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Fragmentation, Hermeneutics, Scholarship, and Liberal Education in Psychology

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In reaction to the other papers in this special issue, the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer is further clarified, especially with respect to the ethical sense evident in Gadamer's work, and in that of a younger generation of critical hermeneutists. This discussion sets the stage for a critical questioning of the ability of psychologists, given their past and current disciplinary and professional horizons, to engage a hermeneutic solution to the problem of fragmentation in psychology.

In almost all of its classical and modern forms, scholarship connotes some model of the rational, organized around the disinterested pursuit of knowledge. Central to the idea of intellectual community, particularly as enshrined in the modern university, is the notion of communication as a mutual transparency that permits and warrants informed agreement and action. All of this, in turn, assumes a shared human capacity for communication of this kind. Further, we only can agree to disagree if we can establish agreement concerning that upon which we diverge. All problems of disagreement and the resultant fragmentations are thus parasitic upon an ideal speech situation.

Unfortunately, nothing appears to guarantee the assumption of communicative transparency upon which the foregoing conceptions of scholarship, communication, and intellectual community depend. Indeed, anyone who has spent any time at all in university departments of psychology can attest that these most often are not model communities in this sense. More formally, arguments by poststructuralists like Jacques Derrida and postmodernists like Jean-François Lyotard raise fundamental doubts about the assumption that communication is, in principle, transparent. Building on

such critiques of modernity, observers of the Academy like Readings (1996), in his recent book, *The University in Ruins*, have argued not that we can not speak to each other, but that academic, like other communities, are not (and can not) be organized around a consensual, immanent ideal. In the resultant University of Dissensus, communication and the understanding it fosters are not matters of rational consensus. Such a community is heterogeneous. It insists that "the position of authority can not be authoritatively occupied" (p. 187).

Is the only alternative then to a community founded on communicational transparency a world of self-interested individuals and groups mired inexorably in their own perspectives and demands? Again, life in contemporary psychology departments and associations certainly seems to provide considerable evidence for this conclusion. While not dismissive of this possibility, all the contributors to this special issue believe that some more desired middle ground might yet be found between the modern ideal of consensual, communicative transparency and the postmodern condition of seemingly irreconcilable difference. To this end, they make common appeal to the possibility of going beyond seeming incommensurabilities across different sub-disciplines, schools, and approaches in psychology, through some kind of hermeneutic encounter. As Kristensen, Slife, and Yanchar (2000, this issue) and Richardson (2000, this issue) already have noted, such a project requires a particular kind of scholarly, moral commitment to understanding both one's own and others' perspectives.

In this reaction, I want to clarify further the nature of this hermeneutic commitment, through a brief exegesis of the perspectivism of Gadamer. I then want to entertain a basic question concerning our ability as psychologists, given our disciplinary and professional horizons, to engage this possible option as a means of overcoming our current state of disciplinary fragmentation.

Gadamer's Perspectivism

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics (1960/1995, 1976) is perhaps the most well-known of several hermeneutics that draw upon Heidegger's (1927/1962, 1949) insistence on the historically conditioned, context dependent character of all interpretation. For Gadamer, all forms of understanding obtain from an inescapable historical and contextual vantage point that assumes a tradition of understanding. Those who would understand never can free themselves from the way of life in which they are embedded. There is no outside vantage point, complete with its own set of ahistorical, universal, and absolute standards, from which to make judgments concerning the relative merits of different interpretations. A single, definitive interpretation is impossible. However, Gadamer's genius has been to recognize that this

does not necessarily signal a descent into an epistemic anarchy that abandons any vestige of objectivity.

When interpretations differ, it is because they are drawn from different historical, sociocultural traditions, including the forms of collective and individual psychology emergent within these traditions. Traditions, in Gadamer's sense, are historically-effected forms of life that include socioculturally sanctioned conventions, means, and practices. Our psychologies grow out of our participation, given the unique kinds of biological beings we are, in these pre-existing ways of life. We literally embody the traditions in which we are embedded, and extend and alter them by our experiences and actions, initially as prereflective, and eventually as genuinely reflective and reflexive agents (see Martin and Sugarman, 1996, 1998).

The nonabsolutist objectivity of interpretations derives from the necessary groundedness of interpreters and interpretations in particular historical modes of existence and practical understanding. All such perspectival objectivity is tied to the horizon of the contemporary sociocultural context within which interpretation occurs. It is a negotiated and negotiable, temporally contingent objectivity that, like the sociocultural horizons invoked, always is subject to ongoing change. Gadamer's metaphor for moving beyond any impasse in interpretative understanding is the "fusion of horizons." He, like Kristensen et al. (2000), rejects radical incommensurability between competing traditions, and posits the possibility of fusions that result from authentic attempts to understand one's own and others' interpretations and the traditions in which they are embedded. When dialogue across interpretative traditions is honestly and seriously engaged, some degree of fusion is inevitable. The understanding that results will differ, at least somewhat, from that contained in either of the competing traditions, both in its substantive claims and warrants of justification.

It is very important to recognize that Gadamer's depiction of understanding as participating in an occurrence of tradition, or traditions in the case of dialogical fusions, rules out radical subjectivity. As Grondin (1994, pp. 116–117) states, "Understanding . . . is less an action of autonomous subjectivity than participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated." What strikes interpreters as sense or nonsense depends on the traditions in which interpreters and interpretations are embedded, and these traditions, while always contingent, are accessible in a way that can warrant a kind of perspectival, fallibilist objectivity. Every genuine attempt to understand requires an interpreter to penetrate her or his own preunderstanding and to be open to the understanding of the other. Both of these undertakings are substantive in a way that includes but goes beyond the subjectivity of interpreters. In Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, there is no principle higher than dialogue, the dialectic of question and answer. What we draw upon in our reflection on our own

historically-effected understanding and our efforts to extend it, is the necessarily perspectival, but non-arbitrary, warranted reason that flows from our historical and sociocultural situatedness.

Depending on the sources one consults, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is portrayed variously: sometimes as a form of Continental, anti-philosophical postmodernism, sometimes as an attempt to rescue Western enlightenment thought through a reification of traditional values, and sometimes as the invitation to dialogue that I have been discussing. While I believe that most Gadamerian scholars would reject the first two of these views, it is important to note at least two important criticisms that have been leveled against Gadamer's ideas. One criticism is that Gadamer's fusion metaphor requires a form of consensual agreement that reinstates classical ideas of communicative transparency, or at least fails adequately to problematize this particular cornerstone of Western, rational bias. The other is that Gadamer's reliance on tradition is simply another form of foundationalist oppression of marginalized voices. I want briefly to argue against these criticisms. However, to do so effectively, I think it must be admitted that Gadamer does rely on a kind of ethical stance that cuts across various traditions. It is this particular ethical stance that I subsequently will use to entertain the viability of a hermeneutic resolution to the problem of fragmentation in contemporary psychology.

By seeming to equate successful hermeneutic understanding with dialogic consensus, Gadamer is not precluding disagreement or the formation of oppositional opinion. He also is not insisting on agreement with tradition as the ultimate goal of understanding or the criterion of successful understanding in a way that renders his perspectivism necessarily conservative. In equating hermeneutic understanding with dialogical consensus, Gadamer simply intends to convey the inevitability of the mediation between past and present, alien and familiar, self and other that is the hallmark of any sincere attempt to understand. As Warnke (1987) makes clear:

On this reading, hermeneutic [understanding and encounter] can include disagreement: we simply agree to disagree. Although we cannot break out of the tradition to which we belong, we can break with it on any given issue by emphasizing other elements of the tradition, showing the way in which the older opinion has to be modified in light of the way the evidence now looks to us, and so on. In this case our agreement with the tradition consists in the fact that we can justify our new opinion only by coming to terms with its counter-position and understanding in just what way we do disagree with it. (p. 103)

In Charles Taylor's (1991) terms, Gadamer is emphasizing that:

Things take on importance against a background of intelligibility . . . a horizon. It follows that one of the things we can't do, if we are to define ourselves significantly, is

to suppress or deny the horizon against which things take on significance for us. This is the kind of self-defeating move frequently being carried out in our subjectivist civilization. (p. 37)

Thus, in dialogic consensus, the truth that is achieved is necessarily perspectival, but may involve disagreement as much as agreement. The resultant fusion preserves the position of the interpreter and that of the other in a newly emergent interpretation that goes beyond either of the previously held positions. We always agree with tradition in the sense that we are part of it, that is, constituted and oriented by it. However, we inevitably modify tradition in seeking the truth of the matters with which we are concerned, and in assessing truth claims in light of norms and principles inherited from tradition, and fused with those emanating from other perspectives. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is a form of justification that involves the dialogical adjudication of both beliefs and standards of rationality. However, unlike say, Hegel, Gadamer is adamant that any such advances in understanding cannot be foreclosed by anticipating an end-point of absolute knowledge. For Gadamer, understanding is ever emergent.

Hermeneutic's Ethical Sense

Gadamer further maintains that successful hermeneutic understanding requires, even demands, the extension of an honest, open, and potentially self-critical "good will" to the other (the text, the conversational partner, the actions or events to be understood). Two very recent attempts to elaborate a neo-Gadamerian, critical hermeneutics, explicitly acknowledge the ethical vision required for the kind of critical penetration of one's own pre-understanding and the ongoing, open dialogical encounter that Gadamer promotes.

In his fallibilist account of critical intersubjectivity, Fay (1996) conceives of objectivity as an ongoing dialogue among rival inquirers who attempt to understand each other in a manner genuinely open to the possibility that the other view may have merit, even beyond that of one's own. Such a dialogue requires the systematic examination of rival accounts and methods in a carefully probing, open-minded way. Objectivity thus becomes "a feature of cooperative conversations bent on collectively exploring the worth of various theories and modes of inquiry from a detached (but not necessarily disinterested) perspective" (Fay, p. 213). Critical intersubjectivity, as a fallibilist form of objectivity, does not require the abandonment of preconceptions, nor does it imply absolute truth or betoken necessary agreement. It does, however, require the serious attempt to understand through the critical penetration of one's own preunderstanding, and an openness to the understandings of others in dialogical fashion.

Clearly, Fay sees the hermeneutic commitment to understanding in ethical, as well as epistemic terms. When he speaks of the activity of social scientists, including psychologists, he suggests they inevitably work with traditions of discourse that equip them with the conceptual resources needed to do their work. These traditions are not closed, static, or immune to internal and external criticism. If the requisite ethic is in place, social scientists yield to the better argument even when it is counter to their preconceptions and value commitments. They do so by seeking evidence for conclusions, submitting work to outside evaluation, responding honestly to criticism, and in general attempting to be fair in the conduct of their work. In all this, they strive to be self-consciously critical of their conceptions of evidence and standards of significance by taking into account the ways in which their investigations are positioned historically, socially, and politically. They are accountable for the intellectual and evaluative commitments in their work, including responsibility to those who are written for and about. In Fay's own words, "This accountability is satisfied when social analyses acknowledge their positionality vis-à-vis other investigators, their audience, and those under study, and when these other voices are given some active role to play in social analyses themselves" (p. 219).

A similar ethical sense runs through the recent attempt by Kögler (1996) to fuse important insights from the works of both Gadamer and Foucault. However, in Kögler's critical hermeneutics neither truth nor self-reflexive subjectivity is equated with power. Power relations are rather to be seen "as a structured and structuring influence on categorical and theoretical forms of our self-understanding and, consequently on the modes of self-relations that go hand in hand with them, though without reducing these phenomena to power relations per se" (p. 255). Kögler leaves no doubt that ethical principles such as recognition of the "cosubjectivity of the other and the inalienable right to pursue one's self-realization" (p. 275) inform his conception of interpretative understanding. Such an ethical vision is indispensable to Kögler's attempt to develop a model of critical interpretative dialogue in which genuine respect for the other, and the possibility of extending one's own understanding and self-realization are reconciled through a situated yet not power-blind form of reflexivity.

Scholarship, Psychology, and Liberal Education

What, then, might be said about the possibility that we psychologists might adopt a hermeneutic approach to our problems of fragmentation? I have come to two conclusions. The first is that the proposed hermeneutic solution may not be workable across perspectives that are both metaphysically and ontologically distinct, in the sense that they really are about differ-

ent things. For example, if I truly believe that a complete reduction of psychological phenomena to neurophysiological and biochemical displays provides satisfactory answers to a psychological person's questions concerning her or his existence, there probably is little room for productive discourse with someone who rejects entirely this reduction. My second conclusion is that in the majority of instances where such metaphysical, ontological impasses are absent, the successful implementation of the hermeneutic option will require a much greater scholarly and moral commitment to open, critical understanding than we psychologists have tended to display in our past and present intellectual dealings.

Yanchar (1997) provides a concrete illustration of the kinds of difficulty that most of us face when confronted with the Gadamerian tasks of penetrating our own preunderstanding and engaging with other ideas dialogically in genuinely good faith. Most of our attempts at perspectival integration represent not so much a genuine fusion of horizons as the establishment of a kind of hegemony that privileges our own views and traditions by fitting other perspectives to (and generally under) them, in the absence of clearly articulated reasons that indicate a painstakingly careful interpretation of the other perspectives. Ironically, despite our past and continuing cascade of proclamations concerning our strong commitment to scholarly thought and inquiry, our usual practice is very well illustrated by Staats's approach. With such a strategy, our problems of fragmentation may be momentarily removed from view, but they can not be addressed and navigated in this way.

Daniel Robinson (1996) implies that our very disciplinary attachments are fueled by a questionable narrowness in our scholarly vision, rather than by an intellectual commitment to understanding human action and experience, and the circumstances and conditions that enable and constrain both. According to Robinson, an adequate human psychology would recognize and celebrate "the deepest and most abiding human aspirations" (p. 7). Such aspirations are simultaneously aesthetic, moral, sociocultural, and political. Consequently, not only should critical and substantive interaction occur across the various sub-disciplines of psychology (contra fragmentation), but relationships between psychology and other disciplines such as philosophy and history must be fundamental. Without such intellectual connectivity, it is impossible to approach in a scholarly fashion the ineluctable fact that "the primary difference between the first human beings and those found in later and historically recorded epochs is to be understood chiefly in terms of what the larger context affords" (p. 7).

And yet, as prominent, respected historians of psychology such as Koch and Robinson consistently have emphasized, the response of both academic and professional psychology has been mostly to avoid both inter- and intradisciplinary intellectual connectivity. In Robinson's words, "Psychology's indiffer-

ence and occasional hostility toward historical and philosophical modes of inquiry can only be ironic. The discipline's nearly official anti-intellectualism has marginalized psychology within its own home, the university . . . [and] persistent and current approaches to the *training* of . . . psychologists threaten to exile most of them from the life of the mind otherwise available to academic persons" (p. 7). With even more specific and dramatic relevance to the possibility that we psychologists might engage in the kind of demanding, critical reflection and open dialogue required by an anti-fragmentation, hermeneutic strategy, is Koch's extreme skepticism concerning the scholarly inclinations and capabilities of psychologists. In one of his last essays, Koch (1992) comments as follows.

Since its inception as science, psychology has generated a rhetoric of "rigor" concerning the ideal characteristics of its inquirers. An early emphasis on experimental exactitude expanded, by the 1930s, to a conception that saw the first-year graduate student also as a mature theoretical physicist, logician, and (when required) carpenter. By the 1960s, the student was expected also, to be an expert in "computer science," and an adept in esoteric speculations of probability mathematics. Consistently missing from these autistic job specifications have been such trivial matters as the ability to read, to report reliably on what has been read, and to write. As for the more sophisticated hermeneutic and analytic skills of scholarship, these have apparently been seen as positive threats to scientific purity. (p. 261)

To the extent that the foregoing sentiments, even if perhaps overstated, capture something undeniably true about our intellectual tradition, it might reasonably be concluded that psychologists have not, in general, shown themselves to be in possession of the kind of scholarly, ethical commitment required by the hermeneutic solution under consideration. To date, both academic and professional psychology have pursued disciplinary and vocational status mostly through strategies and practices fundamentally antithetical to a hermeneutic perspective. These practices have led not only to a divorce between psychology and other disciplines relevant to an understanding of what is involved in the experience of life as a psychological person, but to a growing fragmentation of psychology itself into ever more narrowly defined divisions and groups, all seemingly intent upon walling-off increasingly insular patches of pseudo-intellectual turf — not, I assume, the kind of result anticipated when the American Psychological Association first established its divisional structure some fifty years ago.

In the absence of a major reversal in our disciplinary and professional strategy, one hardly can be sanguine about the prospects for hermeneutic openness, dialogue, and possible resolution. What may be required amounts to little less than a significant restructuring of psychology and its academic and professional organizations through a widespread endorsement of a kind of inclusive, liberal education that psychology has for so long avoided. It is only

through such a genuinely intellectual joining with other traditions of scholarly and professional thought and practice that we might eventually position ourselves to take advantage of the hermeneutic option, and what it might yield in the way of advanced understanding. We must give up our intellectual isolation to become more fully what I believe we really do want to be. In true hermeneutic fashion, we can become our intellectual selves only by recognizing fully, and participating eagerly within, the intellectual traditions available to us. By thinking and acting otherwise, psychology has perhaps fallen prey to what, at the level of individual anomie, Taylor (1991) has referred to as the malaise of modernity — the mistaken notion that one can become or understand anything in isolation from requisite horizons of intelligibility.

Of course, psychology and psychologists are not alone in this mistake. Far too much of the modern Academy seems determined to follow the path of non-interactive, self-interest. Some, understand this tendency as a logical outcome of our twentieth-century attachment to scientism, technologism, proceduralism, and corporatism, and seem almost to relish leaping to the nihilistic conclusion that if anything goes, it might as well be my particular thing. The resultant strident, ideological clashes, with which we are all by now so familiar, reveal little of the hermeneutic ethical stance, and threaten to make valid, radically anarchistic attacks on the very idea of communication as a possible vehicle for intellectual advance.

In recognition of these more general tensions, perhaps Robinson, Koch, and others have overstated psychology's unique culpability for, and susceptibility to, anti-intellectual forces. I believe that a hermeneutic solution to problems of disciplinary fragmentation in psychology is at least intellectually viable. If there really is no neutral ground, no detached, nonparticipant vantage point, we truly are stuck within the traditions we both inherit and spawn. The mere fact that the possibility of a hermeneutic resolution to our problems of intellectual and disciplinary fragmentation is being entertained surely is a sign that at least some part of our current traditions of scholarship in psychology admit to the necessity of reaching beyond both psychology's traditional and more recent sub-disciplinary borders, to embrace possibilities resident in other and broader traditions of scholarly practice. We could do, and probably have done, far worse.

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