we

consciously espouse, our lives as a totality exhibit a "structure of care."

To return to Heidegger's example, the circumstance of the craftsman building something

can be seen as an expression of care, concern, and signification—it is an activity loaded with

meaning and these meanings are inevitably social or intersubjective. So to build a bookshelf presupposes the existence of books and the importance of treating such books with the kind of care that a bookshelf can provide. It is likely that the craftsman never consciously deliberated or intentionally reflected on his own beliefs and values about books, literacy, or the value of knowledge. And yet, in agreeing to build a bookshelf, the craftsman is reinforcing and helping to perpetuate the value that books have in his society. This example points to another dualism—self versus culture—that is transcended in Heidegger's basic phenomenological moment.

Heidegger would claim that most of the time the bulk of our existence is being the *everyman*, immersed in the social practices that our societies lay out for us and into which we are thrown. For Heidegger and other hermeneutic thinkers, we are always already committed to a cultural orientation prior to becoming self-conscious beings. And even when we become self-conscious beings, an "I," we still spend the bulk of our existence immersed in social practices. Thus even though at this moment you may be reading this article and having a variety of reactions and internal commentary about it, you are also likely sitting in a particular setting (your office, coffeehouse) and engaging in a particular kind of activity that is a part of your role as a student, psychologist, or professor. Although we can consciously self-define ourselves and our lifestyle, the hermeneutic view is that this is only the tip of the iceberg—most of who we are is beings who have taken over social practices and the cultural meanings implicit in them.

Implications for International Psychology:

Hermeneutics as a Cultural Friendly View of Persons

We see a number of implications for efforts to internationalize psychology that flow from hermeneutical theory and its emphasis on the inescapable nature of cultural moral visions, the limits of self-knowledge, and the everydayness of culture.

First, as multicultural experts have persuasively argued, to truly engage with others from diverse backgrounds, we need to be cognizant of our own cultural roots and outlook (e.g. Sue & Sue, 1977). As the field of international psychology unfolds, we believe it will be critical for it to work towards clearly articulating the ontological and normative assumptions about the self that are implicated in theory, research, and practice. For psychology as a whole, but especially for international psychology, the rendering of a sufficiently powerful conception of culture is critical. The historical tendency in psychology to minimize the impact of culture on behavior and psychological processes, by either denying its role or by trivializing the constitutive nature of culture, means that dominant folk psychologies will continue to influence us covertly, operating as what Bernstein (1978) termed a "disguised ideology" (p. 31). So, the question becomes not whether culture shapes what we are doing, but whether we are working to be honest with ourselves about our moral visions, our cultural commitments. The cost of not recognizing our cultural assumptions and values is high, especially with international psychology, so it is incumbent upon us to know our own cultural roots as well as we can.

The key point for psychologists interested in working internationally is that whether or not folk psychologies have been explicitly developed, articulated or theorized, folk psychologies *necessarily* exist at a preconscious, preconceptual, and implicit level, where they inform moment-to-moment reactions to others and ourselves (as we have argued above) and underlie implicit understandings of developmental psychology, personality and social psychology, clinical psychology, and even positive psychology (Christopher & Campbell, 2008; Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008). The ubiquity and pervasiveness of these values and assumptions suggest that these implicit understandings and their inherent moral visions continuously shape every realm of psychological research and practice. Consequently, to *think culturally* is far from easy

and requires the disciplined ability to observe our lives, form symbols, and use language to make explicit at least some of what had been implicit in our social practices and learned patterns of interaction (see Christopher, 2007; Christopher & Bickhard, 2007).

Having a robust framework or metatheory for thinking about an international psychology—one that does not assume, from the outset, universal or positivist results but rather creates a perpetual opening—can help us to know ourselves better. Such a framework can alert us to how pervasive culture is in human lives and it can help us think interpretively to discern the specific manifestations of culture. We have stressed how, from the hermeneutic perspective, moral visions necessarily underlie our lives as individuals as well as our professional lives as psychologists. Recognizing this transcendental condition, according to hermeneutic thought, encourages us in the ongoing and never ending attempt to situate our knowledge and our lives in cultural and historical context. Gadamer (1960/1975) terms this effort *effective historical consciousness* and it might be thought as a way of "thinking culturally" to be ever vigilant about how we are expressions of culture and work towards being less "culturally encapsulated." We want to reinforce the idea that this holds true not only for "applied" efforts in psychotherapy, counseling or education, but also for those in "pure" psychological science.

This kind of effective historical consciousness often leads to a critical perspective. By "critical," we mean wrestling with the adequacy and appropriateness of our deepest assumptions. Through understanding other traditions and their underlying moral visions, we can better see through juxtaposition, our own presuppositions. This can invite us to become self-critical and discover opportunities to revise our theory, research, and practice. For instance, with others we believe it is crucial to reflect on both the constraints and affordances that accompany the individualistic presuppositions that underlie much of psychology and Western culture. Thus an

implication of having the kind of metatheory we have advocated here is that it becomes imperative that we become more interpretive and critical, both as individuals and as a field. This falls in line with the philosopher of social science Richard Bernstein (1978) who suggested that an adequate social science should be simultaneously empirical, interpretive, and critical (see also Bishop, 2007; Richardson et al, 1999).

A second implication that flows out of a recognition of the central role that our own cultural traditions play in the social sciences, is that it makes sense to begin to more seriously study and converse with non-Western folk and indigenous psychologies. If Western psychological science is, in part, greatly influenced by a single cultural outlook and ideology, then it is no longer justifiable to create a firewall between "our" psychological science and the indigenous understandings of psychological phenomena that exist in other cultures. In the past, potential contributions of non-Western traditions were largely dismissed as being non-scientific. However, if, as most philosophers of science widely agree, cultural values and assumptions are always present, then we cannot so readily dismiss non-Western approaches to psychological knowledge. The influence of a cultural tradition upon a subject matter, in this case psychology, can no longer be an exclusionary criterion; if it were, there would be no subject matter.

In addition to conceptual and logical reasons for taking other traditions seriously, there are practical, scientific, and moral reasons (not mutually exclusive). Practically, more deeply understanding other cultural traditions can increase the meaningfulness and effectiveness of psychological interventions. When we begin to situate Western psychological theory, research, and practice in cultural and historical perspective, we can begin to appreciate how radically alien they may be for many non-Western people and for ethnic minority members in the United States. Arguably, the lack of impressive results when exporting psychological interventions is linked to

the uncritical imposing of a foreign moral vision upon a native population—often resulting in

distorting and pathologizing their experiences. Even within the United States, ethnic minorities

both underutilize mental health services and have higher premature termination rates compared

to the majority culture. Obviously, many factors contribute to this, but we contend that many of

these discouraging rates are related to the discrepancy between the moral visions of the client

and the psychotherapist and the general lack of awareness of mainstream psychotherapists of

how deeply their conceptualizations and interventions are shaped by an individualistic moral

vision (Christopher, 1996).

Consequently, by recognizing our own cultural roots—both individually and in our

field—we have the best chance of seeing and respecting the cultural outlook of non-Western

people. We can then begin to explore and develop interventions and practices more consistent

with clients' own moral visions. Understanding the deepest meanings that inform others' lives

contributes to a sense of respect and appreciation for diversity. We believe it is only at this point

that psychological interventions have even a possibility of being meaningful and effective in

non-Western contexts. Of course, multicultural sensitivity is now standard in professional

psychology training, but, true to the form of Western individualism, multiculturalism

recommendations focus predominantly on the role of the individual therapist, without adequate

attention to psychological interventions being cultural artifacts in their own right (Wendt &

Gone, 2011). Thus, from a hermeneutic standpoint, we would recommend structural changes in

understanding culture not simply at the level of individual sensitivity, but at how culture is

woven up in how interventions are conceptualized, studied, and disseminated.

A second practical reason for taking other traditions seriously is that it challenges the

narrow, local depictions of human persons within normative Euro-American contexts. Openness

to other cultural traditions may lead to the discovery that non-Western psychologically-oriented practices and understandings may be useful in the West. For instance, indigenous psychologies of Buddhism and Yoga, which blur the distinctions between religion, philosophy, and psychology as defined in Western models, have (according to some) methods that rival Western science in terms of rigor.[4] Much work in this area has already been done by cultural psychologists, indigenous psychologists, psychological anthropologists, transcultural psychiatrists, and transpersonal psychologists, but this research has not generally penetrated mainstream psychology. Ten years ago the position we are advocating might have seemed fanciful or naïve. Yet, the explosion of interest in meditation and mindfulness-based interventions and the flurry of research on their effectiveness is a powerful example of the contributions that non-Western theory and practice can make in Western psychology and behavioral medicine. We have much to learn from qigong and Chinese medicine, yoga, Ayurveda, shamanism, and countless other non-Western approaches to health and healing.

In considering non-Western counterparts to Western psychological science, we must remember that by framing the issues as "psychological" we are already favoring the Western worldview and its dualistic split between mind and body. However, most societies do not rely on this dualism. "There is no mind/body dichotomy in East Asia medicine," Lock (1982) emphasized, "and no concept of mental health as distinct from physical health, either historically or at the present time" (p. 220). In Chinese medicine, for instance, the condition of one's organs, such as the liver, are related to the state of one's emotions and also to characteristic attitudes and psychological outlooks—and all of the individual's health is related to the environment, both human and natural. Given that this mind-body split is uncommon in both human history and

[4] See Alfred (1999); Battiste (2000); Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith (2008); Smith (1999); and Wilson (2008) for summaries of work on indigenous research methods.

most present day cultures, understanding the psychological dimensions of these non-Western

traditions in their own terms without distorting their traditions by imposing our framework upon

them will be challenging.

A third practical reason is that non-Western peoples and ethnic minority members in the

United States are beginning to insist on being equal partners in research and intervention in their

communities. A growing indigenous self-determination movement is leading to greater

indigenous community control of research and health care services (McFarland, Gabriel,

Bigelow, & Walker, 2006). Tribal Nations and First Nations (see Canadian Institutes for Health

Research guidelines) are instituting rigorous institutional review boards that are less likely to

allow research that does not share power and decision making. This might mean that increasingly

the spreading of psychology will not be met with open arms. Instead, we can expect to be asked

to justify not only our research design and interventions, but also the theoretical and cultural

assumptions that underlie these programs. The colonizing and hegemonic nature of much past

research is well-known by native people and steps are being instituted to ensure that Western

values and assumptions are not surreptitiously imposed through current research (Christopher,

2005; Deloria, 1969, 1973; Laveaux & Christopher, 2009). If we cannot think culturally and

critically reflect on the historical and cultural situatedness of our research and interventions, we

can anticipate a less than enthusiastic welcome from native peoples.

In addition to practical motivations, a hermeneutic approach to folk and indigenous

psychologies is also good science. A recent analysis of participants in psychological studies

concludes they are WEIRD (from Western, education, industrialized, rich, and democratic

societies), reminding us that the population of North America, especially introductory

psychology students, is not representative of the world's people (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan,

2010). This is particularly important considering that it has been estimated that only 30 percent

of the earth's population is individualistic in outlook (Triandis, 1989) and American versions of

psychology may only pertain to 5 percent of the world's population (Arnett, 2008).

     A powerful example of the impact of not taking into account the other's perspective on

the quality of science comes from Leonard Syme (2004), Professor Emeritus of Epidemiology at

UC-Berkeley. After a lifetime and millions of dollars attempting to affect public health, he

concluded he would have better spent his career working "with the community as an empowered

partner" (p. 5) instead of employing a top-down researcher-as-expert, or in his words, "prima

donna" stance (p. 1). The repercussions, as he sees it, for the field of public health (and we would

suggest psychology) are revolutionary: "We will have to change the way we classify disease,

train a new generation of experts, change the way we organize and finance public health

education and research, and deal with our arrogance" (p. 5).

     A major challenge for improving the science needed for a culturally robust international

psychology is to foster more interdisciplinary training. Encouraging students to obtain a truly

liberal arts education will give them tools to think interpretively and critically about the status

quo within psychology. Working with other academic traditions, especially psychological

anthropology, but also history, sociology, and philosophy can help us to situate ourselves and our

discipline through knowledge of other cultural traditions and history (see also Cushman, 1990).

Disciplines such as history, anthropology, religious studies, and literature also have much to

teach us about interpretive thinking and can help us to expand our traditional methodologies with

historical and cultural methods of interpretation (e.g., Baumeister, 1987; Cushman, 1995).

     Finally, there are strong moral reasons for taking the other's perspective seriously as a

starting point (Christopher, 1996; Dueck & Reimer, 2010; Teo, 2010). When we neglect to

grapple with the moral visions of other people, we risk objectifying them and dehumanizing

them—treating them, to use Buber's (1970) terms, as an "it" instead of a "thou." From a

hermeneutic perspective, truly engaging with others requires a kind of psychological openness

that can lead to a "fusion of horizons," a melding of outlooks that transforms each of the

participants (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 358). But this kind of hermeneutic dialogue demands a

certain kind of strength of character—for it requires us to approach others as if their ways of life,

beliefs, and values were on equal footing and contain important insights from which we might

learn. Such an orientation goes far beyond the idea of cultural competence, with its connotation

of instrumental mastery, and instead requires what Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) call

cultural humility (see also Christopher, 2007).

Conclusion

In this article we have attempted to bolster and enrich international psychology by

suggesting how philosophical hermeneutics can provide a framework for thinking more deeply

about the ways that culture shapes psychology. Psychology, especially a psychology that strives

to be international, cannot be acultural or value-free. The only question is how self-aware the

discipline will be about the moral visions and folk psychologies that are necessarily embedded in

its own assumptions, methods, and practices. By not paying more explicit attention to culture in a

hermeneutic sense, international psychologists run the risk of conflating international psychology

with a deported American psychology. Given that our world will likely only increase in its global

connectedness, psychologists would be wise to better recognize Western scientific assumptions

as one set among many viable conceptual tools. A hermeneutic approach allows for this

recognition as well as helps to provide the theoretical tools necessary to honestly engage and

respect cultural differences.

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