

## 6 Toward Worldview Pluralism in Psychology

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**With great love, I dedicate this chapter to my father, Roger A. Kosits, who struggled with and died from lung cancer during the time this chapter was written. He was a tolerant man and, I trust, would have sympathized with the pluralistic ideals expressed herein.**

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Human beings are powerfully shaped—and divided—by their worldviews, or beliefs about ultimate questions. Implicitly or explicitly, we carry with us beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), about right and wrong (ethics), and about how we come to know the world (epistemology). The doubly challenging thing about these beliefs is they are not only inherently contested, but there is also no worldview-neutral way to determine which ontology, ethic, or epistemology we should adopt. Neither, as I hope to show, is it possible to live our lives—including our lives *as psychologists*—in a worldview-neutral way. Although our discipline emerged in the 19th century with the promise of a method-wrought worldview-neutrality, this promise has not been fulfilled. Indeed, this volume has argued that worldviews are powerfully transmitted through our sociocultural practices such as training (Chapter 2), our psychotherapy (Chapter 3), our research (Chapter 4), and our study of culture (Chapter 5). The remaining question is: what shall we do about this?

This chapter will argue for what may alternatively be called worldview pluralism or worldview diversity. Though the widely used term *viewpoint* diversity<sup>1</sup> is helpful, the notion of *worldview* diversity hopes to expand the contemporary conversation beyond the current focus on political or moral viewpoints, and include the differing ontological and epistemological assumptions that psychologists believe. By employing the notion of *pluralism*, we intend to take advantage of the twofold meaning of the term. The first sense of the term has to do with the simple reality that psychologists are not entirely monolithic in their worldviews. The second sense

of the term is aspirational, i.e., the hope that psychology might formally adopt a position that *recognizes and nurtures* the diverse worldviews of its members, employing this diversity to improve science, and providing space to explore the possible connections between those worldviews and psychological thought and practice. The latter half of this chapter offers some initial concepts which we hope will advance the conversation on worldview pluralism within psychology, and, finally, within the viewpoint diversity movement itself. The chapter must begin, however, with an account of the significant obstacles which both impede and necessitate worldview pluralism.

### **A Certain Blindness in Human Beings—and the Difficulty of Worldview Pluralism**

In this account of the obstacles to worldview pluralism, we may start with one of North America's greatest psychologists of belief, William James (1890), who began his treatment of the subject with a common intuition: "everyone knows the difference between imagining a thing and believing in its existence, between supposing a proposition and acquiescing in its truth" (p. 283). In the domain of *worldview* beliefs, it is one thing to "suppose"—either on a conscious or merely intuitive level—ontological, ethical, or epistemological propositions, such as "material reality is all there is," or "psychology should adopt the position of worldview pluralism," or "operational definitions can provide legitimate insight in to psychological phenomena"; it is quite another to *believe* them. How do we know whether we believe them or not? James insisted, quite plausibly, that it's a matter of *feeling*. Belief is "a sort of feeling more allied to the emotions than anything else" (p. 283). Indeed, James refers to "the emotion of belief" (p. 284). When a proposition arouses "the believing reaction" (p. 305), we consciously or intuitively perceive that proposition to be real, or true. Hence, he called belief "the perception of reality" and his account of belief in the *Principles of Psychology* occurs in a chapter by that name. By contrast, when propositions fail to create this feeling, we doubt and perceive such things to be unreal.

This becomes problematic for tolerance and pluralism because people end up living in very different perceptual "worlds" (p. 291), believing or intuiting very different *realities*. Now it is true, James argued, that there are certain realities which *all* human beings seem to believe. The reality of our sensations is one of these things. The reality of our own existence is another. These, however, are scant resources for forging consensus! When it comes to worldviews (part of what James called "belief in objects of theory," p. 311), we can differ radically, and there is no easy intellectual or rational path toward consensus since these beliefs are not primarily derived through

cool and rational means. Instead, we tend to believe “those which appeal most urgently to our aesthetic, emotional, and active needs” (p. 312). It isn’t that we aren’t capable of articulating reasons if called to, it’s just that these reasons are likely to be tied to these practical needs.

Worldview pluralism is further complicated by the role of emotion in belief. For James, the more people feel, the more they tend to believe. Though there is fluctuation in the degree to which particular worldview assumptions seem real to us, when we conceive something with fervency, we affirm its existence: “to conceive with passion is *eo ipso* [by that very fact] to affirm” (p. 308). However, and here is the big issue, as Bagehot wrote, passion is often “strongest in those points in which [people] differ most from each other” (p. 308). Our often passionately held worldview beliefs, therefore, are likely to ooze with certainty. To make matters worse, we’re by nature inclined to find opposing worldview beliefs unreal, and therefore uninteresting, unworthy, unfathomable, “unbelievable,” and perhaps even evil.

In his well-known essay “On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings,” James (1899/1958) applied these psychological insights to the problem of pluralism, or of getting along with people whose sense of reality differs radically from our own. This “blindness in human beings,” he explained, “is the blindness with which *we all are afflicted* in regard to the feelings of creatures and people different from ourselves” (p. 149, emphasis added). This “ancestral blindness” dulls our sensitivity to the perspective of others. Since, as believers, we all live in different perceptual realities or worlds, we have a tendency to lack empathy or even charity toward those whose values or experiences differ from our own. To illustrate, James tells the story of encountering certain settlements or “coves” in the wilderness of North Carolina which he perceived to be aesthetic atrocities and “unmitigated squalor” (p. 150). But when his Mountaineer guide explained “why, we ain’t happy here, unless we are getting one of these coves under cultivation,” James wrote, “I instantly felt that I had been losing the whole inward significance of the situation. Because to me the clearing spoke of naught but denudation,” he mistakenly believed that “they could tell no other story” (p. 151). That really nails it: our blindness is to the possibility that other stories could be told. And this implies yet another kind of blindness, i.e., to the fact that we ourselves are caught up in our own perceptual world.

### **Scientific Evidence for This Blindness in Human Beings**

Contemporary psychological research bears James out. Long-standing research has illuminated the human tendency to be convinced of the superiority of our own viewpoints. We know, for example, that human beings

have a tendency to resist changing their beliefs even when they are presented with contradictory evidence (belief perseverance); we tend to seek out information that confirms what we were already committed to (confirmation bias). Consistent with both of these classic biases, strong evidence for “argumentative theory” (Mercier & Sperber, 2011) suggest that human reason isn’t primarily oriented toward truth, but rather toward finding support for what we already believe. More recently, emerging support for the “ideological conflict hypothesis” (Brandt, Reyna, Chambers, Crawford, & Wetherell, 2014) suggests that prejudicial attitudes are likely not the domain of *particular* worldviews, but, rather, people generally tend to be prejudiced against those whom they believe hold opposing worldviews. There is further evidence that the belief-discrimination link is mediated by perceived *value violations*, i.e., when we believe that another person’s values violate our own, we’re more likely to discriminate (Wetherell, Brandt, & Reyna, 2013). Indeed, preference for one’s own worldview “may stem from fundamental psychological processes that humans all share” (Brandt et al., 2014, p. 32). In other words, such worldview-bias and blindness to the insights of opposing worldview beliefs may be part of human nature, as James suggested.

The work of Jonathan Haidt has also borne James out. Haidt’s work has provided evidence that our moral reasoning is the “rational tail” of an “intuitive dog” (Haidt, 2012, p. 33ff). When it comes to moral beliefs—which are a type of worldview belief—intuitions come first and then we often struggle (and in Haidt’s lab, humorously so) to come up with reasons for those intuitions. A few years ago, Haidt (2011)<sup>2</sup> delivered a highly significant conference talk entitled “the bright future of post-partisan social psychology,” which foregrounded the social element to (moral) worldview beliefs. Moral commitments, he argues, not only blind us, but they also bind us together. We tend to assemble into collectives that share a certain set of moral convictions. Among ultra-social species—and unlike other ultra-social species like bees, wasps, ants, termites, and mole rats—human beings are unique in that we maintain social solidarity “by circling around sacred objects and principles” which allow ‘worshippers’ to trust one another. Sacredness, according to Phil Tetlock, is “any value that a moral community implicitly or explicitly treats as possessing infinite or transcendental significance.” Haidt continues, “when sacred values are threatened, we turn into [what Tetlock calls] ‘intuitive theologians,’ that is, we use our reasoning not to find the truth, but to find ways to defend what we hold sacred.” He continues: “sacralizing distorts thinking. These distortions are easy for outsiders to see, but they are invisible to those inside the force field.” So in other words, sacred values, which all human beings possess, likewise *blind us* to the insights and truths of those outside of our own communities.

## **Worldview Blindness in the Discipline of Psychology**

Psychology, for all of its insight into the human condition, has at times had difficulty applying its own insights *to itself*. It has, in other words, a “reflexivity” problem. We quite readily and correctly affirm that *individuals* suffer from a certain blindness, cognitive biases, and emotional thinking. But psychologists, we imply, have risen above the human condition. This is where Haidt’s talk becomes historic, and particularly relevant to our discussion: “But moral force fields are not only found in religious communities. They can operate in academic fields as well.” Haidt (2011) shows that social psychology is dominated by a particular set of ethical assumptions which not only bind the discipline together but also blind the discipline to certain possible types of explanations. In a dramatic demonstration on the floor of the annual meeting of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, the vast majority of attendees indicated they were politically liberal and a fraction of 1 percent confessed to being conservative. After Haidt’s talk, there has been an ever-growing awareness of ideological (or *worldview*) homogeneity in psychology. In a recent issue of *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, for example, Duarte, Crawford, Stern, Haidt, Jussim, and Tetlock (2015) write a target essay providing further empirical evidence of a particular bias within social psychology. In 1996, liberals outnumbered conservatives in psychology by a ratio of 4:1. By 2012, the imbalance had grown to 14:1. A follow-up to this review (Haidt & Jussim, 2016) has provided more evidence of this striking imbalance.

It’s too easy to get distracted by the political labels “liberal” and “conservative” here. What’s crucial and at stake is that Duarte et al. (2015) *are dealing with worldview assumptions*, particularly moral assumptions. For some, the moral imperative to fight for justice for the oppressed is paramount. For others, the moral imperative of personal responsibility is paramount. These insights complement one of the basic theses of this volume, that psychology has certain privileged worldview beliefs, whether they be individualism, naturalism, or, in this case, moral/political beliefs. The point is that the discipline has given preference to one set of worldview beliefs and been “blind” (in a Jamesian sense) to the insights of alternative assumptions. This too, and perhaps especially, makes worldview pluralism in psychology a profound challenge.

## **The Deep Roots of Worldview Blindness in the History of the North American University**

Worldview pluralism would seem to have two strikes against it, then. As James and psychological science attest, worldview blindness is a powerful part of human psychology—that’s strike one. As Haidt and others recite the

statistics within psychology of a powerful allegiance to a single set of moral worldview commitments, alongside the evidence in this volume for other worldview biases in the discipline, the possibility of worldview pluralism seems even less plausible—that's strike two. But there's yet another factor which would seem to make worldview pluralism within psychology even less likely, and that's the historical context in which this issue emerges. In short, worldview blindness has dominated North American psychology for about 250 years, so the possibility of reform would seem bleak indeed.

Following historian George Marsden (1994), it may be argued that a crucial change in North American higher education began during the middle of the 18th century. Prior to that point, during what we may call the confessional era<sup>3</sup> (1636–1758) of psychological thought, colleges tended to be sectarian schools where worldview commitments were stated clearly and explicitly. There was no pretended neutrality—faculty were expected to believe the orthodoxy of the academy and uphold it in their teaching. The main psychologies of this era were contained in theological textbooks, such as William Ames's (1643/1968) *Marrow of Theology*. As the colonial religious landscape became more diverse, however, it became difficult to maintain narrowly defined theological orthodoxies while simultaneously remaining truly public institutions. Typically, colleges chose the route of public engagement and broad appeal rather than disengagement and sectarianism (Marsden, 1994).

In order to maintain their status as public institutions, however, these colleges did not embrace confessional or worldview pluralism—where a multitude of different creeds could be recognized—rather, the “non-sectarian” solution they adopted was to employ the “neutral” methods of the Scottish Enlightenment. The psychology of the day would be based upon the objective observation “of” facts of consciousness,” which would then be inductively arranged (via the method of the revered Francis Bacon) into systems of moral and mental philosophy, the proto-psychology of the 18th and 19th centuries (Fuchs, 2000). When these proto-psychologies are studied in the 21st century, however, it is clear they were far from worldview-neutral. For example, Brown University president Francis Wayland's (1837/1963) best-selling moral philosophy textbook articulated a “doctrine of general consequences” (p. 110) where harmful outcomes were taken as evidence that certain behaviors were outside of God's will. Not exactly the kind of conclusion psychologists would tend to draw today! Clearly, then, supposedly neutral methods were being used in a hegemonically Christian educational context in which, lo and behold, all the data clearly pointed to the truth of Christianity!<sup>4</sup>

Psychological thought in North America has gone through at least two worldview shifts since then. During what we might call a “transitional era”

from approximately 1879 to 1913, there was a movement away from traditional Protestant worldview to a “liberal Protestant” worldview, which emphasized traditional morality but rejected dogma, embracing instead a non-materialist, evolutionary outlook (White, 2008). This revolution (Smith, 2003) was likewise carried out under the guise of methodological purity—the “New Psychology,” it was repeated again and again, was primarily about becoming a *real science*, embracing the new scientific methods of Wundt and others. But the findings of this new psychology were understood to uphold the beliefs of liberal Protestantism (Pickren, 2000). Indeed, William James’s classic *Principles of Psychology* is filled with moral exhortations consistent with this era.

What we might call the “secular era” of psychology began arguably with John Watson’s (1913) “Behaviorist Manifesto.” Once again, there was a call for methodological purity, an emphasis on behavior and a movement away from introspection. But a new worldview was being smuggled in, as Watson proclaimed that there was “no dividing line between man and brute” (p. 158), behaviorism would come to believe that animal research would suffice in the quest to understand human behavior. Though, of course, psychology no longer abides by the methodological rigors of radical behaviorism, its implicit commitment to naturalism (and relegation of other ontologies) remains (as Chapter 4 argues).

This rough outline of North American psychology’s history suggests that several highly significant worldview changes have taken place over the last few centuries, but these shifts were never above board. Instead, each era cloaked its significant worldview change under the guise of methodological purity. Also, a general pattern of interpretation emerged where the agreed-upon data of the psychological science<sup>5</sup> of the era were understood to un-problematically support the regnant worldview. The circularity of these arguments was (and still is) lost on all but those who did (or do) not share the dominant worldview.

### **Are There Alternatives to Worldview Blindness in Psychology? The Possibility of Coexistence**

This historical narrative suggests the existence of massive historical forces that could very well be strike three for worldview pluralism. Discrimination against the worldviews of outgroups appears to be deeply woven into human nature, into the discipline itself, and obscured by dissonance-reducing institutional structures which allow us to continue with a clean conscience that at least *we* are open-minded and scientific, all the while perpetuating worldview blindness. But we mustn’t give up so easily—the integrity of our discipline is at stake.

As legal scholar John Inazu (2016) points out in his book *Confident Pluralism*, we really have three options when it comes to dealing with what “John Rawls called. . . ‘the fact of pluralism’—‘the recognition that we live in [an academic discipline] of ‘a plurality of conflicting, and indeed incommensurable, conceptions of meaning, value and purpose of human life.’” (pp. 4–5). The worldview blindness of psychology is a form of “control,” one of Inazu’s (2015) three options. Control occurs when we “feign agreement by ignoring or minimizing our stark differences” (p. 128). Unstated but dominant worldview assumptions are like the proverbial water in which the fish swim, taken for granted by all except those poor creatures who lack gills. “We hold conferences,” he writes, which seem to be “expressing unity and solidarity” (p. 128) when in reality dissenting voices or opinions are unexpressed. Clearly, control is not the ideal solution to the fact of pluralism.

Another possibility is chaos. We see this in the political situation in the United States, where the expression of diverse opinions is often hateful. James (1899/1958), describing the “unhealthy and regrettable” political situation of his day, captures ours perfectly:

The unhealthiness consists solely in the fact that one-half of our fellow-countrymen remain entirely blind to the internal significance of the lives of the other half. They miss the joys and sorrows, they fail to feel the moral virtue, and they do not guess the presence of the intellectual ideals.

(p. 189)

It is this unwillingness to empathize with the other, to see the virtue and struggles of those with whom we disagree that leads to a chaotic shouting match. And opponents of worldview pluralism within psychology may likewise fear that such openness could lead to a “confusion of tongues” in our discipline, distraction by irrelevancies at best, inanities at worst. To these, I ask that they hear us out.

The third and best way of dealing with the fact of pluralism, and the best alternative to worldview blindness is what Inazu (2015) calls “confident pluralism.” He writes:

There is another possibility that better embraces the reality of our deepest differences: confident pluralism. Confident pluralism insists that. . . our shared existence is not only possible, but necessary. Instead of the elusive goal of *E pluribus unum* (“Out of many, one”), confident pluralism suggests a more modest possibility—that we can live together in our “many-ness.” It does not require Pollyanna-ish illusions that we will resolve our differences and live happily ever after.



Instead, it asks us to pursue a common existence in spite of our deeply held differences.

(p. 128)

Coexistence is a better approach for our discipline. It's where psychologists are allowed to be themselves, to come out of their respective worldview closets, and to openly explore the connections between their psychologies and their deepest convictions.

Some of Inazu's critics do not emphasize the logic of his argumentation, but rather his optimism. They fear that society is simply too divided to behave in such a civil and open-minded way. Given the acrimonious nature of public discourse, his critics may well be right. But there is good reason to be optimistic about psychology, despite all of the significant obstacles. Not only has our understanding of worldview bias increased as the foregoing attests, but, I hope to show, there may be sufficient resources and agreement within our discipline to make progress on worldview pluralism.

### **How Can We Coexist in Psychology? Moving Toward Worldview Awareness in Psychology**

If successful, this concluding chapter has taken us some distance toward the first step toward worldview pluralism in psychology, i.e., recognizing our propensity toward worldview blindness, which is the tendency to take our worldview convictions as *given*, in need of no explanation, as an accurate perception of reality, so much so that we may not even realize we have such assumptions. Further, worldview blindness is the tendency to be prejudiced against those viewpoints which oppose our own, to take opposing viewpoints as unreal or perhaps even evil. In short, the preceding considerations suggest that our certainty about our worldview beliefs is more likely due to the fact that we are human than to the fact that we are right.

The opposite of worldview blindness is worldview awareness. It is the process of making the implicit explicit, and becoming aware of the worldviews that are actually in play—in ourselves, in our opponents, and in the academic discipline we serve. Thankfully, we live in a time of growing worldview awareness as the moral/political biases of the academy have been made explicit by the “viewpoint diversity” movement ([heterodoxacademy.org](http://heterodoxacademy.org)). This volume has aimed to take an additional step, by highlighting other worldview beliefs that prevail in psychology.

It should be noted that both the viewpoint diversity movement and the preceding chapters have focused on what we might call *contested* worldview assumptions, i.e., those worldview beliefs in which psychologists *differ* from one another. Still, it has been widely recognized that pluralism

requires more than recognition of difference—after all, if we have absolutely nothing in common, our prospects of coexistence are bleak indeed. Inazu’s analysis, as we will see, suggests that there can be some areas of agreement that form the basis of confident pluralism. We might say, then, that while contested worldview beliefs *necessitate* worldview pluralism, it is our consensual worldview beliefs that *make worldview pluralism possible*. So, part of worldview awareness within psychology includes an understanding of consensual worldview assumptions.

To make sense of the following, it’s important to make explicit a distinction that has heretofore only been implicit, i.e., that between one’s “worldview” (WV) or the entire constellation of one’s ontological, ethical, and epistemological beliefs, and “individual worldview beliefs” (IWBs), i.e., particular beliefs about ontological, ethical, and epistemological issues. It’s clear that people from very different worldviews (WVs) can share individual worldview beliefs (IWBs). For example, many naturalists and theists can agree in the existence of the mind (an ontological belief), even though their understanding of the mind may vary greatly. Many liberals and conservatives can agree that poverty is bad (an ethical belief), though they may have very different understandings of its causes and cures. So the attempt to find consensual worldview beliefs is a quest to find consensual IWBs, not an attempt to find consensual WVs.

This chapter will explore the possibility of finding consensual IWBs in two ways. First, we’ll look at what we believe to be consensual *ethical and political* worldview assumptions of most psychologists, regardless of theoretical orientation. Given the enormous emphasis today on the ethical/political beliefs that divide psychologists, it may come as some shock that psychologists may very well agree on some bedrock principles. Acknowledging and re-committing to agreed-upon assumptions should set the stage for worldview pluralism within the field more broadly. Second, we’ll turn our attention to the viewpoint diversity movement itself, and the sticky question whether worldview pluralism is possible in mainstream psychological science, a discipline that was, as Chapter 4 and this chapter have argued, born of the WV of naturalism.

### **The Shared Ethical Assumptions of Psychologists**

In some sense, identifying the consensual ethical assumptions of psychologists should be rather straightforward. All research in North America must pass muster through Institutional Review Boards (IRBs in the States) or Research Ethics Boards (REBs in Canada) which are governed by very similar ethical codes. Membership in the APA requires that members promise to uphold the association’s *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct*. Likewise, members of the Canadian

Psychological Association abide by the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*. But there are potentially other consensual ethical assumptions uniting psychologists which would facilitate worldview pluralism in particular. Here we return to the work of John Inazu.

Inazu argues that a common existence is possible through civil practice or virtues, which we can re-frame as a matter of ethical worldview commitments. Inazu (2015) explains, “if enough of us embrace these aspirations, we may be able to sustain a consensus for confident pluralism, even as we draw from eclectic and blended antecedents” (p. 131). In other words, we may have significant disagreements at the level of entire worldviews, we may still nevertheless agree on several individual virtues/ethical standards.

The first of these is tolerance, “the most important aspiration of confident pluralism” (Inazu, 2015, p. 132). Our worldview disagreements may run deep indeed, and we may find the positions of others reprehensible. “As the philosopher Bernard Williams has observed, tolerance is most needed when people find others’ beliefs or practices ‘deeply unacceptable’ or ‘blasphemously, disastrously, obscenely wrong.’ The basic difficulty of tolerance, Williams notes, is that we need it ‘only for the intolerable’” (p. 132). Etymologically the word “tolerance” includes a root that means “endurance” (Inazu, 2016, p. 87). So tolerance is in no way an endorsing of the other’s viewpoint.

The next virtue is humility. If tolerance is the most important aspiration, humility “requires even greater self-reflection and self-discipline than tolerance” (Inazu, 2015, p. 132). We’ve briefly explored why this is the case—our minds are prone to overconfidence in the correctness of our own opinions and in the incorrectness of our opponents’. Inazu, not a psychologist, addresses this perfectly when he says, “our human faculties are inherently limited—our ability to think, reason, and reflect is less than perfect, a limitation that leaves open the possibility that we can be wrong.” Further, one of the main characteristics of worldview beliefs is that they are unprovable, and this, too, is grounds for humility. Inazu says:

This kind of humility is based on the limits of what we can prove, not on claims about what is true. For this reason, it should not be mistaken for relativism. Humility leaves open the possibility that there is right and wrong and good and evil. Humility does not impugn our confidence in truth, but it calls for a recognition that our beliefs often stem from contested premises that others do not share.

(p. 132)

Psychologists—of all people—should understand this. As James (1899/1958) wrote, “cannot we at least use our sense of our own blindness to make us more cautious?” (p. 172).

Finally, Inazu recommends patience. If nothing else, worldview beliefs are characterized by confidence, as we have seen. Haidt (2012) says we have “righteous minds” not merely “moral minds” because we tend to be judgmental and convinced of our own righteousness (p. xix). But our opponents are likewise confident in their beliefs (and perhaps righteousness). So persuasion cannot be our first aim as we embrace worldview pluralism. But we will of course attempt to present our own sides of the story as best we can. Perhaps we’ll win some. But, as Inazu says, “dialogue and persuasion usually take time.” Inazu (2015) notes:

Many of us will need patience to get to know one another across our differences, to stumble toward dialogue across the awkward distance that separates us. Sometimes we will need patience to endure differences that will not be overcome. Patience also encourages efforts to listen, understand, and perhaps even to empathize. Those activities are not the same as accepting or embracing another view. It may turn out that patience leads us to a deeper realization of the evil or depravity of an opposing belief. But we can at least assume a posture that moves beyond caricatured dismissals of others before we even hear what they have to say.  
(p. 133)

Again, psychologists should recognize this. Our “certain blindness” is part of the human condition and, as James (1899/1958) wrote, “it is vain to hope for this state of things to alter much” (p. 171). We will need patience indeed.

To these virtues, I would add two. The first comes from what William James (1899/1958) called “sympathy” (p. 176) or even “reverence, and love” (p. 188). There needs to be a willingness to understand, a desire to perceive the joy of the other person (“to miss the joy is to miss all” (p. 152); James thought this line from Robert Lewis Stephenson was key). As Carl Rogers (1980) put it, people need to feel “prized” (p. 116). Instead of dismissing or squashing the central values of our fellow psychologists, we ought to yearn to know one another better. Inazu’s values tend to emphasize unpleasant aspects of worldview pluralism, endurance and long-suffering. But Jamesian sympathy is a striving for a genuine delight in the other whenever possible.

Finally, I would add to this courage. As we open up our hearts to the viewpoints of other psychologists, as we come to see the joy that they possess, we may be struck by the fact that they enjoy a more compelling vision than we do. And this would suggest the need to revise our own worldview commitments. Because our worldviews are among the most precious things we possess, it takes tremendous courage to be willing to risk these as we enter into genuine dialogue among fellow psychologists. To be so open to other opinions is risky. If we’re truly open-minded, we may find ourselves *persuaded*.

There is another, equally important, side to courage, i.e., the courage to speak up. Although members of suppressed worldview communities within psychology may for understandable reasons be accustomed to keeping their opinions to themselves, genuine worldview pluralism is hindered to the extent that psychologists are afraid to “come out” and share their actual experiences and convictions. We should encourage one another to be to more transparent, particularly by being more tolerant, humble, patient, sympathetic, and courageous ourselves.

### **Worldview Pluralism as a Shared Democratic Ideal**

North American psychologists work within the context of democratic governments and might share a common commitment to democratic ideals (perhaps even going as far as James (1899/1958), who referred to “the religion of democracy,” p. 178). Could this common commitment also provide consensual IWBs that might further advance worldview pluralism within psychology?

The possibility of democratic grounds for worldview pluralism has been recognized at least to some extent within the North American university, the best example of which might be the emergence of aboriginal studies within Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) has taken significant steps toward recognizing the long and horrific history of oppression of aboriginal people, particularly the century-long “cultural genocide” (p. 1) of residential schools in which aboriginal children would be forcibly removed from their “savage” parents to teach them—as the first Prime Minister of Canada put it—“to acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men” (p. 2). In view of the Commission’s work, there is a nationwide effort to make Canada “a more prosperous, just, and inclusive democracy” (p. 7). Part of this work ensures that authentic aboriginal voices have their own place within publically funded research universities. In line with this, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)—the major federal funding agency for psychology and other social sciences in Canada—supports “aboriginal research,” and their (2016) published guidelines to evaluate applications for public funding recognize as legitimate “research incorporating Aboriginal knowledge systems (including ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies).” Here’s the point: no one claims that aboriginal studies have a place within the public university because the worldviews of indigenous peoples are universally recognized as true or are a new orthodoxy of the academy. Rather, one animating idea is that the indigenous people of Canada have their own cultures and worldviews that—*on democratic grounds*—need to be respected, heard, and nurtured.

It would seem that other worldviews—particularly those that already exist within the discipline but have been suppressed—should likewise be respected, heard, and nurtured in psychology. Granted, the use of democratic ideals

within the university may raise concerns about the creation of an undesirable situation in which the most zany or evil ideals are legitimized. But the greater risk, I would argue, is the perpetuation of worldview blindness—particularly that of the dominant/majority ingroup—which is inclined to label outgroup worldviews as zany and evil in the first place. The only requirement for inclusion ought to be a willingness to embrace the consensual disciplinary values of tolerance, humility, patience, sympathy, and courage. If all worldview groups within psychology—majority and minority—can sincerely embrace these five ideals, we have nothing to fear and much to gain. Indeed, the benefits would go well beyond democratic fairness, as the section on viewpoint diversity below suggests.

With these preliminary thoughts in mind, we may turn to a discussion of consensual democratic IWBs that might structure our lives within psychology. John Inazu's (2016) *Confident Pluralism* is helpful here once again. In addition to—and in some way flowing out of (p. 10)—the shared civic virtues of tolerance, humility, and patience, Inazu (working in an American context) argues that a confident pluralism can also be understood as having a basis in Constitutional law. The US Constitution is a foundational statement of democratic principles, and has influenced many other democracies in the western world, so the principles he articulates might have wide application. Specifically, Inazu's argument provides a useful democratic framework for thinking about how a worldview-plural psychology might organize itself.

Inazu's democratic/constitutional line of argumentation has three main "prongs." The first prong, *the right of association*, is "the most important constitutional commitment of confident pluralism" (Inazu, 2015, p. 129) and could be interpreted in two possible ways for psychology, one, ironically, in a way that suppresses worldview diversity and another in a way that encourages it. Inazu explains that "part of the right of association entails discrimination—a meaningful right of association will permit voluntary groups to exclude." As an example, he talks about Wellesley College, which "discriminates against men and unexceptionally performing high school students." Likewise, "the Mormon Tabernacle Choir discriminates against non-Mormons and bad singers." Continuing, he explains that "within the voluntary groups of civil society, we tolerate forms of discrimination that would elsewhere be impermissible" (p. 130).

There are two possible ways this could be applied in the discipline of psychology. One way would be to conceive of psychologists as one ideologically homogeneous voluntary group. The discipline could take the recent evidence of liberal bias in psychology, for example, and suggest that this is now going to be the orthodoxy of the discipline, and discriminate against those who do not share this orthodoxy. Although there is evidence that such discrimination takes place already (Duarte et al., 2015), it seems highly unlikely that psychology would want to take such an extreme and

prejudicial approach that would *mandate* that all worldview minorities leave the discipline.

The other, worldview-plural way that this could be applied in psychology is to think of “voluntary groups” *within* psychology. That is, members of various worldview communities should be allowed the right of association within the field of psychology. Within APA or CPA, for example, there ought to be divisions (APA) or sections (CPA) for all worldview communities already within the field that desire a place where they can talk and work together. Such divisions and sections already exist for some worldview communities, particularly those consistent with the current worldview biases of the discipline. Worldview pluralism in psychology would insist that *all* worldview groups within psychology have the right of association, not only those who share the dominant value system. The entire discipline would benefit, as I hope to show. By contrast, one way to perpetuate worldview blindness and control is to prevent non-dominant worldview groups within psychology from talking to each other.

Inazu’s (2015) second constitutional prong of for pluralism is *public forums*, or:

physical and virtual spaces where citizens come together to voice their dissent, opposition, and discontent. Public forums can be actual places, such as town halls, but they can also be non-physical or virtual spaces. Public colleges and universities create public forums when they allow students to form their own organizations; local governments often create public forums when they solicit comments on a website.

(p. 130)

Applying this idea to psychology, worldview pluralism would, then, affirm that psychology as a discipline, its conferences and journals, ought to be conceived of as a “public forum” in which members of the guild can—in mutually agreeable and helpful ways—“come together to voice their dissent, opposition, and discontent.”

Inazu (2015) points to a deficiency in current practice in which “political protestors in public forums are often relegated to physically distant and ironically named ‘free-speech zones’” (p. 130). This is a reminder that creating special divisions in the APA or sections in the CPA for various worldview groups would not go far enough if these become ironic “free-speech zones” while in the public forums they must remain closeted as they have always been. On the other hand, if we viewed such divisions as providing the right of association for like-minded individuals, and the discipline itself as a public forum in which the fruit of these “sectarian” discussions can be shared with the broader community for the common good, this might help

us all overcome our native blindness to our own perspectives and to each other's insights.

Inazu's third and final democratic prong for pluralism is *public funding*: "Finally, it is important that we preserve access to generally available public funding, regardless of ideology" (p. 131). He makes very interesting point that tax-exempt status applies to very different groups, "The pro-choice group and the pro-life group, religious groups of all stripes (or no stripe), hunting organizations and animal-rights groups—the federal tax deduction benefits them all" (p. 131). When one side calls for the other to be stripped of its tax exemption, we've lost sight of the pluralistic ideal. Likewise, in the discipline of psychology, research and scholarship funding should not be limited to preferred worldview groups, but there should be a concerted effort to distribute funding to all, especially marginalized worldview groups—the example of SSHRC's funding of aboriginal research in Canada is an excellent example of this. Such a step would ensure that each worldview community can develop its own psychological thinking so that it can be presented, as Mill put it, in its "most plausible and persuasive form" (Jussim, Haidt, & Martin, n.d.)

### **Is the "Viewpoint Diversity" Movement an Example of Worldview Pluralism?**

The viewpoint diversity movement has been mentioned several times in this chapter, and it has been suggested that there is some connection between it and the worldview pluralism advocated herein. It's therefore fitting to explore in a bit more detail the compatibility between its vision and ours. Again, the viewpoint diversity movement ([heterodoxacademy.org](http://heterodoxacademy.org)), within psychology and beyond, begins with the recognition of a particular kind of worldview bias within the mainstream university, discusses how this bias diminishes science, and calls for a diversity of viewpoints (particularly moral/political viewpoints) to improve science. I shall elaborate on this a bit below.

The crucial preliminary point, however, is that—within psychology—"viewpoint diversity" is a movement within mainstream psychological science (MPS). So we need to ask whether worldview pluralism is possible within MPS before we can ask if the viewpoint diversity movement is compatible with worldview pluralism. By MPS I refer to the quantitatively oriented discipline emphasized in most undergraduate and graduate education, exemplified by professional organizations like the Association for Psychological Science (APS) and their journals, and what's taken for granted when most psychologists today refer to the term "psychological science." If any psychology could claim to have the ability to pursue truth while transcending the influence



of worldview—and, by consequence, the claims of worldview diversity—it would seem to be MPS. In what follows, however, I hope to make a few paradoxical points about MPS. On the one hand, I hope to show that MPS is not worldview-neutral at all, but rather is based upon a number of ontological and epistemological assumptions that not all psychologists hold. On the other hand, despite—and, indeed, *because of*—this non-neutrality vis-à-vis *certain* worldview assumptions, a truncated form of worldview pluralism is nevertheless possible within MPS.

How can MPS be non-neutral and yet worldview-plural? Isn't this a contradiction? My personal sense is that MPS brings together researchers from diverse WVs (in the sense of interconnected systems of worldview beliefs) because these researchers share a set of individual worldview beliefs (IWBs, as discussed above) that make MPS possible. Many psychologists outside of MPS reject these IWBs (such as *some* qualitative researchers), yet, within MPS these shared assumptions enable an otherwise-worldview-diverse community to work together. Let's begin, then, by discussing some of these IWBs.

Ontologically, the MPS community tends to assume that minds exist; that there are causal connections between mind, behavior, and environment; that the mind is connected to biology, including genes and brain; that psychological and behavioral phenomena have a certain lawfulness (even if that lawfulness is merely probabilistic and aggregate-level only). Further, the community assumes the capacity of the human mind to understand this lawfulness. Without such assumptions the current research practices of MPS would make very little sense.

Although these assumptions may seem to be expressions of the worldview of naturalism, it turns out that these assumptions are embraced by members of different worldview communities. Certainly, the methods of MPS were born under the influence of the worldview of naturalism (Chapter 4 and this chapter), but many researchers within the MPS community do not embrace metaphysical naturalism. The most obvious example I know of this would be the existence of psychology departments (such as my own) within the 115 member campuses of the evangelical Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (cccu.org). These departments overwhelmingly teach the methods and subfields of MPS, yet are populated by theists. To counter the claim that these theists are simply unknowingly presupposing naturalism, philosopher Alvin Plantinga (2011) argues paradoxically that ontological assumptions such as these cohere with theism, not naturalism! But the point here is not to argue whose WVs better cohere with the shared IWBs of MPS. It's just to show that folks from different WVs find a place for these assumptions. This serves to support the general point—that MPS is non-neutral ontologically, but these shared IWBs

make it possible for psychologists with different worldviews (WVs) to participate in MPS.

Epistemologically, the MPS community tends to presuppose a number of ideas. For example, that it is possible to create measures that imperfectly but usefully translate bio-psycho-social reality into numbers; that learning about the association between measures in samples, whether through correlation, regression, or other multivariate techniques, can provide useful insight into a wide range of phenomena; that learning about mean differences between groups in experimental or quasi-experimental designs provides important information concerning a whole range of factors that influence psychological and behavioral reality; that inferences from samples to populations depend on other assumptions, such as the legitimacy of imagining hypothetical populations whose scores on variables are normally distributed, or that tentative conclusions about data may be drawn by comparing an observed result with a hypothetical comparison distribution assuming that “the null hypothesis” is true, i.e., that there was no effect.

It should be noted that these consensual epistemological assumptions are continually being revised. Within a decade we may no longer be assuming the variables are normally distributed or that estimating the probability of observing a particular outcome given the null hypothesis is a legitimate way to go. There are, of course, significant methodological reforms going on in psychology at this very moment, and these amount to a negotiation regarding what the MPS community will assume epistemologically.

Once again, researchers in MPS holding diverse worldviews seem to have found a place for these epistemological IWBs. Though naturalistically inclined scientists may argue—in a manner analogous to the positivists of old—that psychological knowledge is possible *only* through empirical methods such as these; others might hold that tradition, literature, philosophy, revelation, or other sources also provide valid psychological insight (albeit insights that cannot be merely asserted within MPS). Certainly, this is the case for the aforementioned psychologists within the CCCU. Likewise, the viewpoint diversity movement has put a spotlight on examples of viewpoint minorities (e.g., libertarians) participating in MPS, showing that those with different worldviews have already found a place for these IWBs.

MPS, then, far from a completely worldview-neutral endeavor, is full of individual worldview beliefs (IWBs) that are held in common by people from diverse worldviews. By presupposing these IWBs, psychologists with diverse worldviews are able to work side by side in their common pursuit of psychological knowledge. With this background in place, we may finally address the question: is worldview pluralism possible *within MPS*? I think the answer to this question is a qualified yes. Obviously, insofar as the methods of MPS presuppose IWBs such as those discussed above, it is not

ontologically or epistemologically “neutral,” so any worldview pluralism within MPS must of necessity be a truncated or limited variety, i.e., a worldview pluralism for psychologists who find a place for the consensual IWBs of MPS within their entire network of worldview beliefs (but not for those psychologists who reject these IWBs). However, if psychological scientists agree to presuppose *only* these consensual IWBs, and diligently guard against presupposing or smuggling in *contested* worldview assumptions, a limited form of worldview pluralism should be possible within MPS.

This is precisely what has begun to happen in the viewpoint diversity movement, which has taken the first steps in the direction of a *worldview-plural psychological science*—a very exciting development indeed. Again, the focus of this community of researchers has been on how one set of (left-leaning) moral/political values has come to dominate MPS, creating a need for more political diversity within the field to ensure “institutionalized disconfirmation,” so that researchers don’t get sloppy and allow a discipline-wide confirmation bias to take hold. Although it’s never explicitly stated, what’s happening in the viewpoint diversity movement, in other words, is a community of researchers which shares one set of viewpoints (the shared ontological and epistemological IWBs of MPS) is bringing attention to how non-shared moral/political worldview beliefs are being privileged within the discipline, to the detriment of MPS. For example, Duarte et al. (2015) show how the dominant and unchecked ethical/political worldview beliefs of the mainstream have diminished the quality of social psychology research by creeping into the methods and paradigms of social psychology, by becoming embedded within operational definitions themselves, by limiting the sorts of research questions and programs available, and even by perpetuating negative but inaccurate stereotypes toward worldview outgroups. They argue that a more ideologically diverse MPS would be much more likely to identify and correct such bias, increasing the likelihood of generating “broadly valid and generalizable conclusions” (p. 7).

Although this volume strongly implies that the viewpoint diversity movement within MPS needs to include other, non-political worldview beliefs, this movement toward a worldview-plural psychological science is nevertheless very encouraging and finds an important place within the worldview pluralism that we advocate in this book. But it is crucial to remember that psychology is broader than MPS, and some psychologists—including several authors in this volume—reject the IWBs of MPS. It is crucial to remember this because MPS—as the purveyor of the dominant epistemology of the discipline—has been one of the biggest perpetrators of worldview blindness within psychology. We see this blindness when psychological scientists presume that *theirs* is the Only True Epistemology and that other psychologies aren’t real psychologies or have nothing to offer MPS.

So one of the great goals of worldview pluralism would be a more reflexive, worldview-aware MPS which recognizes its non-neutrality vis-à-vis worldviews, its corresponding limitations and blind spots, and, crucially, its need for other non-MPS psychologies to flourish. A true worldview pluralism would sanction the development of alternative psychologies that reflect the diverse worldviews of psychologists, including psychologies which reject the IWBs of MPS. It would—along the lines Haidt has suggested—engage in some affirmative action, trying to bring in under-represented worldview communities (in Canada, many psychology departments are hiring aboriginal psychologists, for example). In allowing a thousand flowers to bloom, MPS would benefit, too. Indeed, a case can be made that the viewpoint diversity movement *needs* worldview pluralism as described in this chapter, and here's why: As Haidt and others emphasize, in order for viewpoint diversity within MPS to bear fruit, minority opinions must be expressed *in their most refined form*. One of their favorite quotes from John Stewart Mill's *On Liberty*:

He who knows only his own side of the case knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side, if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion . . . Nor is it enough that he should hear the opinions of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. He must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them . . . he must know them in their most plausible and persuasive form.

(as quoted by Jussim et al., n.d.)

But how, precisely, will worldview minority opinions and psychologies come to be expressed “in their most plausible and persuasive form” if the entire discipline—including the training opportunities afforded to such minorities (Chapter 2)—is biased against those very opinions? Simply hiring a few token representatives of those opinions is not enough because such hires will not have experienced the proper conditions in which such articulations are possible. It's only when different worldview communities are treated in accord with the ethical and democratic values expressed above that these conditions will be possible. And all boats will rise.

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As the historical narrative outlined in the beginning of this chapter attests, worldview pluralism has been a long time coming in the North American university; we've gone from one dominant worldview to the next. But we

have hope that psychology—and the university more generally—may be entering into a new, pluralistic era in which our understanding of our tendency toward worldview blindness, our recognition of certain key shared ethical and democratic values, and our shared yearning to better understand the human condition, are leading to a broader, more inclusive, and ultimately more satisfying discipline of psychology.

## Notes

- 1 See [heterodoxacademy.org](http://heterodoxacademy.org)
- 2 Quotes from this talk are taken from an online version of the same: <https://vimeo.com/19822295>
- 3 In what follows, I summarize the worldview-sensitive narrative I've been developing in my history of psychology course.
- 4 We see the same thing in Yale President Noah Porter's (1884) moral philosophy textbook in which the psychological data provide evidence of Christianity.
- 5 It's important to remember that prior to the New Psychology, the proto-psychology of the early- and mid-nineteenth century claimed scientific status for itself, as evidenced by titles such as "intellectual science," and "moral science."

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