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On What Basis are Evaluations Possible in a Fragmented Psychology?

An Alternative to Objectivism and Relativism

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Abstract

This paper argues that unification in the discipline cannot be achieved through appeals to objectivism or relativism. Objectivism fails because it bills itself as a value-free tool of inquiry, when in reality it is a value-laden metatheory. Relativism fails because it cannot make judgments among communities, and as such is a candidate for disunity, not unity. We argue that any attempt to unify the discipline must begin at the level of moral assumptions. Morality serves as the ground on which evaluations of divergent discourse communities can and must take place. A disciplinary conversation is required in which various moral systems are considered as unifying strategies. We outline how a productive conversation of this sort can take place.

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An Alternative to Objectivism and Relativism

Arguments by Yanchar (this issue) and Slife (this issue) illustrated that psychological discourse is threatened by incoherence, fragmentation, and perhaps even incommensurability. Notwithstanding the legitimacy of such concerns, Slife illustrated that we need not be concerned with the more severe claim that psychological discourse communities are literally incomparable, and are thus impervious to the overarching critical examination and evaluation deemed necessary by some commentators (Osbeck, 1983; Slife and Williams, 1997; Wertheimer, 1988; Yanchar, 1997). To state that discourse communities within psychology are incomparable, by virtue of their radically different assumptions and perspectives, is to deny the fundamental relatedness that such communities must share in order to be viewed as incommensurable in the first place. Put simply, we must have some knowledge of these communities because we are aware that they exist, and we must have some means of comparing them because we know that they are incommensurable.¹

Problems arise, however, when we confront the next step in pursuing a coherent psychology — identifying the means by which such comparison is possible (and is currently taking place). Although a thoroughly challenging task, the identification of the basis for comparison is crucial, for it is through comparison and contrast that evaluation of the various positions on epistemology, ontology, and ethics within psychology would be possible. To ultimately commit to certain critical assumptions or evaluative criteria, as we approach some kind of unity, demands that we know something about them, vis-a-vis other philosophical and critical possibilities.

The difficulty is that traditional scientific means of comparison and evaluation — some combination of rationalism and empiricism — seem to be failing us. This is the root of the incommensurability of these communities and paradigms as understood by philosophers and historians of science, such as Kuhn (1970), Feyerabend (1975), and Bernstein (1983). Traditional definitions of rationality and knowing — particularly as manifested in our logic of

experimentation — are themselves artifacts of a paradigm, and thus are not the neutral (or objective) languages or methods they were once taken to be. Indeed, one challenge to the traditional notion of progress and rationality is the utter absence of any neutral, sense-datum language with which to accurately describe physical reality (Rorty, 1982; Yanchar, this issue) and through which truth claims about it are expressed (Yanchar and Slife, 1997).

In the absence of such objectivity, we cannot be certain that the philosophical assumptions of any discourse community or theoretical system are the most appropriate, pragmatically viable, or true. In this sense, we must rely on the willingness of all who participate in the discipline to be aware of, and to openly discuss, their assumptions about the nature and direction of psychology. As we argue in this paper, these philosophical assumptions are ultimately moral claims about the nature of human existence and its systematic investigation; thus it is at the level of these implicit moral claims that any suitable evaluation will begin. Through dialogue regarding various moral perspectives, including comparison and evaluation of their relative merits, we open the possibility that some consensual moral perspective (and accompanying philosophical commitments) may emerge as a unifying factor, while others will and must be rejected.

Although psychology as a discipline has not historically and consciously deliberated over the question of its varied moral underpinnings, it must begin a dialogue at just this level if progress toward unity is to occur. However, the initiation of dialogue regarding the development of a consensual moral perspective is not an easy task. Relativism is often invoked as a default response to the challenge of moral and philosophical diversity, a position which assumes that there can be no general morality and thus no coherence or rationality among communities. We argue, to the contrary, that there is a general moral order that takes local moral perspectives into account, thereby allowing for the possibility of comparison, contrast, and evaluation at the metalevel. Indeed, in order for local moral orders to exist and to be known, this general moral order must already be in place and implicitly understood.

Science and Values

The failure of traditional science to provide objective or neutral comparison and evaluation no doubt stems from the historically contingent and morally situated nature of any human endeavor: What we are doing, how we are doing it, and why we are doing it, are inextricably bound to the context in which the act is situated. For example, scientific inquiry is conducted in an empirical fashion not because empiricism is an absolutely veridical and indubitable epistemic standpoint, but because the idea of empiricism is inherent in the deepest values of the historical context of modern science. Empirical methods have been valued because prevailing beliefs point to empiricism as the appropriate — indeed the morally correct — way to acquire dependable knowledge.

The results of our scientific work in general, and the perspective we take when evaluating the work of others, are then based on those values and are at least partly a reflection of that historical context (e.g., Danziger, 1990; Gergen, 1985; Matsumoto, 1994; Yanchar 1997). Indeed, any epistemology or ontology will, at bottom, seem compelling not because its veracity is absolutely beyond question, but because it coheres with or co-constitutes the values already presupposed (e.g., empiricism and materialism follow logically from a commitment to naturalism). Philosophers have recognized the perspectival nature of science when they speak of the value-laden nature of scientific language and discourse (e.g., Feyerabend, 1975; Hesse, 1980; Lakatos, 1970; Newton-Smith, 1981). Such thinkers have shown that the vocabulary we use in describing and explaining the natural world is theoretically-loaded, exclusive, and ultimately the by-product of particular philosophical and moral perspective.

Nowhere is the value-laden and perspectival nature of scientific work more obvious than in the traditional scientific method itself — the mechanism which some have advanced as the “great hope” in uniting or evaluating discourse communities within psychology (see Rychlak, 1988; Stanovich, 1998; cf. Yanchar, this issue). Within psychology, method is commonly viewed as a value-neutral process that enables the objective description and explanation of raw human experience. Through this neutral process, it is assumed that the truth-value of knowledge

claims can be objectively ascertained. This approach to unity and science, however, overlooks the fact that method is not a neutral, self-correcting process that has been verified and validated according to some objective and external standard. Rather, method is an invention of philosophers and scientists with particular philosophic “axes” to grind and values to promote.

Most obviously, the scientific method is based on axioms (i.e., foundational moral claims) such as determinism (i.e., prediction and control), materialism (i.e., operationism), atomism (i.e., reduction and parsimony), and universalism (i.e., replication) (Slife, Hope, & Nebeker, in press). These axioms were progressively organized into a comprehensive system by historical figures such as Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, who helped establish the Enlightenment perspective, and at the same time undermine the hegemony of tradition then associated with the church of Rome. In helping to establish the Enlightenment perspective, and thereby advancing values such as determinism, materialism, and others, these thinkers developed a method that would produce mechanical, empirical, universal findings. These values, which have long informed traditional scientific theorizing and research, have become so established in some quarters of the behavioral sciences that they are not viewed as historically-formulated principles at all, but rather as indubitable facts of human nature and its systematic investigation. Of course, there is no guarantee that these values advanced as part of the Enlightenment worldview are true. As is the case with axioms in any field of endeavor, there can be no independent test of their veracity. The extent to which we view them as compelling and useful is the extent to which we endorse and take part in the Enlightenment agenda, rather than some other agenda.

Like any set of fundamental values, the axioms of the scientific method function as an implicit morality. Because it is assumed that reality is material, atomistic, and universally lawful, scientists are obligated to use a method that is attuned to like phenomena. In order to conduct morally permissible scientific research, then, one must assume the existence of only those entities or substances that fit squarely within the ontological (materialism) and epistemological (empiricism) boundaries of traditional science. The failure to acknowledge these scientific precepts, when conducting the scientific investigation of human beings,

constitutes a breach of ethics. For example, potentially important aspects of human experience that do not fit within these parameters, such as paranormal phenomena, free will, or spiritual experience, are typically rejected from scientific accounts because they are patently contrary to prevailing beliefs about what we can reasonably accept as ethical scientists (for example, scientists do not generally accept divine inspiration as an explanation of culturally aberrant behavior).

Indeed, it would seem that the only morally legitimate explanation of behavior would come as an appeal to natural, material causes, such as genetic endowment, neurology, stimuli, and so forth. The rejection of non-material phenomena in psychology may be extending to psychological disorders themselves, where psychologists increasingly call for prescription privileges. The logic of this push toward prescription privileges seems to be that because only physical matter has real (i.e., scientific) existence, psychological phenomena are fundamentally a product of neural anatomy and physiology. Therapeutic interventions should thus transpire at this biological level (e.g., drugs). It is in this sense that traditional scientific theorizing and research has been exclusive, systematically rejecting such phenomena that are thought to create “ontic bulge” (cf. Dennett, 1969, pp. 19-42). Furthermore, scientific research has come to be viewed as the only legitimate, and thus moral, way to learn anything meaningful about the nature of human beings (cf. Weizenbaum, 1976, pp. 1-16). Indeed, it seems obvious to many psychologists that it would be immoral not to use the scientific method when answering questions about human phenomena or when solving human problems, even if such scientific work involves the deception of research participants (Christensen, 1988).

To argue that the scientific method is an artifact of Enlightenment values regarding epistemology, ontology, and so forth, is to argue that it is as contextual as any other human endeavor and thus unable to provide neutral or objective comparison and evaluation. The axioms upon which the scientific method is based, and which are not independently verifiable, amount to claims about how we ought to view the physical universe, including human existence within it. Though the traditional scientific approach to theory construction and method has

dominated psychology's shorter history (i.e., from the formal founding of psychology), there is clear evidence in psychology's longer history of a wide array of theoretical and methodological approaches not only for doing psychology, but also for unifying psychology (Yanchar and Slife, 1997). Just as the scientific method will implicitly (if not explicitly) press its own moral agenda, so will the other theoretical and methodological approaches. Thus, the claim that a method or perspective is historically contingent and exclusive implicates not only the traditional scientific method, but other approaches to methodology, human science, and psychological theory as well. Indeed, any method or theory will emerge from a particular community or context, and thus will be a reflection of the values (e.g., epistemological and ontological commitments) that are part and parcel of the fabric of that community or context. In this sense, morality cannot be separated from the project of knowledge production.

Morality, then, is the starting point for any unification effort, however pluralistic or reductionistic this unity might be. Knowledge-producing disciplines inevitably have varying discourse communities, because this variance is part of the creative tension necessary to generate new ideas. Still, for these various discourse communities to cohere as a discipline--to form a community of communities--there must be certain shared criteria for evaluating the various knowledge claims of each community. Otherwise, every community would be incomparable to every other community, and no adjudication of competing claims would be possible. The question we are asking here is: From where do these criteria originate? The answer cannot be science, because science requires these criteria to even begin investigation. The answer has to be the moral system endemic to the historical contexts in which knowledge-producing disciplines are developed and sustained. Therefore, when a discipline is threatened with disunity and fracture, it is at this level of contextual morality where unification efforts must begin.

The fundamental nature of moral precepts is increasingly acknowledged among psychologists; all theoretical and methodological approaches are suffused with values of one sort or another (e.g., Richardson and Fowers, 1998; Robinson, 1992; Prilleltensky, 1997; Slife & Williams, 1995). In fact, this recognition of the value-ladenness of psychology has served to

increase our sensitivity to the number of discourse communities within psychology, because each community makes its own moral claims and thus makes its own epistemological and ontological assumptions about psychological phenomena. This wide diversity of moral perspectives creates practical problems for the discipline. As many psychologists have observed, the divergent moral assumptions (including philosophical commitments) of the various discourse communities are often incompatible, resulting in a lack of unity, dialogue, and progress (Hoshmand and Martin, 1994; Slife & Williams, 1997; Yanchar, this issue; Yanchar and Slife, 1997). Without some degree of unification, psychology risks either becoming fractured and subsumed by other disciplines that are considered more fundamental, or becoming irrelevant altogether.

In order for psychology to remain viable as a discipline, psychologists must come to some agreement on what psychology should value. Such agreement would provide a common moral backdrop and the possibility of epistemological and ontological coherence. However, with the process of science inherently value-laden, how do psychologists attempt to broker among competing local value systems including their indigenous epistemologies and ontologies? No single discourse or research community within the discipline seems able to claim a privileged status regarding its moral perspective and philosophical assumptions, because such communities are generally viewed as parochial and idiosyncratic. Although we cannot escape the need to confront the moral perspective and implications of any discourse community, the project seems plagued by a kind of relativism.

Default Relativism

The relativism described here is default in the sense that it seems obvious, is easily and implicitly assumed, and has not been carefully examined within the discipline. In essence, relativism is the claim that competing communities and diversity of truth claims within psychology should all be recognized as making legitimate contributions to knowledge, at least for their local community. All competing communities are thus equally truthful, insofar as we consider the context of their origination and application (e.g., Rorty, 1979). In fact, according to

relativism, truth claims apply only to the local community from which they emerge, and may only be judged according to the standards of that community.

The same can be said for local morality: moral claims, just like truth claims, are made and evaluated within individual communities. Only the members of a local community are in a position to determine what is good or bad, right or wrong, and so forth, for their community. Judging the correctness of a community's moral claims by the standards of another community is, according to relativism, immoral (i.e., intolerant). From the relativist's perspective, communities are self-contained, incommensurable, and fundamentally incomparable. That is, they are not only profoundly different (i.e. incommensurable), but also so different that we would have no assurance of any common criteria with which to compare communities (i.e., incomparable).

Such relativism is clearly manifested in psychology, where it is often implicitly embraced as a way of dealing with theoretical and methodological diversity (e.g., Gergen, 1985; cf. Fowers and Richardson, 1996; Gantt, 1994; Slife and Williams, 1995; Yanchar and Slife, 1997). Examples within psychology include the emergence of social constructionism as an overall approach to theory construction and knowledge generation, and eclecticism as a practical approach to therapy. According to advocates of social constructionism, the divergent communities and paradigms of psychology are no different from any set of divergent communities and cultures. Each society constructs its own meanings, including its own moral systems and epistemologies (e.g., Danziger, 1990; Gergen 1985). As such, the notions of truth and morality for one community are often incompatible with the notions of truth and morality for another community. The social constructionist approach to these communities is to affirm (or respect) all communities, because there is no other alternative. The prevailing moral system in a particular culture is supported and protected by that culture's power structure and history. To impose it on another culture would be to assume some superiority that transcends cultures, yet there are no transcendent criteria to evaluate this superiority according to social constructionism.

Hence, all systems of thought — whether moral, political, or scientific — are relative to, and thus contained within, the cultures from which they emerge.

Another example of relativism in psychology is some forms of eclecticism (cf. Slife, Reber, and Gantt, in press). Because each therapeutic technique is supposedly developed within a unique theoretical system, each will make unique claims about the nature of human existence and the course of therapy. Psychoanalysts value self-awareness and unconscious conflict, for instance, while humanists value individual subjectivity. However, no single therapeutic orientation is thought to be superior to another; rather, each technique must be carefully used with a client in a context that seems appropriate. In this sense, the value of the technique employed is considered to be relative to the client's own needs and values. This is the same relativism seen within the discourse communities of psychology — that of being respectful and not attempting to evaluate the various, often contradictory and competing, systems and theories available. With relativism, there is no choice but respect and tolerance, because there is no cross-contextual criterion that is fair to all clients. The net result is that no overarching moral judgments are permissible.

When confronted with opposing truth claims or local moral orders, a relativist is likely to invoke both political and moral tolerance. Political tolerance implies that people and their beliefs should be protected from oppression (i.e., all persons have equal rights), whereas moral tolerance implies that all local moral orders are equally correct (i.e., proper conduct can only be determined within a particular culture). Relativists typically presume both types of tolerance, assuming that political tolerance implies moral tolerance, that protection from oppression implies the equal correctness of all ideas.

From this perspective, it is easy to see why relativism is so commonly assumed: it not only protects discourse communities from oppression, but also purports to value each community equally. This freedom and this egalitarianism is welcomed in a discipline with so many different and competing theoretical orientations, not to mention a discipline often dominated by U.S. political ideals. Indeed, relativism is key to the current plethora of ideas, theories, and

techniques that fill psychology. All ideas are protected, and all ideas are valued, at least in principle. Consequently, no ideas have preeminence and very few ideas have been discarded outright.

The Inadequacy of Relativism

Although the relativism described here helps us appreciate the uniqueness of competing moral orders within psychology, there are three principal reasons why it is not an effective way of dealing with the project of evaluation and moral consensus, and thus why it cannot provide any tenable kind of unity in psychology. First, political tolerance does not require moral tolerance. Political tolerance presumes that all people have rights, whereas moral tolerance presumes that all people are right (relative to their own contexts). Just because one favors the protection of certain groups from oppression does not mean that one has to consider them to be morally correct. Even in the United States, where political tolerance is highly valued, people are encouraged to make moral judgments and to vote their conscience. Although we will attempt to show that discourse communities require a kind of political tolerance, and thus some protection from oppression, the notion that this also requires a priori the moral equality of such communities renders relativism ipso facto incapable of judgment among them.

Second, relativism assumes that the incommensurability of “local” groups implies their incomparability. That is, the many deep differences among groups makes any comparison among them impossible. As Slife (this issue) has argued, however, discourse communities can be profoundly different, yet still be subject to a more general kind of comparison. Indeed, the very existence of discourse communities implies their recognition — in the literal sense of “having seen before” — from the vantage of another community. If the knowledge communities within psychology are like “ships passing in the night,” as relativism would imply, then we would not know of their existence. However, to know that “ships” do “pass” one another, requires a recognition that one is on a “ship” and that one is “passing” something similar. Likewise, for a knowledge community to exist as a community, persons within the community must be aware that there are other communities against which the community is compared. This

means that ideas of “community” or “culture” do not exist unless the people in those communities and cultures are exposed to other (fundamentally different) communities and cultures. In so doing, local communities and moral orders exist, at least in part, in comparison with and in contrast to other local communities and moral orders. There must be something outside the community for that community to reflect on its "local" nature.

A specific example from psychology illustrates this point. Humanism, as a theoretical tradition with particular moral underpinnings, does not make complete sense unless it is compared and contrasted with traditions based on different moral underpinnings, such as behaviorism. Only in comparison with behaviorism’s lack of “human elements” does humanism have any theoretical clout. If both behaviorism and humanism were merely self-contained theoretical perspectives, they would be unaware of each other and would not require each other’s historical and theoretical context in order to be understood. In this sense, the existence of a community or local moral order requires that there are other communities or moral orders against which the one’s community or order is compared. In short, there must be a community of communities for any communities--a nonlocal moral order--to exist in the first place.

Third, relativism fails as a response to the need for evaluation and unity because it is ultimately a form of disunity. By definition, relativism views discourse communities or theoretical perspectives as being self-contained, individualized groups and cultures. As such, these individualized cultures have not only incommensurable but also incomparable value systems (cf. Slife, this issue). Although relativism may assume that some modicum of translation can occur among these communities, it will also assume that some core aspects of the community cannot be communicated, and thus compared, contrasted and evaluated through a common standard. In this sense, relativism focuses on local exclusivity, because it is the only at the local level that standards can reside.

Because relativism does not postulate the background of a larger “community” from which the very existence and identity of the local communities are taken, it cannot illuminate the nonlocal morality necessary for the larger community to exist. This means that relativism is

atomistic, rather than holistic. Atomists assume that all entities, including the smallest entities, gain their qualities or characteristics exclusively from what is inherent in the entity itself — in this case, the local community. Holists, on the other hand, assume that all entities, even atoms, cannot be completely understood without some context for their existence. In the case of the atom, it cannot even be a small thing with its properties inherent within itself without some comparison to bigger things — such as its relation to other atoms — which do not affect its properties. The problem with relativism, then, is that it can never link all the atoms of psychology's discourse communities; it doesn't explicate the necessary background or interaction that allows these atoms to be atoms. At best, then, relativism is incomplete; more likely, however, relativism cannot in principle appreciate the larger moral backdrop that allows communities to be communities, and thus cannot provide a tenable approach to understanding the diversity and incompatibility within psychology.

Characteristics of a Nonlocal Moral Order

The task of unification, then, demands that we move beyond objectivism--obedience to a supposedly truth-producing method--and beyond the default relativism described here. Such a move requires that we begin our comparison, contrast, and evaluation of discourse communities at the level of their moral underpinnings. The recognition and development of a nonlocal moral order, which can emerge from this examination and evaluation, would provide a moral starting point for unity and philosophical coherence within the discipline (for example, common epistemological and ontological commitments). Such a consensual starting point is notoriously difficult to establish, however, and has been seriously challenged by thinkers within psychology (e.g., Gardner, 1987; Koch, 1981; Krech, 1970).

It is our position, to the contrary, that these challenges are not insurmountable and do not preclude the acknowledgment and development of such a starting point. Still, such a starting point cannot appeal to traditional foundationalisms based on objectivist metaphysics (e.g., Staats, 19xx). Indeed, we contend that careful work, under the assumptions of philosophical hermeneutics (particularly as explicated by Gadamer, 1985; Taylor, 1985; and Bernstein, 1983)

are the most promising in this regard. Since default relativism and the supposed incomparability of communities are not the impediments they are often thought to be, it should be possible to select (via careful examination and evaluation) the common values and assumptions that productively inform and unify the discipline. However, such unity is not forthcoming without extensive reflection on what a suitable moral order would be like. We suggest four characteristics, consistent with philosophical hermeneutics, that would guide a disciplinary conversation about the nonlocal order which would unify psychology.

First, any candidate for nonlocal moral order will emerge from a local moral perspective (or from several local moral perspectives), yet be applicable and responsive to the entire discipline. Indeed, any moral order would be contextual in this way — it would have to exist “in” the local itself and yet have import for, if not some commonalty with, other local orders. Proper candidates would be local orders that seem necessary to make sense of the nonlocal community of communities, and nonlocal orders that appear necessary to make sense of the local moral orders. Any candidate for nonlocal morality must be openly aware of its own local or contextual nature, and be open to continual re-examination from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

The terms local and nonlocal may seem to imply that something and its contrary exist at the same place and time. While this contrasting relationship may challenge conventional assumptions of logic, it is not new to psychology. Rychlak (1994), among others, has shown the importance of oppositional relationships that co-exist and even require one another. Although not always recognized, gestalt psychologists, also, require the co-existence of seemingly contradictory properties (Slife, 1993). For instance, parts are both dependent and independent of the whole — a "part of" and "apart from" the whole. Parts are dependent because they get their meaning and "partness" from their relationship to the other parts. Parts are also independent because they are recognized as having separate identities from the whole; otherwise they would not be singled out as parts. This whole-part relationship is similar to the relationship between local and nonlocal moral orders. The meaning of local orders are derived, in some sense, from

the nonlocal, but this meaning also has its own separable and local identity. All whole-part relationships are of this nature.

Second, any candidate for nonlocal order would also have to be sensitive to the possibility of dramatic and incommensurable differences between discourse communities. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the more dramatic these differences are, the more important their relationship is to the local order in question. For example, when faced with a community that is different in the most significant of ways from one's own community (i.e. incommensurable differences), one becomes aware of many things about one's own community that were hidden prior to the encounter. In fact, it is by virtue of these deep differences among communities and their local moral orders that they differentiate themselves in the first place.

In this sense, to understand one's own community, one must truly come to understand the incommensurable differences with other communities. It is in recognizing, comparing, and contrasting these differences that self-knowledge and self-awareness takes shape. Without the ability to recognize, compare, and contrast these differences, one's community would have no identity in the conventional sense — as a community among communities. Therefore, any candidate for nonlocal morality must facilitate communities attempting to understand the incommensurable differences of each other, because awareness and understanding of any particular community is at stake.

Third, one must develop a nonlocal moral order with extreme caution, perhaps even a type of humility. The awareness and understanding of one's own, and thus another community, demands that one approaches the incommensurably "other" very carefully (Bernstein, 1983). No understanding will occur through an arrogance that assumes one's own community has a privileged status, or that seeks to impose its own order on the other. Such arrogance makes possible only projections or even reflections of oneself, and, thus, the depth of understanding of the other that is necessary for true understanding of oneself is prevented. In other words, the different parts of the whole (i.e., the communities of the community) would not be differentiated, so that there would be no whole to give meaning to its parts.

On the other hand, to begin to adequately understand another discourse community, we must assume that incommensurable differences are to some degree irreducible to one's own community. That is, we may not be able to use our contextually dependent ways of knowing to fully comprehend the other community. Consequently, one has to approach the other with humility — recognizing that there are, in many cases, defensible reasons for the value system upheld in another community, and that another value system may provide something that our current one does not. In this sense, it is important that we approach these differences as openly and humbly as possible.

However, we must be careful to distinguish this openness and humility from objectivism and relativism. Unlike objectivism, it cannot mean that the understander gives up or suspends his or her own community, history, or context. Rather, one's own history and context are “fused,” to use Gadamer's term, with the history and context of the other community. Also unlike relativism, this fusion could (and sometimes must) include a negative judgment of the other, particularly after the other has been humbly approached for understanding. That is, the community could disapprove of, and even work against, the other community, but still view it as part of its community of communities (e.g. as humanism does with behaviorism). This is a fusion that would not rob the other of its own meaning, because to do so is to rob one's own meaning (that is gained in comparison with and contrast to the other). However, this fusion would not and could not suspend moral judgment and accountability, because as incommensurable as the other community may be it is still part of a community of communities and must abide by its nonlocal moral standards.

Fourth, part of such nonlocal moral standards is acceptable consequences for human beings. Many have argued that several assumptions of traditional psychological theorizing have been inappropriate for or harmful to higher moral interests, if not the possibility of morality itself. Assumptions that have been critically examined in this regard include determinism (Rychlak, 1979; Slife and Williams, 1995), reductive materialism (Hyland, 1995; James,

1902/1929; Robinson, 1995; Slife and Williams, 1995), liberal individualism (Cushman, 1993; Richardson, 1998), ethnocentrism (Moghaddam, 1987), and gender bias (Tavris, 19**).

Although psychologists from different research or discourse communities will surely disagree about the most appropriate moral commitments and consequences for psychology, many would agree that the search for appropriate and non-damaging assumptions about people is important. Moreover, any assumption that renders the moral aspects of the fragmentation issue impossible or inconceivable is itself undermining the process of unity. Given the fundamental necessity of morality for science and disciplinary actions, any assumption – such as efficient causation (e.g., Rychlak, 1979; Slife, 1993; Slife, in press; Williams, 19xx) – that would render morality meaningless is inherently inappropriate.

Conclusion

We have argued that any method, theory, or general approach to doing psychology science will be informed by certain philosophical assumptions — for example, epistemological and ontological commitments. These philosophical assumptions are affirmed not because they are absolutely true, but because they are part and parcel of the values that are presupposed within a particular research or discourse community. In this sense, a research or discourse community's deepest commitments to empiricism, determinism, or other assumptions are implicit moralities or value judgments about how we ought to view human beings and about how we ought to conduct research. The outward manifestation of a science is ultimately a reflection of its underlying moral agenda.

Informed by radically different moral claims, the many discourse or research communities of psychology leave the discipline with a serious challenge to its sustained existence. We have argued that some kind of evaluation of the many possible moral claims of psychology (stemming from many different discourse or research communities) is required before any serious approach to the unification of psychology can be realized. With a common value system or moral backdrop in place, the discipline may be unified in its aims, even though there would be a wide range of research questions and theoretical perspectives available. The

challenge of developing a common moral perspective is difficult, however, because communities of scientists have been viewed by some as relativistic and thus impervious to comparison and contrast with other such communities. Ultimately, if such a relativism is true, then there can be no legitimate evaluation of the various moral perspectives offered by discourse communities.

We have argued that such claims of relativism are overstated, and that some community of communities must be in place for one to view itself as a community (self-contained or otherwise) in the first place. The existence of such a larger community of communities opens the possibility of dialogue and interaction between various moral and philosophical positions. We have argued that through such dialogue and interaction, some common moral perspective can emerge, allowing for a more harmonious discipline of psychology. It is beyond the scope of this paper to state exactly what such a moral perspective would be like, but we have provided four criteria that we contend must be satisfied for this project to bear fruit.

With a common moral perspective in place, we may gauge whether our research and theorizing has harmful or beneficial effects on people, whether it takes us in generally desired directions, and whether we are in fact deepening and enriching our understanding of human existence. Clearly, there is no need for a totalizing form of unity that would have all psychologists adhere to a single, narrow theoretical orientation. But there is a legitimate hope, we feel, that some common set of assumptions about human existence and its systematic investigation may allow the discipline of psychology to openly and reflexively develop in a way that contributes to the greater good of human culture. We view the recognition of the inevitably moral nature of human activity — including scientific activity — as the first step in this direction.

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¹ It is in this sense that talk of incomparability constitutes a paradigmatic exercise in self-refutation.

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