Acta Academica 31(2): 75-101

Eefke Beyers

Psychology and culture: the politics of recognition

Summary

In this article it is suggested that the two main ontological assumptions prevalent in mainstream Western psychology (atomism and holism) are accompanied by implicit moral ideals as well as concomitant constructions of selves, notions of good and political directives. A case is made for viewing present trends in psychology towards the accommodation of culture as representative of a holistic ideal and of a concomitant politics of recognition of difference. This ontological and political perspective may be seen as a corrective of atomistic liberalism in the direction communitarian liberalism. The latter position is neither collectivist nor ethnocentric in orientation but liberal in the original sense of the word.

Sielkunde en kultuur: die politiek van herkenning

In hierdie artikel word gesuggereer dat die twee hoof ontologiese vertrekpunte in die hoofstroom van Westerse sielkunde (atomisme en holisme) vergesel word van implisiete morele ideale en gepaardgaande selfkonstruksies, idees oor die goeie en politieke direktiewe. Die saak word gestel dat huidige tendense in die sielkunde om kultuur te akkommodeer, verteenwoordigend is van 'n holistiese ideaal en van 'n politiek van erkenning van verskille. Dié ontologiese en politieke perspektief kan beskou word as 'n korreksie op atomistiese liberalisme ten gunste van gemeenskapsfilosofiese (*communitarian*) liberalisme. Laasgenoemde is nóg kollektivisties, nóg etnosentries in oriëntasie maar liberaal in die oorspronklike sin van die woord.

Prof E Beyers, Albertstr 250, Waterkloof 0181 of Posbus 95003, Waterkloof 0145; E-mail: beyers@smartnet.co.za

Psychology today is battling to come to grips with the fact of cultural differences and multi-cultural contexts. Psychologists are confronted with moral and political issues which have hitherto been ignored. It is the basic premise of this discourse that the recent drive to accommodate culture in mainstream Western psychology has both political meaning and moral force. I hope to analyse assumptions which were once current in psychology and to show that such assumptions tend to define moral positions. I believe that psychologists in Southern Africa have been largely unaware of the moral tone and meaning of their work. In assessing how to deal with culture we are confronted with this state of affairs. Our best approach would seem to be to reflect upon the matter and clarify for ourselves what our attempt to accommodate culture involves. As a point of departure I shall assume that South African psychology up to the present time has been based mainly upon mainstream Western psychology, to which I shall refer simply as psychology.

I have had recourse mainly to political philosophy and especially to the works of Taylor (1989, 1995) for insight into these issues. The thread of the argument which I adopt is as follows:

- Psychology is characterised by a particular understanding of what knowledge is and a connected set of ontological assumptions. From the inception of psychology until the nineties, two main traditions of ontological understanding have been discernible.
- Each of the ontological assumptions is accompanied by implied moral ideals and statements of worth.
- The articulation of moral ideals takes place via a construction of an ideal self or identity.
- Notions of good are implicit in the construction of ideal selves. Therefore, in harmony with ontological assumptions and consequent moral ideals, societal notions which define what it means to be a good person, a person worthy of respect, are articulated via psychology.

Following Taylor (1995: 1-10), I shall attempt to analyse psychology's self or selves by noting how certain ontological assumptions traditional to psychology have been accompanied by particular ideal selves, as well as by noting some recent reformulations of such positions. Two ontological perspectives are

prevalent in Western psychology — the atomistic (epistemological) and holistic (post-epistemological). The atomistic perspective involves a background moral assumption that goodness is generated from within individual entities. This results in a politics of universalism or the liberal ideal. After centuries of dormancy, the alternative perspective of holism has emerged strongly in recent years. Its different ontological assumptions generate somewhat different moral ideals and political insights, thus leading to a communitarian ideal. Both these perspectives have implications for dealing with culture. It seems that the perceived distinctions are often wrongly dichotomised and I hope to show that they should not be understood as mutually exclusive. My view will be that these theoretically categorised notions are intertwined in real life, and that a revised ontology and moral position for psychology may draw on both the liberal and the communitarian positions.

In commencing this argument it is necessary to clarify the connection between ontological questions and moral ideals.

1. Ontological assumptions and related issues

An ontological question is a question concerning the origin of something. Psychology asks questions regarding the sources of human action, which also implies a question as to the origin of knowledge. In order to understand the ontological question well, one may follow Taylor (1995: 181) and rephrase it as: what factors do we invoke to account for social life? Phrased in this way, the question easily leads to a further connection: if one knows what factors account for social life, one will also know what factors account for goodness in social life. If one can say what accounts for goodness, one can generate ideas about how people should be in order to promote goodness in social life. Given this much, the next step would be to say that since one has a notion of how a person should be in order to be a good (respected) person, one can then suggest what policy a society should adopt in order to be a good society for all.

In accordance with age-old philosophical and political debates, ontological statements are thus conceived to be accompanied by moral ideals, ideal selves and political policies (although cause is not

implied). Taylor (1989) thoroughly demonstrates this in his analysis of the modern identity.

In psychology such a confluence of issues is subtle but discernible. It is reflected in the critical analyses of the philosophical foundations of psychology by a variety of writers such as Stam *et al* (1987), Wallach & Wallach (1983) and Wexler (1983), as well as by expositions of the ideal selves of psychology such as Markus & Kitayama (1991), Schwartz (1986), Bellah *et al* (1985), and others. What follows is an attempt to demonstrate such a confluence of issues by a discussion of how atomistic psychology predisposes a liberal moral and political order. This is to be followed by a discussion of the later holistic psychology which implies a somewhat different moral and political order.

2. Atomistic psychology: the epistemological tradition

The intellectual tradition of twentieth-century psychology resides in an understanding of what knowledge is. A basic premise in this tradition is that knowledge is a correct representation of an independent reality. In this view, the so-called epistemological tradition, it is believed that one needs to make an inner description of an external reality, uncontaminated by that reality. That is, one should find ways of gaining certainty that one's inner representations of reality are correct. Such certainty is something the mind generates for itself, although assisted by appropriate methods (Taylor 1995: 1-19).

In order to generate certainty for itself, the mind should engage in reflexivity: that is, one should not trust the opinions of others, but generate certainty by exercising disengaged reason or rationality. This entails that the mind turn back upon itself, within itself, to gain understanding. The seeker of true knowledge, then, seeks it in his own mind, not within something external such as an unchanging nature (eg God).

The confidence or certainty striven for is attained by the rational ordering of thought. For epistemology, then, the crux is to find methods whereby the mind can gain certainty that its insights are correct. Social context must not be allowed to contaminate the

process. Although psychology has, to a considerable extent, turned away from the emphasis on the inner rationality of this tradition and substituted the hypothetico-deductive method, this method is, nevertheless, an analytical inductive procedure based upon theory, formulated from within the researcher, ideally with neither the theoretical hypotheses of the researcher nor the object of research being affected by their respective social contexts.

To summarise, the basic idea of epistemology is:

- that certainty of knowledge stems from reflexive clarity which is attained via an analysis of ideas abstracted (disengaged) from what the ideas represent (the so-called reflexive turn), and
- that methods should be discovered to attain such reflexive clarity.

The reflexive turn in psychology leads to a tendency to chart abstract formal statements for the mind to grasp; to categorise, to arrange and to sort out the meaning of things in terms of plans or scripts or models or theories.

2.1 Atomism's moral ideal

This tradition involves certain implied moral statements. In emphasising a mind operating from within itself as ideally detached from the object, whether generically or by method, a moral ideal is implied, that is, an ideal of detached selfhood. When individuals are disengaged from immediate social reality in order to gain a better perspective, they immediately assume responsibility for their own minds and their own personhoods or selves, in terms of the assessment of true knowledge. Such personal responsibility assures freedom. That is, individuals are freed from the opinion or influence of others by adopting insight generated in their own minds. To maintain freedom the independent or autonomous use of the mind should be protected. Freedom, then, is to be maintained in autonomous disengagement from others.

An analysis of atomism's moral ideal by Taylor (1989: 111-99) presents a picture of the ideal individual. It seems that the ideal person should be capable of detachment from his/her immediate environment in order to maintain an autonomous individuality. The individual should not allow his/her personal judgement to be

affected by others or by external conditions. Self-control and the maintenance of an autonomous self in the face of whatever the external context might present is important. Once such personal control is exerted, goodness comes from within the inner judgement of the individual.

These tenets prescribe three basic notions of what it means to be an ideal person. As Taylor (1995: 7) puts it:

> The first notion is the picture of the person as ideally disengaged, that is, as free and rational to the extent that he has fully distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds, so that his identity is no longer to be defined in terms of what lies outside him in these worlds. The second, which flows from this, is a punctual view of the self, ideally ready as free and rational to treat these worlds — and even some of the features of his own character — instrumentally, as subject to change and reorganising, in order the better to secure the welfare of himself and others. The third is the social consequence of the first two: an atomistic construal of society as consrituted by, or ultimately to be explained in terms of, individual purposes.

Psychology has offered this moral ideal in variegated form from its inception to the present time. One may cite the literature of psychoanalysis for examples of how the inner person needs to exercise control to produce good from within, the literature of behaviourism for *dicta* on how to manage the self, or the literature of cognitive psychology for a study of laws for the exertion of universal inner rationality.[1]

The principle of punctuality, whereby the individual should engage in an ordering of the society and of himself, is at the heart of what is termed social engineering. In applied psychology there is an abundance of evidence of the punctual view of the self, from instrumentalist recipes for self-improvement and the creation of self-esteem to prescriptions for managing the self in the familial or the working context. The doctrine of apartheid is an extreme example of psycho-political engineering.

1 For an overview of various branches of psychology which present aspects of the above, see Schwartz 1986: 117 and Wallach & Wallach 1983: 17-29.

It is, however, the third notion of atomism which is central to traditional psychology.

2.1.1 The perspective of atomistic psychology on ontology

Two ontological assumptions are connected to the notion that society is constituted in terms of individual purposes. Atomists believe that the behaviour of human beings is the result of inner (individual) forces. This implies that:

- social actions, structures and conditions should be accounted for in terms of the properties of constituent individuals, and
- that one can and ought to account for social good in terms of "concatenations of individual goods" (Taylor 1995: 181).

Thus one should understand goodness in society by tracing the development and expression of goodness from within the inner nature of the individual entity. The implied insight here is that the individual is capable of generating goodness from within and that society will be good (healthy) if all individuals are allowed (though not constrained) to generate such potential goodness from within.

Atomists do not articulate the implicit opposite: that there is a social concept of goodness which induces the individual to strive towards the attainment of good consequences. This important feature will be discussed below.

2.2 The ideal self of atomistic psychology

In accordance with the principles stated above, the ideal self of the atomists has been extensively worded as "the encumbered self" (Sandel 1982), "a bounded entity" (Spence 1985: 1288), "the self-contained self" (Sampson 1988: 369), and "the independent self" (Markus & Kitayama 1991: 147).

These articulations are connected to a set of moral rules which centre on the maintenance of free, rational and responsible personhood whereby the individual strives towards good consequences for himself, which will necessitate good consequences for society. Formulations for these ideas have been provided elsewhere (Beyers 1990: 1-26). The strong moral force of this ideal is towards freedom of self-expression. This is accompanied by an idea of the

dignity of the individual as equal to the dignity of every other individual. Individuals must therefore be treated equally. The two concepts of freedom and equality have become the central ideas directing political policies in societies which follow the atomistic ideal. Taylor (1995: 181-203) terms such policy atomistic liberalism (to be distinguished from other forms of liberalism).

I believe atomistic liberalism fully represents the major value orientation of modern Western psychology, albeit in many diverse and seemingly contrasting forms. For example, influential humanist theories (Rogers 1961; Fromm 1992; Maslow 1968) suggest that the individual should be allowed to develop his/her full inner potential unrestricted by others or by judgemental practices.

Kohlberg's (1969) influential theory on moral development also implies that the individual develops morality (goodness) via processes of unhindered inner growth. Cognitive theories of development such as are based on the works of Piaget follow a similar genetico-developmental tradition (Piaget 1970: 1-75).[2]

2.3 The politics of atomistic liberal psychology: universalism

In accordance with the ontological assumptions of atomistic liberalism and the concern with freedom and equality, an atomistic liberal ideal emphasises the rights of the individual. Following the train of thought outlined above such rights would comprise:

- the right to free rationality,
- the right to disengaged criticism of society,
- the right to personal control,
- the right to control society instrumentally through the possibility of correct thinking, and
- the right to actualise personal goals.

2 For an overview of psychology's inherent atomistic liberalism see Wexler 1983: 163-4.

The politics associated with these ideals concerns the advancement of such rights in a society in which:

- an individual is protected against societal constraints to his autonomy,
- every individual assumes personal responsibility for failure,
- individuals deal with society in a spirit of free speech and criticism,
- an individual is given the opportunity to remedy the ills of society by applying correct thinking, and
- the society avoids the notion of first- and second-class citizens and assures equal dignity among individuals.

Taylor (1995) explains that not all liberal societies emphasise all of these features to the same extent. Humanist liberalism concentrates on the protection of the individual against societal constraints which might hinder autonomy, on personal responsibility and self-actualisation, and on free speech and criticism. Mechanistic liberalisms concentrate on the instrumental control of both self and society; libertarian liberalism emphasises personal freedom to the point of ignoring all else, and egalitarian liberalism concerns itself mainly with equal citizenship.

How do these political principles translate into psychology?

If an individual's rights to personal responsibility and self-actualisation are to be protected at all costs, it becomes imperative to understand what is common truth about the behaviour of *all* individuals. Therefore, since the basic universal nature of all creatures needs to be understood, universal laws of human nature need to be established. By so doing, it should become possible to direct policy towards ensuring equal inner growth for all individuals. That is, the principle of universal equality would be protected. The implication of atomistic ideals for psychology, then, is a commitment to universalism.

2.3.1 A consequence of universalism for psychology

The current argument needs to be suspended at this point in order to note a widely-held view: that the attempt to establish universal laws of human nature has led to an overemphasis on homogeneity. This

has resulted in what may be termed a difference-blind mentality, whereby the principle of universal equality is equated with the absence of differentiation (Taylor 1995: 225-6). Given this drive toward universalism, psychology can give but scant attention to distinct cultural identities. The idea that mindsets might develop differently in diverse cultural contexts, taking into account diverse collective goals, is considered quite unacceptable. What results is a homogenisation of insight due to a rigorous exclusion of the possibility of any differentiation of roles among people. By some sardonic trick of reality, this leads to the maintenance of class distinctions: contrary to the aim of making all individuals equal, class distinctions are actually upheld by the denial of difference. There is more on this issue, but the holistic perspective must first be considered.

3. Holistic psychology: a post-epistemological tradition

I use the term 'holistic' here in a very limited sense — to denote the interconnectedness of phenomena, the relations among concepts. I define it in this way to exclude a number of post-epistemological theories of a different kind: neo-Nietzschian and some post-modern perspectives which entail a set of moral consequences different from those that will be attributed to holism here (see 4.1). I do not address these theories because they have only limited representation in the mainstream psychology of the nineties, and also because they are not committed to a central concern for holism in the sense of interconnectedness between or intersubjectivity among persons.

A new understanding of what knowledge is developed gradually from the time of Kant, culminating in the fifties in the works of Wittgenstein. Taylor (1995: 1-19) believes that this understanding arose from an aversion to the moral and spiritual consequences of atomistic epistemology. These consequences were generally agreed to centre on the steady growth of hedonism and egocentrism in atomistic liberal society (Bellah *et al* 1985: 142-63).

The basic premise of the new understanding was a criticism of epistemology's assumption that knowledge is to be discovered in disengaged reason. In short, it is held that the conditions for

disengaged reason are by definition situated in involvement. That is, in order to make any representation of human reality at all, one requires an involvement with life itself. Any description of reality is situated in the world in an other than disengaged manner. A description of reality is done by an agent who participates in everyday living. The first condition of human existence is involvement, not disengagement.

Thus it is held that one can only make a knowledgeable statement about the human world if one is involved in it. However much one might strive for disengagement through actions such as experimentation or other scientific techniques, one is an agent in the world and part of it. Knowledge of the world is thus grounded in our dealings with it. One can distinguish between one's picture of the object and the object itself, but not between one's dealings with the object and the object itself (Taylor 1995: 12).

Given this assumption, it is impossible to make a correct statement of reality with any certainty. The process of approaching the articulation of reality — the legitimate goal — is conducted tentatively, against a background of experiencing of the world. The background whence our thought arises should be acknowledged as part of the process of discovering knowledge. It is possible to gain a measure of detachment from our world through processes of what is termed critical reasoning, but never an assured objectivity towards it, despite method.

Such processes of hesitant and tentative reasoning about the world are similar to epistemology's reflexive turn. However, in the post-epistemological understanding of reflexivity one is said to abstract ideas against a background of personal experience. The process of gaining knowledge is thus always fallible. The post-epistemological conception of thought is known as critical reasoning rather than disengaged reasoning, thereby highlighting the inherent fallibility of thought.

Psychology's gradual turn towards this new tradition is apparent in various movements, notably the social constructionist movement and what has been termed "fallible realism" or "scientific realism" (Manicas & Secord 1983: 401). An important variant of social constructionism has been described by Shotter (1993: xiii) who

speaks of a "third kind of knowing" (besides "knowing that" or "knowing how"). This type of knowledge, which is neither disengaged reasoning nor critical reasoning, is a practical kind of knowing. In this view, important insight is gained from intersubjective dealings at a particular time in a particular context. This type of knowing, arising during mutual co-existence, tries to fathom "what a situation might ask of us".

For example, one will sense that someone is not acting appropriately in an intersubjective event. It may be very hard for those involved to define what such 'sensible action' might entail, but nevertheless they have a sense of it from the background knowledge relevant to the situation, a sense constructed in communion with others. To put it differently, such knowledge is reflected in practical common sense. As Shotter (1993: 5) phrases it, "one thinks both out of and into a certain cultural situation".[3]

This two-sided holistic perspective on knowledge (as critical reasoning or as practical knowing) clearly contends that the kind of knowledge involved in the possibility that humans will understand each other is always connected to practical daily living. The contrast between the atomistic and the holistic approaches resides in what one can do with such knowledge (that is, with regard to human affairs). The implied contrast is well phrased by Shotter (1993: 6):

> The future cannot be made to occur by the sheer force of one's conviction of its possibility [...] one must relate one's actions to what at any one moment is a real possibility within it. Thus if we are to act in such a way, we must not act solely out of 'our own inner scripts', 'plans', 'ideas', but must be sensitive in some way to the opportunities and barriers, the enablements and constraints offered 'to us by our circumstances in order to act into' them. Clearly this renders impossible correct thinking and precludes direct social engineering.

Thus, both routes to knowledge (common sense and critical reasoning) assume that all real human knowing concerning human beings is sensitively involved in daily life.

3 Atomistic psychology has denied that this can constitute knowledge since it has not been subjected to measures of correctness.

3.1 Holism's moral ideal

For the holistic post-epistemological tradition, implied moral statements centre on the idea of involvement as a condition for knowledge. The tradition rejects any theory which conceives of disengaged reasoning, with control, autonomy or actualisation as the road to freedom, since disengagement negates the idea of intersubjective meaning-making. The proviso that knowledge resides in intersubjective meaning-making, in mutuality, leads to a rejection of a variety of societal forms, for instance forms of atomistic liberalism such as utilitarianism, whereby orderly control is to be generated by disengaged personal responsibility or, at the other extreme, post-epistemological radicalism (neo-Nietzschian, Foucaultian, or Derridian perspectives) which offer the person either self-making or nihilism (Taylor 1995: 15-9). It also rejects conservative reductionist schools of thought such as behaviourism or Marxism which emphasise single causes for human behaviour (whether individualistic or collectivistic).

At the heart of post-epistemological morality (exclusive of the abovementioned radical versions) lies an emphasis on mutuality and concern as preconditions for freedom. Freedom's proof in action, autonomy, resides in self-reflexivity (as held by the atomists), but it is a reflexivity derived from experience in context: that is, provided such a context promotes personally responsible autonomy. This last point is a complex one which will be addressed briefly in 4.2.[4] Given that background knowing is related to all autonomy, self-reflexivity is seen as fallible. Thus in post-epistemological thought, freedom is conceived of as partial and phrased as authenticity, rather than autonomy.

The post-epistemological ideal is therefore to be understood first as a reaction against and rejection of aspects of epistemology. Any directives for self-actualisation which phrase goals in purely individual terms are no longer valued as moral ideals. Moral ideals for the holistic view can be deduced from political philosophical analyses such as Etzioni (1995) and Lasch (1978); philosophical

4 See also Beyers 1996: 195-6 for further explanation.

analyses such as Lonergan (1980), and psychological analyses such as Bellah *et al* (1986), Shotter (1993), Wallach & Wallach (1983) and others. Such ideals include the following aspects:

- The self should present itself as a self-in-mutuality, rather than a self-in-personal-growth (although the latter is not necessarily seen as denied by the former).
- The self has a responsibility to be involved in ordinary communal life. This ensures both personal and communal growth.
- The self should participate in the construction of a new background by community involvement, within existing backgrounds.
- The self is involved with acting well rather than with thinking correctly (Taylor 1995: 145).
- The self and the community are creators of human action. The self therefore has a responsibility to actualise personal goals in harmony with the needs of those with whom he/she is involved.

There are clear signs that mainstream psychology is being affected by holism's moral ideal. Although not as clearly demonstrable from the literature as psychology's previous liberal ideal, the signs of a move from atomistic morality are noted below.

3.1.1 Extrapolation of the holistic perspective on ontology

In the holistic view human action is seen to result from individual action following intersubjective being. All social constructions, actions and conditions are to be understood in terms of situated individuality. Even though for some holists, such as Harr (1983: 58), inner nature may dispose the individual towards some particular form of being, it takes shape in social life.

In accordance with this assumption holism understands goodness in society to be the result of intersubjective dialogue (whether verbal or non-verbal). Goodness thus arises from situated being. It follows that people from different cultures might define goodness in similar ways since reality presents itself similarly to various cultural contexts. However, there may also be diverse conceptions of goodness in diverse cultures, as a result of the social construction and reconstruction of moral rules.

Atomism's conception of the good society is thus rephrased. The good society is not seen to arise originally from the acting out of goodness arising from within the inner being of the individual. For holism, the good society arises when people generate ideas about and conditions for the maintenance of goodness by means of appropriate social rules, where a 'rule' is viewed as a tool and not as a law (Harr 1993: 56). Thus social goods and individual good are mutually constituted and not mutually exclusive. Given this emphasis, and in contrast to atomism, individuals need not protect themselves against society. They are constituted by it and have the capacity to assist in its change through intersubjecrive being.

This very major difference between the two perspectives thus resides in notions of the maintenance of good. Atomism's individual strives for goodness by transcending society; holism's individual strives for goodness from his/her being-in-connectedness.

3.2 The ideal self of holistic psychology

In accordance with the moral ideals stated above, the ideal self of holism is expressed as an "ensembled self" (Sampson 1988: 369) or an "interdependent self" (Markus & Kitayama 1991: 149). For Sandel (1982) an "unencumbered self" is an impossibility.

The ideal self of the holists has features similar to those implied by atomism, but the shift in emphasis articulates a rather different set of moral rules. The ideal self of holism should be a partially free agent, critical of society (on the basis of authenticity) and responsible to it due to a connectedness with others. Such a self should manifest a self-committed personhood. The strong moral force of this self is exerted in the direction of mutuality and concern. This does not imply to mean that the individual should transcend all self-actualising goals, but that personal goals and individual critical reasoning should be contained within goals which serve both the individual and the community.

Indeed, one may discern an increased emphasis in psychology on the concept of 'mutuality' as a means of understanding the complexity of human development. For example, an influential social psychology textbook by Hewitt (1988: 40) emphasises mutuality,

while the theme of the significance of commitment is discernible in recent psychological analyses (see Beyers 1990: 21).

In holistic thought, the individual has a right to equal dignity, but gains that right automatically when he/she is recognised as a full member of the community. Society is not considered as constraint on that right since the individual participates equally in the construction and reconstruction of moral rules on the basis of inter-subjective mutuality. The potential practical difference between holism and atomism with regard to equality is enormous: atomism's individual could insist that society should devise measures to protect him/her against social forces in order to ensure equal individual treatment; holism's individual would insist on ensuring equality by being an acknowledged member of a particular intersubjective community. It seems justified to suggest that the former would be likely to conceive of an ideal of universal citizenry wary of particularised citizenry, and the latter an ideal of a particularised citizenry wary of universal citizenry. Both would strive to ensure equal dignity for the individual.

Numerous contributions from psychology during this decade point to a concern with the formative reality of the social context for humanness. The "intersubjective being" is not to be mistaken for an interaction between "separate, bounded individuals" (after Spence 1985: 1288). It refers to a co-constructed humanness, to shared meaning-making. Noteworthy contributions have been made in this regard by leading psychologists such as Bruner (1990: 1-32) on the task of psychology; Shweder (1990: 1-43) on cultural psychology, which is said to depend on the premise that "the life of [the] psyche is the life of intentional persons" evolving from "participation in an intentional world" (Shweder 1990: 54); Heelas & Locke (1981) on indigenous psychologies, and Greenwood's reader *The future of folk psychology*, in which one chapter is boldly titled "Folk psychology is here to stay" (Greenwood 1991: 149). Since the eighties, a steady questioning of social psychological views on subjects such as similarity and attraction has borne further testimony to a discomfort with atomistic analyses of the nature of social influence (Gergen 1982: 34).

These contributions point to the view that freedom of choice is a function of situated morality: that the individual, in order to exercise choice, must have an understanding of the principles involved in choice and that such an understanding is acquired socially. Thus autonomy is viewed as involving intersubjective being (Harr 1983: 20).

For holism, then, the right to equal citizenship implies the right to be an individual in a community. Ultimately this implies a recognition of diversity. The right to community may be said to articulate a political policy of communitarianism, which will be dealt with and further qualified below.

3.3 The politics of holistic communitarian psychology: recognition of difference?

Concern with intersubjectivity results in a balancing of the language of rights and the language of commitment. That is, rights are important but they are seen to imply commitment. For example, the right to freedom and equality implies a commitment to these ideals. Hence, following the main trend of this philosophical stance, one could phrase the 'communitarian' ideal in terms of action rather than terms of law, as in the case of the atomistic liberal ideal. One could speak of

- a commitment to personal authenticity,
- a commitment to the establishment of equal dignity supported by mutuality in community,
- a commitment to critical reasoning, and
- a commitment to the recognition of diversity among individuals.

Implied in the commitment to community is a right to community. This principle therefore implies the individual's right to be recognised as a member of a particular society. To afford the individual the dignity that he deserves, his particular cultural identity must be protected and respected. Taylor (1995: 185) makes the important point that this view does not deny agency. It should also be noted that the communitarian ideal is a far cry from the collectivistic perspective.

Communitarianism retains the ideal of agentive 'self-responsibility', but rejects any right to actualise the self shich does not take the needs of the community into account. Those who adhere to this position classify themselves variously as civic humanists, holistic liberalists, communitarian liberalists and liberal communitarians (Taylor 1995).

4. Atomistic liberal psychology and holistic communitarian psychology in perspective

In an attempt to clarify important differences between atomism and holism, these ontologies are usually presented as dichotomies (as has been the case in the above discussion). Likewise, liberalism and communitarianism are categorised and contrasted in political literature. This trend is unfortunate since it has trivialised an intricate relationship between the two perspectives. It is my view that in political debates liberals see totalitarianism, despotism and ethnocentrism in almost every statement of communal need and identity. Communitarians predict the demise of concern, civic harmony, order and the discipline necessary for commonly held standards of virtue as an inevitable consequence of liberalism.

In atomistic liberal psychology a similar trend towards dichotomising and trivialising is noticeable. For decades it has not been politically correct for psychologists to concern themselves with civic norms or the maintenance of good character; this is distrusted as an apology for advocating conformist behaviour and a threat to the maintenance of personal freedom. Value-laden 'scientific' texts in social psychological literature bear testimony to this, as has been ably shown by Gergen (1982: 173). Likewise, any attempt to study folk psychology has been distrusted as an excuse for ethnocentrism. Attacks on any deviation from the politically correct search for universals are subtle but sharp (Spiro 1994: 4). It is implied, if not stated outright, that a search for universals and a study of the content of a particular cultural context are mutually exclusive points of departure. A recent study (Wierzbicka 1993: 205-31) is noteworthy for its attempt to contribute both to a definition of universals and to an analysis of particular cultures — but such studies are the exception.

Historical analysis supports the notion that ideals such as those contained in atomism and holism are intertwined. Spragens (1995: 37-51) clarifies the connection, which will be sketched briefly below. These insights could inform psychology with regard to dealing with apparent dichotomies.

4.1 The interconnectedness of liberalism and communitarianism

At the time that liberalism came to the fore in Western society, social life was highly regulated. A variety of repressive practices constrained the freedom of individual expression in religious, economic, personal and other spheres. Against this societal background of the repression of individual concerns, the idea of freedom came to signify relief from repression ... "for relief, not for the be-all and end-all of human existence" (Spragens 1995: 39).

It is important to realise that the idea of individual freedom was promoted by people like Locke, Condocet and Mill who were deeply rooted in traditional norms. Spragens (1995: 39) writes:

> The original liberals were still in fundamental respects committed to moral and philosophical assumptions they inherited from the classical tradition [...] even as they spoke the language of modernity they took for granted some of the anthropological and moral assumptions of the very same intellectual ancestors they were rejecting.

The early liberals were thus more traditionally moral than is generally conceded by twentieth-century liberal theoreticians. For example, Locke was an empiricist who made hedonistic statements, but in his personal letters he manifests a deep moral and religious involvement and he emphasises the cultivation of virtue. No matter how important the individual's rights were to him, they were never to be exercised in a way which would undermine the community. Spragens (1995: 4) writes: "He was not a rights seeker but a theorist seeking equilibrium between contract and consent".

Similar statements can be made about Condocet and Mill. Their vision was that a healthy society was a complex institution, held together by a variety of good values and by virtuous people. They did not endorse the view that a single value such as freedom (or equality),

however important, should dominate society. They emphasised that in a healthy society people of good character should be involved together in striving after worthy goals such as prosperity, equality, freedom, stability, responsibility, harmony, civic friendship, moral insight, intellectual advancement and similar complex features. Freedom and equality were seen as values among other values. Indeed, it was foreseen that the right to freedom and equality would place an obligation on the individual to promote an orderly society. On no account were freedom and equality to be absolutised.

After the Industrial Revolution and the advent of capitalism, mobility and technology, the classical value system upon which liberalism rested was eroded. In twentieth-century liberal society earlier conceptions of virtue were superseded by a more clearly value-neutral liberalism (except for equality or freedom or both), finally culminating in what is generally known as possessive individualism. In terms of this tradition no individual or government has a right to openly adopt policies which might direct character according to a conception of the good, since such a choice would undermine the individual's right to choose for himself what is in his own interest.

The contrast is sharp. For early liberals freedom was to be found only in a context of

> complementary obligations, deriving from communal attachments, and responsibilities, from the restraints of a moral order and from the force of human sympathy [...] No early liberal would have ever defended the buccaneer individualism of a Herbert Spencer or ever even have conceived of an individual like Sartre's Orestes, who finds 'nothing left in heaven, no right or wrong, or anyone to give me orders' and concludes that he is to live by 'no other law, but mine' (Spragens 1995: 43).

Today we have liberal societies often dominated by single values, such as freedom or equality, with atomistic psychologies to support them. But the important point is that the *dicta* of epistemology concerning value-free disengaged reason constrain such societies and their psychologies, preventing them from making a meaningful contribution towards the maintenance of the complex of community obligated values contained in a virtuous character. It comes as no surprise, then, that there is a concern in psychology to rediscover character, to resocialise that which might promote the personal

restraint inherent in the moral obligations of freedom and equality (Harr *et al* 1985: 146-7). What these psychologies would wish for is a renewed focus of study on ideas of virtuous behaviour, lost by the possessive liberalism of the twentieth century.

The advent of the holistic perspective in psychology has highlighted the dilemma. How psychology may respond to the categories and advocacies outlined above will now be addressed.

5. Ontology and advocacy: psychology's reaction to the categorisation 'atomism versus holism'

Psychology has been shaped in the twentieth century, a period noted for its possessive individualism. What psychology should carefully consider is the implication of the relationship between a revised ontology and the advocacy of moral ideals.

Having recourse for a moment to a folk (common) sense (which is a holistic stance), I should like to make certain deductions from the brief venture into the history of psychology outlined above. Individual rights and freedoms are best sustained in the long term in a society where individuals have a strong sense of personal obligation, of commitment to communal concerns and of restraint upon the self. Contrarily, societal order and communal harmony are best sustained in the long term where sufficient checks on group authority exist via the protection of the notion of individual moral choice.

What seems to be 'right' for humanness, then, is a sense of autonomy embedded in communal concern. Does this mean that I am advocating a moral order for human beings based on contradictory ontologies? If common sense indicates that this is so, then the ontological dichotomies should be read as intellectually clarifying categories but not as correct categorical statements.

Our question remains: should the two ontologies be seen as mutually exclusive determinants of moral prescriptions? I suggest not, on the basis that:

- Human beings are intersubjectively constrained towards the creation of certain meanings. These meanings define rule systems (or principles) which are involved when the individual chooses

how to act (a holistic view).

- Human beings develop the capacity to distance themselves from contact and to choose between different sets of rule systems (an atomistic view).
- This occurs only if the society in which the individual is embedded develops a rule system whereby the idea of choice between principles is held in high regard and therefore intersubjectively socialised within that context (a holistic corrective of an atomistic view).

I believe this clarifies the superficiality of perceivedontological and political dichotomies. Therefore, it seems that the atomistic and holistic ontologies need not be seen as contradictory or as provideing mutually exclusive moral prescriptions. They should not be categorised and essentialised. Rather, holism should be read as a corrective upon atomism. An essentialised atomistic ideal created the need for this holistic corrective. What psychology does not need now is a new essentialised holistic ideal.

Recent trends in psychology cannot be accused of falling into such a trap. Atomistic psychology has merely responded to the challenge of holism by becoming more concerned with context during the past decade. It follows that the study of differences among collectives, culture and the culture of context is one way in which psychology is spontaneously trying to rectify its rarified conception of the ideal self. How this is happening will now be discussed.

6. Psychology, culture and the politics of recognition of difference

It was noted at the outset that psychology has recently become concerned with the relationship berween culture and the individual. The discussion above has provided insights which may be of assitance in assessing of the meaning of this concern.

I believe the drive to accommodate culture today is a spontaneous actional response to the ills of atomistic liberalism, but not a negation of everything which atomistic liberalism tries to maintain. In psychology this concern wirh culture (and with community) has

taken on a variety of forms which are not always in accordance with a politics of recognition of difference.

- There are attempts to retain all the basic tenets of atomism but to include culture as a variable in research. This is to be seen in the cross-cultural psychological movement which emphasises the search for universals. By its own admission it is floundering (Van de Vijver & Hutschemaekers 1990: Patt 1) and it is clear that defining universals cross-culturally is a very difficult enterprise.
- A few cross-culturalists of essentially epistemological persuasion have acknowledged the importance of diversity and are describing their endeavours as 'indigenous psychology'. They are clearly committed to a search for universals and implicitly promote liberal values, yet are also committed to an articulation of what indigenous reality entails (Kim *et al* 1994: 10).
- The cultural psychological movement retains aspects of atomistic liberal psychology (Markus & Kitayama 1991: 224-53). It is holistic but agentive in that it concentrates on the particulars of culture as important to the understanding of self and identity. Cultural psychologists are happy to concede the possibility of universals without necessarily actively searching for them (Stigler 1990: 1-43). Cultural psychology acknowledges multiculturalism as a reality requiring to be studied for itself (Cole 1996: 7).
- The community psychology movement is similar to the cultural psychology movement in that it aims for a definition of particular communities and therefore allows for an assessment of a multicultural context. Some versions of it are non-agentive in that the focus is upon the restructuring of community (TerreBlanche *et al* 1994) but it is not necessarily dismissive of agency since it often strives for the protection of community in order to encourage personal responsibility and empowerment (Rappoport 1990: 51).

At present, then, the accommodation of culture in psychology retains its agentive character to a large extent, both in the cross-cultural and the cultural psychological versions thereof. It is therefore neither disposed towards collectivism nor towards ethnocentrism. It manifests both liberal and communitarian principles. When it does endorse a politics of recognition of difference (as in

cultural psychology), I believe that it corrects twentieth-century liberalism's tendency towards homogenisation and consequent undermining of equal dignity. On the moral level it tries to rephrase the ideal self of psychology in terms of embedded individualism rather than possessive individualism.

7. Conclusion

What can a culturally aware psychology achieve, in terms of the exposition above? It can facilitate several important ideals:

- a rediscovery of the importance of community to any agentive action,
- a reformulation of self-actualisation and personal freedom as involved agency rather than disengaged reasoning,
- a renewed faith in the socialisation of virtue as a fundamental prerequisite for the establishment of a moral self, by contributing to an academic understanding of the nature of virtue, and
- a confirmation of the importance of agency for psychological health, but with the recognition of difference among agents.

It seems worthwhile to strive for these ideals.

Bibliography

BELLAH R N, R MADSEN, N M SULLIVAN, A SWIDLER & S M TIPTON
1985. *Habits of the heart. Individualism and commitment in American life.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

BEYERS E
1990. *Morele ordes in die sielkunde.* Intreerede, Maart 1990. Pretoria: Unisa.

1996. Toward a formulation of a philosophical base for education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology* 26(3): 191-7.

BRUNER J S
1990. *Acts of meaning.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

COLE M
1996. *Cultural psychology. A once and future discipline.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

ETZIONI A (ed)
1995. *New communitarian thinking.* Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

FROMM E
1992. *The revision of psychoanalysis.* Boulder: Westview Press.

GERGEN K J
1982. *Toward the transformation of social knowledge.* Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

1983. Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 26: 309-20.

GOSLIN D A (ed)
1969. *Handbook of socialization theory and research.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

GREENWOOD J D (ed)
1991. *The future of folk psychology. Intentionality and cognitive science.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

HARR R
1983. *Personal being: a theory for individual psychology.* Oxford: Blackwell.

HARR R, D CLARKE & H DE CARLO
1985. *Motives and mechanisms. An introduction to the psychology of action.* London: Methuen.

HEELAS P & A LOCK
1981. *Indigenous psychologies: the anthropology of the self.* London: Academic Press.

HEWITT M, W STROEBE, J P CODOL & G M STEPHENSON
1988. *Introduction to social psychology: a European perspective.* Oxford: Blackwell.

KIM U, H C TRIANDIS, S KAGITCHIBASI, S C CHOI & G HOON
1994. *Individualism and collectivism.* London: Sage.

KÖHLBERG L
1969. Stage and sequence: the cognitive developmental approach to socialization. Goslin (ed) 1969: 347-480.

LASCH C
1978. *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing expectations*. New York: Norton.

LONERGEN B
1980. *Understanding and being. An introduction and companion to insight*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.

MANICAS P T & P F SECORD
1983. Implications for psychology of the new philosophy of science. *American Psychologist* 38(4): 399-413.

MARKUS H & S KITAYAMA
1991. Culture and the self: implications for cognition, emotion and motivation. *Psychological Review* 98: 224-53.

MASLOW A H
1968. *Toward a psychiatry of being*. Princeton, New Jersey: Van Nostrand.

PIAGET T L
1970. *Genetic epistemology*. New York: Norton.

RAPPOPORT T J
1990. Research methods and the empowerment of social gender. Tolan *et al* (eds) 1990: 51-63.

ROGERS C R
1961. *On becoming a person: a therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.

SAMPSON E E
1988. The debate on individualism: indigenous psychologies of the individual and their role in personal and societal functioning. *American Psychologist* 43(1): 15-22.

SANDEL J J
1982. *Liberalism and the limits of justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SCHWARTZ B
1986. *The battle for human nature. Science morality and modern life*. New York: Norton.

SHOTTER J
1993. *Cultural politics of everyday life*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

SHWEDER R A
1990. Cultural psychology — what is it? Stigler *et al* (eds) 1990: 1-43.

SPENCE J T
1985. Achievement American style: the rewards and costs of individualism. *American Psychologist* 40: 1285-95.

SPIRO M E
1994. *Culture and human nature*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

SPRAGENS T A
1995. Communitarian liberalism. Etzioni (ed) 1995: 37-51.

STAM H, T B ROGERS & K GERGEN
1987. *The analysis of psychological theory: metapsychological perspectives.* Washington: Hemisphere Publishers.

STIGLER J W, R A SHWEDER & B HERDT
1990. *Cultural psychology. Essays on comparative human development.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

TAYLOR C
1989. *Sources of the self.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
1995. *Philosophical arguments.* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

TERREBLANCHE M J, R A BUTCHART & M SEEDAT
1994. Community psychology and oral history in Eldorado Park: A case study in surveillance, confession and resistance. Paper presented at the Advanced Social Research Seminar Series, University of the Witwatersrand, October 1994.

TOLAN P, C KEYS, F CHERTOK & L JASON (eds)
1990. *Researching community psychology. Issues of theory and methods.* Washington: APA.

VAN DE VIJVER F J R & G J M HUTSCHEMAEKERS
1990. *The investigation of culture. Current issues in cultural psychology.* Tilburg: University Press.

WALLACH M A & L WALLACH
1983. *Psychology's sanction for selfishness. The error of egoism in theory and therapy.* San Francisco: D H Freeman.

WEXLER P
1983. *Critical social psychology.* London: Routledge.

WIERZBICKA A
1993. A conceptual basis for cultural psychology. *Ethos* 21(2): 205-31.