Remythologizing Culture: Narrativity, Justification, and the Politics of Personalization

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The thesis that the self is a story unfolding in *prescriptive* space is typically embraced by social constructionists as a radical alternative to naturalistic accounts of human development. Yet, the Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System proposed by Henriques (2003) implies that events at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., matter, life, mind, and culture) can be considered as conditions of possibility for the emergence of meaningful personal narratives. Thus, the ToK System represents an opportunity to recast the work of naturalists and social constructionists in a framework that is at once scientific and humanistic. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc. J Clin Psychol 61: 67–80, 2005.

In a lecture delivered at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association several months before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. (1968) challenged American psychology to reconsider the political implications of discourse pertaining to mental health. King (1968) acknowledged that, "every academic discipline has its technical nomenclature" (p. 10). Yet, he also hinted at the possibility that the language adopted by mental health professionals stands in the way of progressive social change. For instance, he observed, "you who are in the field of psychology have given us a great word. It is the word 'maladjusted'" (King, 1968, p. 10). Although few psychologists (then or now) would praise the "maladjusted" life, King (1968) reminded us that, "there are some things in our society, some things in our world, to which we should never be adjusted" (p. 10).

Although concerns regarding the political implications of discourse pertaining to mental health have been noted by others (e.g., Laing, 1967; Summerfield, 2000; Szasz, 1994), the theoretical perspectives that inform the work of applied psychologists

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presently lack the scope and conceptual power necessary to come to terms with the challenge implicit in King's vision. Cognitive-behavioral therapists, for instance, have traditionally granted priority to the (presumably reasonable) demands that the world makes *on us* over any demands that we might feel entitled to make *on the world*. Aaron T. Beck (1999) is hardly courting controversy when he suggests that personality is a collection of evolved behavioral strategies that help reconcile "internal pressures for survival and bonding" with "external obstacles, threats, and demands" (p. 415). Yet, if we also believe that these strategies should promote "adaptation to the present-day social environment" (Beck, 1999, p. 415), it is difficult to escape the conclusion that *psychopathology* is best characterized as a "mismatch" between behavior and the social context.

I suspect that the strong tendency on the part of many applied psychologists to emphasize the value of adjustment is less reflective of any explicit political commitments than it is yet another symptom of the theoretical fragmentation and professional specialization that continues to haunt the field. If the primary task of the cognitive-behavioral therapist is to implement precisely those techniques that have been shown to improve scores on relevant measures of mental health, then the political issues raised by King (1968) would appear to be no more relevant to their practice than they would be to the work of cardiologists and orthopedic surgeons. However, if the project of creative maladjustment endorsed by King carries with it the risk of considerable anxiety and personal distress, then we can no longer glibly assume that therapeutic interventions are best evaluated in terms of their impact on objective measures of "well being." Rather, a holistic, person-centered psychology must remain open to the possibility that unhappiness reflects a healthy response to a dysfunctional culture.

A psychology comprised of mere "specialists" can never acquire the theoretical scope necessary to *articulate* (let alone resolve) the most profound challenges that we confront as cultural beings. However, no single metatheoretical paradigm has yet to receive the unequivocal support of a broad range of academic and applied psychologists. There remain very real tensions, for instance, between (a) naturalistic accounts of human behavior that grant a privileged ontological status to empirical *facts* (e.g., evolutionary psychology) and (b) interpretive visions that are more concerned with the (transfactual) *possibilities* implicit in a multiplicity of hermeneutic systems (e.g., the narrative study of lives). What is needed, therefore, is a metatheoretical stance that allows us to acknowledge the biological, cognitive, and psychosocial facts of the human condition while also leaving open the possibility of change in *any facet* of our cultural life.

In this commentary, I will argue that the conceptual tools necessary for the articulation of such a stance are already implicit in the Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System proposed by Henriques (2003, 2004). Specifically, Henriques' system allows us to distinguish the scientific study of the animal mind from those disciplines (e.g., sociology, history, and moral philosophy) concerned with the ambiguities and complexities of human culture. Thus, academic psychologists remain free to develop general models of animal behavior without concerning themselves with issues that emerge as significant on a cultural plane. *Human* psychology, however, must be recognized as "a hybrid discipline that merges the pure science of [animal] psychology with the social sciences" (2004, p. 1211, brackets mine).

Following Henriques, I interpret cultural life as an order of behavioral complexity that emerges when individuals are obliged to provide justifications for their actions. Expanding on Henriques' insights, I suggest that this cultural demand for justification brings into being a "self" that is at once a fact (insofar as "I am what I *do*") and a value (insofar as "I am what I can *justify*"). As an unstable (or metastable) synthesis of facts and values, the cultural-person-as-a-whole can never find adequate grounds for self-unification on a purely

empirical plane. Thus, a holistic, person-centered psychology requires a conceptual analysis of the relationship between the process of scientific discovery *and* the creative acts that bring selves, values, and communities into being. It is precisely this relationship that lies at the heart of the ToK System.

However, a vision of cultural truth as a creative act is difficult to reconcile with the belief (common among psychologists) that truth is ultimately an empirical discovery. Thus, our initial task is to differentiate those empirical truths that are revealed at the levels of matter, life, and mind from the value-contingent truths that emerge at the level of culture. In the first section of this essay, I will consider Henriques' Justification Hypothesis (JH) as a compelling account of the emergence of human culture as well as an interpretive rubric that illuminates the meaning of the self as a cultural construct. Whereas traditional scientific epistemologies can be applied appropriately at the levels of matter, life, and mind, truth at a cultural level of analysis remains contingent upon the sociolinguistic justification systems that illuminate the moral significance of each of our acts.

Significantly, this vision of cultural truth as a process of justification is consistent with recent theoretical accounts of the self as a story that unfolds in *prescriptive* space. Thus, the second section of the present commentary will consider narrative metatheory as a necessary corollary of the conceptual distinctions implicit in the ToK System. More specifically, I will argue that narrativity represents the *very language* of justification and, as such, there is no possibility of understanding cultural life outside of a narrative context.

Yet, insofar as our culture can be characterized in terms of a multiplicity of incommensurate justification systems (cf. Gergen, 1991), a self that remains contingent upon the process of justification fails to display the unity that would be achieved if any one such system could establish itself as the final arbiter of cultural meaning. Even science, which preserves (by virtue of its accomplishments) epistemic authority in the domains of matter, life, and mind, has yet to establish such authority at the level of culture. Thus, there appears to be little chance that *human* psychologists will come to substantive agreement regarding the specific metanarratives that ought to guide our interpretations of the world.

Nevertheless, it may be possible for psychologists of "good will" to evaluate justification systems (and the corresponding cultural narratives) in terms of purely humanistic criteria that are not themselves contingent upon paradigm-specific considerations. In the final section of this commentary, I will suggest that cultural justification systems can be assessed in terms of their power to expand the range of thoughts and actions available to individuals situated in specific social and historical contexts. Significantly, this humanistic approach to the justification of cultural narratives opens up the possibility of articulating a synthetic account of the work of such diverse thinkers as William James, Daniel Dennett, Carl Rogers, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Henriques' Justification Hypothesis and the Experience of Moral Agency

A first principle of the Tree of Knowledge (ToK) System proposed by Henriques (2003) is the thesis that all science is the study of behavior. Specific sciences differ substantively only with respect to the type of behavior they consider as their primary focus. Each succeeding level of analysis illuminates a genuinely novel form of behavior, and the disciplines of physics, biology, psychology, and sociology are focused on the behavior of inanimate objects, living organisms, animals, and human beings, respectively.

The strength of the ToK System rests on the fact that it draws attention to the formal unity of the various sciences, as well as the relationships between the various dimensions of complexity. For instance, the "mind–body" problem (and the corresponding tension

between biological and psychological visions of human existence) can be resolved if it is recognized that mind is nothing other than the brain *in action* (and thus does not constitute a substance that needs to be formally distinguished from organic matter). Similarly, we can interpret culture as something that *happens* to mind (rather than as a distinct metaphysical essence in its own right).

There can be no question, however, that the ToK System allows for a strict identification of the levels of matter, life, mind, and culture. For example, the emergence of mind represents a qualitative transformation in the behavior of organic matter. Although the (organic) principle of natural selection does indeed illuminate a condition of possibility for the emergence of any sort of organism, the actual behavior of an organism may be determined by factors other than the evolutionary history of the species. Henriques' (2003) Behavioral Investment Theory (BIT) represents a synthetic account of what we presently know about the neuro-cognitive mechanisms that allow animal behavior to be modified as a result of experience.

Yet, Henriques (2004) is well aware that BIT cannot account for "the massive influence of key elements such as language, self-awareness, and culture on human behavior" (p. 1216). The behavior of a political martyr, for instance, implies a constellation of values that cannot simply be identified with the "basic needs" of animals in general. Of course, all animals strive to maximize "rewards" and minimize "punishments." However, BIT cannot predetermine the specific outcomes that human beings will find reinforcing (or aversive). Thus, Henriques (2003) is able to consistently maintain that, "humans represent a subset of animal objects that cannot be fully explained by psychology" (p. 163).

In the ToK System, the emergence of complex sociolinguistic systems represents a definitive rupture in the evolutionary history of our species. Prior to the emergence of language, individuals pursued their own biologically determined ends, irrespective of whether this pursuit compromised the well being of others. However, given a sufficiently complex linguistic system, individuals can "ask and be asked about the thought processes associated with their behaviors" (Henriques, 2003, p. 170). No longer is it sufficient simply to *act*. Individuals can now be expected to provide adequate *justifications* for any projects they undertake. Thus, with the emergence of culture, the prereflective animal mind is transformed into a self-conscious moral agent.

As sociolinguistic justification systems grow increasingly complex, they eventually branch "into different domains such as religion, law, mathematics, and philosophy," allowing human agents to distinguish "which actions are legitimate and which actions are not" (Henriques, 2003, p. 155). Significantly, the behaviors prescribed by these justification systems need not coincide with the natural behaviors of our precultural ancestors. Quite the contrary, specific moral codes may actually encourage behaviors at odds with our "natural" inclinations. As Dawkins (1989) comments:

> We have the power to defy the selfish genes of our birth. . . . We can even discuss ways of deliberately cultivating and nurturing pure, disinterested altruism—something that has no place in nature, something that has never existed before in the whole history of the world. . . . We, alone, can rebel against the tyranny of the selfish replicators. (pp. 200–201)

There is no a priori limit to the power of justification systems to transform the intentional projects of cultural beings. Systems of justification may even encourage individuals to risk their lives in the pursuit of particular social and political goals. Considered as a theoretical account of human motivation, Henriques' Justification Hypothesis (JH) thus implies that the moral quest for legitimization supercedes the natural quest for self-preservation.

Holistically considered, the ToK System provides "the overarching perspective that clarifies how humans can be viewed as being both *continuous* with other animals (i.e., via

the lens of BIT) and *distinct* from other animals (i.e., via the JH) at the individual and societal levels of analyses" (Henriques, 2004, p. 1218). The project of the animal psychologist is to analyze the neuro-cognitive processes (e.g., learning mechanisms) that serve as conditions of possibility for the emergence of any sort of culture. However, the actual content of a culture (and the principles according to which it evolves) are matters that fall outside the scope of neuro-cognitive psychology. Culture is indeed among the progeny of mind, but *once alive* it need not look to matter, life, or mind for guidance. It is, so to speak, on its own.

Yet, there remains a perpetual danger here of interpreting culture as a fact on par with the facts studied by physicists, biologists, and psychologists. It is indeed a fact that a specific culture approves of "*this*" behavior and disapproves of "*that*" behavior and thus it is always possible to conduct empirical investigations of cultural justification systems. However, the cultural-person-as-a-whole is never able to interpret his/her *own* values as if they were mere facts. Rather, such values illuminate a world that *ought to be*, irrespective of the way things *are*.

The ambiguity that emerges at the very moment we consider value as the object of our investigation was described by Sartre (1974) as the "paradox of ethics" (p. 247). On the one hand, a value is a fact insofar as it can be considered (from a third-person perspective) as a form of linguistic behavior emerging in a particular sociohistorical context. On the other hand, every value illuminates a possible future that (*as a possible future*) remains undetermined by the past. For Sartre (1974), "the imperative's *pure future* is *neither knowable nor predictable*" (p. 245). Rather, "its character as pure future . . . makes it *a future to be created*" (Sartre, 1974, p. 245).

An analysis of the experience of obligation thus implies a perspective quite distinct from that adopted by the natural scientist. "It's not a matter of knowing the future through the present but of knowing the present through the future" (Sartre, 1974, p. 246). It is precisely this experience of an ideal future as an "unconditional possibility" that defines the agent as a *subject*:

> The norm does not bring the subject into relief by simply prescribing an act to a subject already existing in self awareness but by affirming that such a subject in awareness is always possible in spite of any possible set of external circumstances. Only a subject in awareness can fulfill a norm. . . . [and] the fundamental possibility revealed by a norm is the possibility of making oneself a *subject in awareness*—in connection with external conditions—by doing one's duty. (Sartre, 1974, p. 244, brackets mine)

Of course, this "subject in awareness" is appropriately ignored by psychologists interested in the study of mind as such. Questions regarding human freedom and responsibility can emerge as meaningful only at a *cultural* level of analysis. In this respect, it is striking to consider how closely Sartre's (1956, 1974) account of the emergence of moral agency parallels the cultural musings of Darwinian materialist, Daniel Dennett (1984, 1991, 2002).

For both Dennett and Sartre, no distinct neuro-cognitive process can ever be considered "free" in any substantive sense of the term. We look in vain for an authentically free homunculus lurking somewhere in the human brain. As Sartre (1956) reminds us, "the nerve is not *meaningful;* it is a colloidal substance which can be described in itself and which does not have the quality of transcendence; that is, it does not transcend itself in order to make known to itself by means of other realities what it is" (p. 560).

The quest for freedom is guaranteed to flounder if we hope to find it lurking in material or mental entities of any sort. As Dennett (2002) comments, "isolated consciousness can indeed do nothing much on its own. Nor can it be responsible" (p. 253). Yet, the

profound challenge associated with the quest for moral agency is not to *discover* freedom in some isolated region of being. Rather, Dennett (2002) suggests, "if you want to be free, you must *take* responsibility" (p. 292). In other words, human freedom is not an *empirical given*, but rather, a *creative act*. The "Archimedean perch" from which it is possible to assume our freedom is nothing other than the self conceived holistically as a *center of narrative gravity* (Dennett, 1991, 2002). According to Dennett (2002), "Once you distribute the work done by the homunculus . . . in both space and time in the brain, you have to distribute the moral agency around as well. You are not out of the loop; you *are* the loop" (p. 242). Sartre (1956) similarly comments that "freedom is not *a* being, it is *the being* of man" (p. 441).

Yet, there can be no question here of a naïve voluntarism. Dennett (1984) explicitly repudiates the thesis that "one can create oneself *ex nihilo*" (p. 83). Likewise, Sartre (1956, 1968, 1981) argues that human freedom never wholly transcends the past. Rather, "a life develops in spirals; it passes again and again by the same points but at different levels of integration and complexity" (Sartre, 1968, p. 106).

The freedom of the individual depends on a broad range of organic, cognitive, and cultural conditions and thus can rightfully be considered as among the most fragile of human creations. According to Dennett (2002), "freedom is real now, in some happy parts of the world, and those who love it love it wisely, but it is far from inevitable, far from universal" (p. 305).

Yet, even here there remains a risk of allowing freedom to become reified as some sort of metaphysical essence distinct from the stories we actually live. As there is now a rich literature pertaining to the relationship between selves and stories, a consideration of the spirit that animates the work of contemporary narrative psychologists may shed further light on what it means to think about the responsible self as a "center of narrative gravity" (Dennett, 1991, 2002).

Selves, Stories, and Justifications

After nearly two decades of sustained interest in personal narratives on the part of personality and developmental psychologists (e.g., Brown, Debold, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1991; Hermans, 1992; McAdams, de St Aubin, & Logan, 1993; Nouri & Helterline, 1998; Pratt, Norris, Arnold, & Filyer, 1999; Quackenbush & Barnett, 2001; Singer & Salovey, 1993; Tappan, 1989), the thesis that the self is best understood as a story has become a well-worn cliché. Some (e.g., Gerrig, 1994) even express doubts that a substantive distinction can be made between narrative thought and the analytic mindset that has historically guided the work of academic psychologists. Baumeister (1994) once commented that, "users of narrative methods are generally not revolutionaries" (p. 649). Although such methods may represent "a valuable addition to our arsenal," there is no evidence that they "will soon (or ever) replace the laboratory experiment, the systematic survey, or the structured, fixed-response questionnaire" (p. 649).

Yet, even a brief perusal of the work of many authors adopting a narrative perspective suggests that they are indeed animated by something resembling a revolutionary fervor. Gilligan, Brown, and Rogers (1990), for instance, proclaim that "in the move away from a narrative art to a science that rejects narrative art, psychology has lost an awareness of voice and vision" (p. 89).

Why, though, should we endow stories with such profound significance? What truths might they illuminate that could not *also* be captured in wholly positive descriptions of empirical states of affairs?

We might catch a glimpse of the answer here if we recall that narrative protagonists are never themselves obliged to submit to any set of empirical facts. Quite the contrary, protagonists are free to struggle against the facts in the name of some alternative state that *ought to be*.

Gergen and Gergen (1986) have commented that any successful narrative account "must first *establish a goal state* or valued endpoint" (p. 25). For instance, "it must succeed in establishing the value of a protagonist's well-being, the destruction of an evil condition, the victory of a favored group, the discovery of something precious, or the like" (pp. 25–26). Although stories can vary considerably in form, all narratives organize individual story elements "in such a way that the goal state is rendered more or less probable" (Gergen & Gergen, 1986, p. 26).

As implicit references to ideal states, stories necessarily encapsulate events and actions within a moral framework. Unlike a simple chronological listing of events, a narrative necessarily represents a specific moral perspective (Tappan, 1991; White, 1981)—a perspective that transcends, and thus provides a basis for evaluating, the individual elements of the story. According to Gergen and Gergen (1986), "All events in a successful narrative are related by virtue of their containment in a given evaluative space. Therein lies the coherence of the narrative. As one moves from one event to another, one also approaches or moves away from the desired goal state" (p. 26).

A coherent narrative is thus inconceivable prior to the emergence of the cultural justification systems that illuminate the moral significance of each of our acts. Indeed, narrativity can appropriately be considered as the *very language* of justification. Of course, it is possible to imagine an abstract moral code that does not (in itself) display the features of a good story (e.g., the Kantian "categorical imperative"). However, such a code can be actualized in the course of an individual's life only to the extent that it is *intended* as such. It is precisely this intention to bring into being a value that might not otherwise exist that provides the necessary conceptual link between narratives and justification systems. Cultural justification systems illuminate the moral significance of human intentions and, as McAdams (1992) has noted, "*there may be no intention without story*. The story is the most natural vehicle for transporting the meaning and the course of human intentions" (p. 330).

Sartre (1956) has commented that, "human reality does not exist first in order to act later; but for human reality, to be is to act, and to cease to act is to cease to be" (p. 476). However, once we move to a cultural level of analysis, it is no longer possible to interpret human action wholly in terms of existing states of affairs. According to Sartre (1956), "no factual state whatever it may be (the political and economic structure of society, the psychological 'state', etc.) is capable by itself of motivating any act whatsoever" (p. 435). Although the relevant facts must be taken into account, a holistic vision of the cultural-person-as-a-whole also requires a consideration of the personal and cultural narratives that illuminate the *prescriptive context* of human behavior.

Here, I think, we have found a key to the appeal of narratives that does not depend on their power to illuminate factual states of affairs. Unlike propositions in science, characters in stories are free to *stand opposed* to any aspect of the world whatsoever. Obviously, characters must acknowledge the facts in order to change them, but narrative tension begins when characters interpret existing states in light of a "*future which must be created*" (Sartre, 1974, p. 246).

The profound significance of the narrative approach to the study of lives rests on the fact that it considers the problem of value as revelatory of our very mode of existence as cultural beings. Thus, narrative metatheory is not simply one more theoretical "orientation" among others. Rather, it stands as a testimony to the failure of *every* holistic interpretation of human reality to justify itself by a simple appeal to the facts.

So considered, the narrative approach to the study of lives shares common cause with social constructionism, postmodernism, and any other epistemological stance that considers "truth" as a cultural construct. Henriques (2004) comments that "social constructivists and postmodernists clearly anchor their ideas to the notion that all human activities take place within, and cannot be divorced from, cultural justification systems" (p. 1217).

This, it seems to me, should be our starting point in cultural studies. Some may wonder how such epistemological relativism could ever resolve the problem of disciplinary fragmentation discussed by Henriques (2003, 2004). Although I do not suggest that psychologists will ever achieve consensus with respect to core values (or that consensus *as such* is even desirable), there may nevertheless be a standpoint from which it is possible to gain our metatheoretical bearings.

Of Science and Humanism

In his classic defense of pragmatism, William James (1907/1990) commented that "the history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments" (p. 2). Specifically, James drew attention to a profound antagonism between (a) "tough-minded" thinkers who pride themselves in their empiricism, materialism, and fatalism, and (b) "tender-minded" thinkers who sing the praises of rationalism, idealism, and human freedom.

Although I do not presume that there are strict parallels between James' (1907/1990) depiction of these temperaments and warring factions in contemporary psychology, it is nevertheless reasonable to suggest that psychologists are as divided by their metatheoretical temperaments as they are by anything else (see Kimble, 1984).

Many basic and applied psychologists, for instance, would consider themselves naturalists, at least insofar as they remain committed to the epistemic ideals represented by the natural sciences. For the naturalist, it is the social scientist's responsibility to illuminate relations among *facts* (or *events*), which are appropriately modeled utilizing the tools of analytic reason. This epistemic mindset is vividly illustrated in the recent work of Edward O. Wilson (1998), for whom science represents "the organized, systematic enterprise that gathers knowledge about the world and condenses the knowledge into testable laws and principles" (p. 58).

According to Wilson (1998), the animating spirit of science is the quest for *consilience*, which he describes as "the linking of facts and fact-based theory across disciplines to create a common groundwork of explanation" (p. 8). Although Wilson (1998) admits that ethics and religion present science with "it's most interesting and possibly humbling challenge" (p. 290), he also anticipates that a proper application of the scientific method will revolutionize our understanding of human culture. In the end, the very principles that have allowed us to realize theoretical syntheses in the natural sciences will help "unite the natural sciences with the social sciences and humanities. The difference between the two domains is in the magnitude of the problem, not the principles needed for its solution" (Wilson, 1998, p. 292).

Naturalists may wonder how anyone could disagree with such down-to-earth sentiments. Yet, the recent history of psychology has witnessed a rather striking proliferation of anti-empiricist ideology. Although self-proclaimed social constructionists, postmodernists, postpositivists, and existentialists have participated in this project of epistemic subversion, the phrase "social constructionism" can be conveniently employed in reference to the basic spirit that animates this movement.

There is a danger here of overschematizing, but it is fair to say that thinkers of this ilk are primarily concerned with the modes of interpretation that human beings employ to

make sense of their world (cf. Harre, 2002). Although science can be considered appropriately as one such mode, the epistemic ideals of the naturalists are not entitled to trump alternative modes of thought at the level of human culture. Indeed, social constructionists often express considerable contempt for the mechanistic metaphors that guide the thinking of their naturalistic brethren. Sarbin (1986) is typical in this regard:

> The worldview of mechanism, the root metaphor of which is the transmittal of force, insisted upon discovering and eventually controlling the forces that were to be found in nature. The standard lexicon of psychology . . . is comprised of terms that represent such forces: drive, instinct, libido, cognitions, reinforcement, mental states and so on. It is as if there is a moral imperative to reduce the drama of humanity to the play of impersonal forces. (Sarbin, 1986, p. 10)

To combat such "cold abstractions," many social constructionists have suggested that we replace metaphors borrowed from the natural sciences with language inspired by scholarship in the humanities. The "narratory principle" endorsed by Sarbin (1986), for instance, rests on the assumption that "human beings think, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures" (p. 20).

Naturalists, for their part, may wonder why anyone would make such a fuss over a point that should be obvious to everyone. After all, the adoption of a scientific mindset does not in-itself stand opposed to the observation that people tell stories. Even Wilson (1998) admits that "we are obliged by the deepest drives of the human spirit to make ourselves more than animated dust, and we must have a story to tell about where we came from, and why we are here" (p. 6).

Yet, such apparent consilience may mask over the deepest tensions between these two metatheoretical temperaments. Everyone recognizes that people tell stories. Yet, for the social constructionist, narrativity is not simply one more empirical phenomenon to be "explained." It also represents an *epistemic stance* that illuminates truth from an authentically human point of view. As Brown et al. (1991) have suggested, the very project of narrative interpretation "directly challenges the strive toward 'objectivity'—a disembodied voice and a detached point of view that characterizes traditional empiricist and rationalist approaches to psychological inquiry" (p. 66).

The tension between these two temperaments may thus cut deeper than many "consilience theorists" are prepared to acknowledge. Social constructionists reject the tyranny of method to which the naturalists must inevitably submit. Naturalists, for their part, view radical social constructionism as little more than an idealistic hoax. Wilson (1998), for instance, has little respect for any philosophical stance that views science "as just another way of knowing" (p. 45):

> Discourse [for the postmodernist] . . . can proceed without worrying about consilience. About rigor too, it would seem. Although this concession is welcomed by postmodernist scholars, it is a premature surrender that would drain much of the power and joy from scholarly inquiry. . . . It waves aside the synthetic scientific method, demonstrably the most powerful instrument hitherto created by the human mind. Lazily, it devalues the intellect. (p. 207)

Thus, the prospects for a genuinely unified psychology seem quite bleak indeed. If disagreements among psychologists were restricted to the domain of facts, then we could always seek unity at the level of epistemology. However, when epistemology itself is a bone of contention, moralizing about "proper methods" will never be sufficient to bring the warring factions together. Unification, it seems, requires that we somehow relax dogmatic assumptions regarding the nature of "truth" (a concession to the social constructionists) without at the same time doing violence to the very real facts illuminated from a scientific point of view (a concession to the naturalists).

Yet, what could make such a synthesis *desirable*? If naturalists value naturalism *as such*, then the work of social constructionists will never appear to be anything more than word games. If, for their part, social constructionists remain dogmatically committed to their own (nondogmatic) hermeneutic principles, they will never find reason to grant the status of "truth" to any empirical claim whatsoever.

But what if naturalists and social constructionists were committed to something *other* than naturalism and social constructionism? What if these metatheoretical orientations were recognized as tools that facilitate the achievement of something *other* than the refashioning of still more conceptual and theoretical tools?

William James (1907/1990) was well aware of the dangers of radical epistemological skepticism. However, he never saw any reason to embrace a vision of reality as "ready-made and complete from all eternity" (p. 54). For James, "the notion of a reality calling on us to 'agree' with it . . . simply because its claim is 'unconditional' or 'transcendent', is one that I can make neither heads nor tails of" (p. 50).

As an alternative to every form of dogmatism, James offered what he considered to be a genuinely humanistic conception of truth (see Hastings, 2002). Reality, for James (1907/1990), "*is still in the making* [italics added], and awaits part of its complexion from the future" (p. 54).

Of course, even a malleable universe offers resistance, and this coefficient of adversity must be taken into account by anyone hoping to complete meaningful projects. Yet, what humanistic scientists working at all levels of analysis share is a commitment to understanding the world *for the sake of changing it*. That is, humanistic science can appropriately be conceptualized as an effort to extend the range of possibilities available to individuals situated in specific social and historical circumstances.

The philosophical musings of Wilson (1998) notwithstanding, the value of research at the levels of matter, life, mind, and culture does not lie in its power to illuminate the whither and wherefore of human existence. Rather, such research is of value simply because it opens up possibilities that might not otherwise exist. If the mapping of the human genome leads to the prevention of Alzheimer's Disease (see Nussbaum & Ellis, 2003), then the range of psychosocial possibilities available to the elderly, their families, and the community as a whole will be considerably expanded.

Considered holistically, the ToK System provides a language that allows us to clearly articulate the physical, biological, cognitive, and cultural factors that contribute to the flourishing of human freedom. Of course, alternative metatheoretical visions (e.g., Wilson's Consilience) can also account for the practical relevance of research in the natural and social sciences. However, the significance of the ToK System does not rest solely on the fact that it illuminates what science can do for us. The ToK System also represents a systematic effort to come to terms with the being that is *free to care* about science in the first place. When the implications of the Justification Hypothesis are fully articulated, it is no longer possible to offer a strictly scientific account of the problem of human freedom. Rather, we must also consider the justification systems (and corresponding cultural narratives) that allow creative projects of any sort to emerge as *meaningful*.

Dennett (2002), we recall, proclaims that, "if you want to be free, you must *take* responsibility" (p. 292). Yet, Dennett's reflections fail to illuminate how the *cultural* project of freedom might actually be realized. "The only hope," he says, ". . . is to come to understand, naturalistically, the ways in which brains grow self-representations, thereby equipping the bodies they control with responsible selves when all goes well" (Dennett, 1991, p. 430).

Certainly, such an approach can illuminate the neuro-cognitive conditions of possibility for the emergence of any sort of freedom. However, it also presumes the very value

that we are trying to explain. Why should socially and historically contingent beings ever *resist* their fate? What justification systems allow a person to embrace the phenomenon of human intentionality *as such*? Here, Dennett's (1991, 2002) analyses are superceded by Sartre's (1956, 1981) reflections on the problem of justification.

In the course of his multi-volume psychobiography of the French novelist Gustave Flaubert, Sartre (1981) explicitly examined the psychosocial conditions that must be met if socially and historically contingent beings are to *desire* freedom. There is no question for Sartre (1981) of "choosing" freedom in an isolated act of will, for "the meaning of a life comes to the living person through the human society that sustains him and through the parents who engendered him" (p. 134). Yet, freedom as a cultural *idea* lacks the power to create the *experience* of possibility. If I do not already grasp what it means to be free, then the concept of freedom will never be anything more than an empty abstraction.

For Sartre (1981), a necessary condition for the experience of authentic freedom is a primordial awareness that one's being is already justified *in the eyes of another*. That is, a person must have a "*mandate to live*" (Sartre, 1981, p. 133). In a discussion consonant with the work of contemporary attachment theorists (e.g., Lopez & Brennan, 2000), Sartre (1981) highlights the critical role played by parental love in the unfolding of authentic freedom:

> If later on with a little luck he can say: 'My life has a purpose, I have found a purpose in my life,' it is because the parents' love, their creation and expectation . . . has revealed his existence to him as a movement toward an end; he is the conscious arrow that is awakened mid-flight and discovers, simultaneously, the distant archer, the target, and the intoxication of flight. If he has truly received the fullness of early parental attentions consecrated by the scattered smiles of the world. . . . living will be the *passion*—in the religious sense—that will transform self-centeredness into a gift; experience will be felt as the *free exercise of generosity*. (pp. 133–134)

Sartre (1987) coined the term "personalization" to draw attention to the fact that the cultural-person-as-a-whole is more appropriately considered as a creative *project* than as an empirical *given*. Yet, no one can initiate such a project on his or her own. Rather, "the love of the Other is the foundation and guarantee of the objectivity of the individual's value and his mission" (Sartre, 1981, p. 135). Deprived of this justifying love, the self is experienced as "powerless and unconnected" (Sartre, 1981, p. 141) and "life presents itself as pure contingency" (p. 135).

Carl Rogers (1957) once suggested that empathic understanding, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard can be considered as necessary and sufficient conditions for personality change in a therapeutic context. In its strong form, this thesis clearly ignores other necessary conditions (e.g., a "dementia-free" mind). However, it does draw attention to the profound significance of empathy and compassion at a cultural level of analysis. For Rogers (1980), "persons in an environment infused with these attitudes develop more self-understanding, more self-confidence, more ability to choose their behaviors . . . they have more freedom to be and become" (p. 133).

These considerations, of course, cannot begin to do justice to the complexity of the relevant issues. Yet, my purpose here is not to defend specific empirical claims, but rather, to show how scholarship engaged at multiple levels of analysis (matter, life, mind, and culture) can help illuminate the conditions of possibility for the emergence of authentic human freedom.

The quest for freedom does indeed require that we "come to understand, naturalistically, the ways in which brains grow self-representations" (Dennett, 1991, p. 430). Yet, if

the self (as a "center of narrative gravity") remains contingent upon a multiplicity of cultural justification systems, then we are also obliged to consider how the experience of moral agency is qualified by our relationships with others.

Conclusions

The ToK System represents an Archimedean perch from which it is possible to assume our freedom as psychologists. Unlike Wilson's (1998) Consilience, the ToK System does not mask over the tensions between naturalism and social constructionism. Rather, properly interpreted, such tensions cease to be substantive.

Science can be granted epistemic authority at the levels of matter, life, and mind simply by virtue of its success. Truth at a cultural level of analysis, however, remains contingent upon the sociolinguistic justification systems that illuminate the moral significance of each of our acts. Of course, nothing precludes the possibility of applying scientific epistemologies to the analysis of cultural phenomena. However, the facts illuminated by such methods no longer have the significance at the level of culture that they possessed at the levels of matter, life, and mind. As Heidegger (1918/2002) commented, an empirical claim in the social sciences has "merely hypothetical or provisional validity, *dependent* on other cases *not* subverting it" (p. 48).

This, of course, does not mean that counselors and clinicians are free to ignore empirical research that might be relevant to their work. Empirically Supported Treatments (ESTs), for instance, will probably always have a place in the arsenal of applied psychologists (see Henriques & Sternberg, 2004). Nevertheless, the very interventions that allow us to improve scores on relevant dependent measures (e.g., life-satisfaction) may actually compromise our position with respect to other social values (e.g., self-awareness, political consciousness). Thus, the adoption of the ToK System demands that we situate facts in the context of lives. In the end, this implies that the scientific mindset must be preserved and surpassed by the project of *empathy*, "the one attitude necessary for understanding" (Sartre, 1981, p. x).

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