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Round 2A: Finding Objectivity and Causality in Pragmatism – A Response to Held

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ABSTRACT

In previous writings, I have set forth a rationale for the foundational knowledge value in psychology and psychotherapy of (a) the individual, systematic case study, and (b) inductive generalizations derived from databases of large numbers of such case studies. This rationale is build upon the epistemology and ontology of contemporary philosophical pragmatism and social constructionism as applied to psychology – what I have termed "pragmatic psychology." Held (2006) challenges this rationale, claiming first, that a justification of case study methodology can be made within conventional, natural-science-oriented psychological science, i.e., independent of pragmatism and constructionism; and second, that in fact, by my adopting a social constructionist epistemology, I undermine two characteristics – objectivity and causality – that are only available in the conventional psychological science paradigm and that are crucial to the meaningful, inductive psychological generalizations from individual case studies that I am seeking. In responding to Held's challenges, I point out their value in helping me to more explicitly articulate components of pragmatic psychology that have not been fully discussed in my previous publications. These components include: (a) pragmatic psychology's capacity, in certain important contexts, to generate statements that are "objectively true" in Held's definition of this term; and (b) pragmatic psychology's embrace of causal mechanisms and principles when these are framed as "conceptual tools" for problem solving, not as ontological mirrors (or approximations of such mirrors) of external reality, as proposed by conventional, natural-science-oriented psychological science. The article ends with a call for accepting pluralism in psychology.

Key words: pragmatism; positivism; natural science; conventional science; objectivity; causality; perspectivism; pluralism

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INTRODUCTION

While the systematic, qualitatively and quantitatively elaborated individual case study has an important history in the early development of psychological knowledge -- e.g., in the work of Skinner, Freud, Piaget, and Bruner -- over the second half of the last century it was

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generally viewed as methodologically too problematic to take seriously. However, recently there has been a resurgence of interest in the case method. Part of that resurgence is documented and reflected in the work of Ronald Miller (2004) and myself (Fishman, 1999, 2001, 2005).

Miller and I have both been specifically led to the knowledge value of individual case studies in psychotherapy when they are accumulated into databases of cases. We have been so led through our philosophical dissatisfaction with the presently dominant epistemology in applied psychology, which Held (2006) calls "mainstream or conventional (psychological) science." I view this epistemology as drawing upon a positivistically inspired philosophy-of-science model in the natural sciences, which in my work I have called the "positivist paradigm" or the "natural science" paradigm. Specifically, this model uses a hypothetico-deductive approach, which assumes that the proper role for psychological research is to seek out universal laws of human behavior and experience, laws that are typically probabilistic, but which still posit causal relationships among discrete, operationally defined variables that play out across groups of individual subjects. According to the natural science model, these laws are best demonstrated in experimental studies, in which one or more "independent" variables are varied over time to see their effect on one or more other, "dependent" variables, with all other variables held constant. The adaptation of this model to the area of psychotherapy outcome research is exemplified by the "double-blind" study, in which subjects are randomly assigned to an experimental or control therapy condition that is operationalized via manual, with both the subjects and the researchers who evaluate therapy outcome not knowing – i.e., being "blind" – as to which subjects are assigned to which condition. Any differences between the outcomes of the experimental versus control groups can then be attributed to the differences between the manualized, experimental therapy versus the manualized control therapy, since subject differences have been controlled for (via random assignment); possible experimenter bias has been controlled for (via the blinding procedures); and the effect of history (Kazdin, 1981) has been controlled for (since all the therapy sessions take place during the same time period).

Based upon our experience as researchers, practitioners, and teachers, and based upon our backgrounds in academic philosophy, Miller and I argue first that the natural sciences model inherently sacrifices the crucial contexts and qualitative richness of the human experience, both generally and specifically as it applies to psychotherapy. We further argue that a case-based, social constructionist epistemology better suits the actual phenomena and knowledge goals of psychotherapy. In contrast, the thesis of Barbara Held's (2006) initial paper in this series is that (a) a justification of case study methodology can be made within conventional psychological science, and (b) in fact, by Miller and I adopting a social constructionist epistemology, we undermine two characteristics – objectivity and causality – that are only available in the conventional paradigm and that are crucial to the meaningful, inductive psychological generalizations from case studies that we both claim as our goal.

While Held's arguments have not persuaded me to change my position per se, they have been very helpful in revealing aspects of my views that were not as explicit and fully articulated in my past publications as they should have been. Thus, from my point of view, Held's paper has been very valuable in advancing the dialogue about the epistemological and ontological bases of

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knowledge that derives from case studies. In this paper I respond to Held's thesis, and in a separate paper, Miller responds.

PHILOSOPHICAL PRAGMATISM: MY ALTERNATIVE TO CONVENTIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE

Held is correct that my rationale for the psychological case study involves an advocacy of an alternative to conventional science. This alternative is the application to psychology of philosophical pragmatism, or what I call "pragmatic psychology" (Fishman, 1999). Here is how I recently (Fishman, 2005) described pragmatic psychology's rationale for the case study method:

> Philosophical pragmatism is founded upon a social constructionist theory of knowledge. The world that exists independently of our minds is viewed as an unlimited complex of change and novelty, order and disorder. . . . To understand and cope with this world, we take on different conceptual perspectives, as we might put on different pairs of glasses, with each providing us a different perspective on the world. The pragmatic "truth" of a particular perspective does not lie . . . in its [possible] correspondence to "objective reality." Rather, the pragmatic truth of a particular perspective . . . lies in the usefulness of the perspective in helping us to cope and solve particular problems and achieve particular goals in today's world.
>
> Because there are few empirically falsifiable high-level principles that transcend specific situational contexts, to understand and cope with a particular psychosocial problem, it is necessary to assess needs and develop solution-oriented interventions within the context of the particular problem. This means that theory and research should deal with problems as they holistically present themselves in actual situations, and that programmatic interventions administered to single clients (be they individuals, groups, organizations, or communities) should be studied, documented and assessed as whole units for a proper understanding and evaluation of these programs. Thus the pragmatic paradigm argues that actual cases -- in all their multisystemic complexity and contextual embeddedness – should be one of the crucial units of study in applied and professional psychology. (Fishman, 2005, p. 7)

While deduction, embodied in the hypothetico-deductive research model, is primary in conventional psychological science, induction is a crucial part of pragmatic psychology, since in this paradigm, all applied psychology knowledge is rooted in "actual [individual] cases -- in all their multisystemic complexity and contextual embeddedness." Also, pragmatic psychology argues against conventional science's exclusive focus on studying discrete, individual variables, since such focus destroys the important contexts and interrelationships among multiple variables that can only be retained by studying cases holistically. Following this logic, pragmatic psychology argues that the basic unit of psychotherapy phenomena is the individual case, with general principles and theories – such as those derived from discrete-variable-focused, experimental studies -- functioning as "conceptual tools" for addressing the problems. The validity of these conceptual tools across individual clients then becomes an inductive, empirical question, assessed by cross-case analysis.

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Because of the importance of individual cases in all their qualitative, descriptive detail as one of the basic units of knowledge in pragmatic psychology, within this epistemology it becomes incumbent upon the field to collect large numbers of these cases in systematic, scholarly write-ups of the highest methodological quality. Held points out various philosophers of science who cite qualitative, contextually based description as one of the functions of conventional science, and one only has to look at the detailed descriptive systems developed in botany, zoology, and astronomy to see that type of descriptive function at work. However, in actual practice, psychology's commitment to the natural science model has led to an almost exclusive concentration in its most valued scholarly type of publications – peer-reviewed journals reporting empirical research studies – on experimental or quasi-experimental studies that focus on quantitative measures across groups of individuals for the purpose of testing theoretically derived hypotheses, with statistical rather than qualitative analyses highlighted. Held (2006) even references Rozin, a social psychologist whom she believes speaks for all of mainstream psychology, when he bemoans the fact that psychologists devalue description in contrast to the ideals of the natural science model:

> In "Social Psychology and Science,"Rozin (2001) argues that social psychologists have rushed to conduct experimental tests of hypotheses prematurely, in their attempts to emulate what they consider to be the methods of the natural sciences. In so doing, social psychologists have failed to notice that, developmentally speaking,, natural scientists begin not with theory and experimentation, but with "extensive examination and collection of relevant phenomena and the description of universal or contingent invariances" (p. 3). Moreover, whatever *degree* of warrant obtains, natural scientists do not claim the absolute certainty that some in psychology impute to them. (Held, 2006, p. 5)

So I would simply point out here that even if in principle the ideals of the natural science method encourage context-embedded description, Miller and I contend that in practice it requires a different epistemology to motivate psychologists to take case studies seriously. As an example of this, the interest and advocacy that Miller and I have developed for the systematic case study only emerged once we rebelled against the confines of mainstream psychology by critiquing conventional psychological science and searching for an alternative epistemological paradigm. As a dramatic reflection of mainstream psychology's rejection of the scholarly knowledge value of case studies, consider that in the area of psychotherapy research – whose basic unit of application is the individual case -- until a few years ago there were no peer-reviewed journals devoted to scholarly, systematic case studies; and today there are only two (*Clinical Case Studies* and *Pragmatic Case Studies in Psychotherapy*). More generally, for Ph.D. psychology dissertations, students typically need special permission if they are to deviate from the established norm for dissertations: the theory-testing, experimental or correlational, quantitative group study. Again, I would contend that the epistemological bias towards such studies has epistemologically excluded systematic case studies from being taken seriously as important and valid psychological knowledge.

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PRAGMATISM AND OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE: BATTING .667

"Objectivity" is such a loaded word and it has such a variety of meanings in the history of philosophy, in any particular discussion of this concept it is important to be explicit about how the word is being used. Consistent with this, Held clarifies her particular meaning of objectivity. She begins by contrasting her meaning to what she calls the "straw man of objectivity," in which

> objective knowledge is said to consist in (or to equate with) indubitable knowledge of timeless, universal, and mechanistically deterministic causal laws about "unchanging" brute/mind-independent entities. (Held, 2006, p. 17)

Held then clarifies that she is using the term "objective knowledge" to mean knowledge that is "true" (more about this word below) independent of the attitudes and interpretation of any particular person or group (what Held after Miller calls a "language community"). Held illustrates by applying this view of objectivity to causal generalities:

> Causal generalities/claims (e.g., when you use intervention X in a type of case Y, in which conditions C prevail, you are likely—but not guaranteed—to get outcome Z) exist *as* causal generalities/claims independently of anyone's beliefs about their nature and/or anyone's moral views about the desirability of outcome Z in the first place. They may therefore be said to exist objectively in just *that* (somewhat trivial ontological) sense, even though they may be refined or even completely overturned upon further observation, and they may not extend successfully to new cases or contexts *despite all due/warranted expectations/predictions*. . . .
>
> That is, the truth of the causal generalities/claims that emerge inductively from the ever-evolving database advocated by Miller and Fishman *does not in principle or automatically depend upon anyone's beliefs about the truth of those generalities/claims.* If that were so, those generalities/claims could indeed give us only relativistic "truth" rather than the objective truth I believe to be possible in principle.(italics added, Held, 2006, pp. 17-18)

Held's definition of objective knowledge as knowledge that is true independent of a particular community of knowers leads us to different meanings of the word "truth." Philosophers have differentiated at least three types or theories of truth:

(a) "correspondence" or "ontological" truth, which defines a statement as true to the extent that it mirrors the external world (Rorty, 1978), that is, it captures the actual nature of the ontological "stuff" of which the world is made;

(b) "coherence" truth, which defines a statement as true within a particular "knowledge system" to the extent that it is consistent with other elements in that system. Examples are a Wittgensteinian language game in which one can make an idiomatic statement that is correct usage, even though the meaning of the statement is not deducible from the combined meanings of the individual words that make it up; a mathematical system like geometry in which a geometric proof can be true or false; a defined body of case law in which a present

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case can be consistent or inconsistent with that body; or a statement about the fictional world created by a novel that can be true or false in terms of consistency with that world); and

(c) "pragmatic" truth, which defines a statement as true to the extent that it is helps us to cope and solve particular problems and achieve particular goals in today's world. In the pragmatist Charles Peirce's framing, pragmatic truth is defined by its effects: "Let us ask what we mean by calling a thing *hard*. Evidently that it will not be scratched by many other substances. The whole conception of this quality lies in its conceived effects" (Hartshorne, Weiss, & Burks, p. 400).

Pragmatic psychology embraces both coherence truth and pragmatic truth. It rejects attempts at correspondence (ontological) truth, since as a social constructionist epistemology pragmatic psychology rejects the ability to view the world independent of a particular perspective. Since statements that are true within both the coherence and pragmatic theories of truth are true independent of any particular community of knowers, by Helds's standard I find statements that are "true" within both the coherence and pragmatic models are objective statements. Thus coherence-based truth of Statement S1 in Knowledge System K^1 is derived from its logical coherence with other elements in K^1, that is the inner logic of K^1, and therefore is not dependent upon the views of any particular community of knowers. Likewise, the pragmatism-based truth of Statement S2 in Knowledge System K^2 is derived from its capacity to be helpful in solving particular problems in particular situations, as evidenced by various kinds of empirical evidence of helpfulness (quantitative and/or qualitative, experimental an/or case-based). The pragmatic knowledge system involved contains criteria of what constitutes proper goals for change, evidence of that change, and an appropriate explanation of how S2 creates desired outcomes in terms of that evidence. Thus, the truth of S2 is a function of the inner logic of these criteria and associated data interpreted with this knowledge system, and thus is not dependent upon the views of any particular community of knowers.

PERSPECTIVISM

A theme in the above discussion and in pragmatic psychology generally is perspectivism, the view that the world is not given, but can only be interpreted in various ways and can never be known in terms of ontological objectivity. A dramatic illustration of this is the history of theoretical perspectives in psychology. Three examples. First, the basic ontological stuff of human experience has variously been viewed as inner *traits*, like intelligence and such personality factors as introversion/extraversion; or as stimulus-response *interactions*; or as concentric circles of individual, group, organizational, community, political, economic, and cultural forces in reciprocal, *organismic* relationships (Altman & Rogoff, 1987).

Second, the basic mode of psychological phenomena has variously been characterized as either overt behavior, information-processing cognition, narratively-based cognition, emotional experiencing, or phenomenological experiencing (e.g., see Fishman, 1999). Finally, there have been various contrasting, literary-like visions of reality of how the human experience can be

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viewed (Messer & Woolfolk, 1998) -- either as *romantic* adventure, or as the *ironic* playing out of dialectical forces, or as the essentially *tragic* nature of human life caused by our intrinsic vulnerabilities, or as the essentially *comic* dynamics of our capacity to solve situational problems and find happiness.

Perspectivism says that we cannot determine if any of these perspectival options is ontologically true or false, but only that in particular situations, specific social groups can find a particular perspective more helpful than others and/or more conceptually persuasive and more consistent with known data, be it quantitative or qualitative, sense-based-observational or interpretive.

Also supporting a position of perspectivism is the work of such postpositivistic philosophers as Popper, Kuhn, Quine, Feyerabend, and Wittgenstein. These thinkers all sound a similar theme, emphasizing the limitations if not the impossibility of ontologically objective, scientific knowledge. This is

> because of our embeddedness in the logical, cultural, cognitive, and linguistic preconditions of . . . [the] knowledge that we do have] – preconditions that change according to historical and cultural context. For Popper, these preconditions include the deductive theoretical principles that we simply have to assume without being able to prove them [e.g., the principle of "falsifiability"]; for Kuhn, the preconditions are scientific paradigms; for Quine and Feyerabend, they are webs of belief; and for Wittgenstein, they are [the structures and rules of] language games.
>
> We can never step out of these preconditions and see the world objectively [in the ontological sense]; for our ability to "see" is contingent upon these preconditions being in place. This notion – that the seeking of knowledge is limited by the need to assume preconditions to that knowledge which can't be proven – is very similar to the linguistic concept of the hermeneutic circle. . . . According to the hermeneutic circle, to understand a strange culture, practice, theory, language, and so forth, interpretation occurs within a circle in which the parts are always interpreted within some understanding of the whole, which in turn is understood by coming to understand the constituent parts. Thus, to understand something new requires reference to something that is already known and has to be taken for granted in order to understand the new; and then in turn we must assume the former, the new learning, to analyze and understand critically the latter, what we originally knew and assumed.(Fishman, 1999, pp. 87-88)

LINKING PERSPECTIVISM TO OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE VIA PRAGMATIC RELATIVISM

Any perspective can be considered a "knowledge system," in the sense this term was used above in describing the coherence or pragmatic theory of truth. In other words, within any perspectival system, it is possible to set forth those conceptual and value assumptions, substantive facts, logic, and other ways of reasoning that are accepted, and those that are not accepted, within the system. However, as conceived within pragmatism, there are in principle

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two major limitations to the completeness of possible knowledge within any particular knowledge system. First, in line with the idea of the hermeneutic circle, it is not viewed as possible to simultaneously explain all the assumptions of a knowledge system. This idea is similar to Gödel's First Incompleteness theorem in mathematics, which proves that there exist formally undecidable propositions in any formal system of arithmetic (Gregory, 1987, pp. 294-295).

Second, in line with the social constructionism upon which it is based, philosophical pragmatism does not deem it possible to step out of any particular knowledge system and determine whether that perspective mirrors or corresponds to external, ontological reality.

Held points out that I endorse the epistemology of social constructionism and its associated corollary, perspectivism, and she raises the classic problem this posits in terms of relativism: if ontologically true objective knowledge is not possible and all we have are alternative constructions and perspectives on reality, won't this lead to intellectual chaos in which there are no ways to distinguish between the true and the false, the right and the wrong, and the beautiful and the ugly. For example, one could claim that there is no way to settle disputes between those who religiously believe in an imminent rapture and those who don't so believe, because each has true beliefs within their own knowledge system. Also, one could claim that within a toddler's knowledge system, scribbling can equate with the beautiful; and that within a religiously motivated terrorist's knowledge system, killing innocent individuals for symbolic, political purposes can be good. Yet this is only one view of the problem of relativism, the so-called position of "anything goes" relativism, which has been forcefully critiqued by such anti-objectivist and pragmatism-sympathetic authors as Richard Bernstein in his book, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (1983), and Clifford Geertz (1989), in his chapter, "Anti Anti-Relativism." As Held points out my own response to the potential epistemological problems that relativism raises is the position of "pragmatic relativism" first enumerated in the ideas of Bernstein (1983) and Rorty (1989). Held quotes me as follows as to the meaning of "pragmatic relativism":

> Fishman (2001) is clear enough about what he means by "pragmatic relativism": "[P]ragmatism is in essence agnostic on the issue of the knowability of external reality, and it is most concerned about contextually based, functional realities—what will help this particular individual, group, organization, community or country achieve its democratically derived goals and in the process enhance solidarity [note the nod to Rorty] and open, constructive dialogue" [Fishman, 2001, p. 280]. (Held, 2006, p. 18)

However, while this quote provides a related idea about philosophical pragmatism, it does not in fact make clear the arguments of pragmatic relativism, which I have discussed in some detail in my 1999 book, *The Case for Pragmatic Psychology*. While stating that objective knowledge is not possible, pragmatic relativism avoids anything-goes relativism by pointing to the fact that many perspectives and conceptual frameworks are

> not arbitrary, trivial, or insubstantial. For these frameworks arise from and are embedded in historical traditions and contemporary sociocultural structures and institutions. And even

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> though this does not endow such a framework with absolute authority or certainty [derived from knowledge that ontologically mirrors the world], it does provide the framework with significant momentum and weight in determining the present.
>
> For example, in the industrialized countries of Western Europe, the United States, and Canada over the past 125 years, there have been very strong traditions of striving towards democracy and social justice that are a major moral force in the world today – traditions that can be traced at least back in part to situations and events such as Periclean Greece in the fifth-century B.C., the Magna Carta in 1215, and the Declaration of Independence in 1776. On the other hand, these traditions don't carry objective or absolute moral authority outside of the historical and contemporary sociopolitical context of the last 125 years. The counterexamples of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in the 1930s and '40s certainly illustrate this lack of absolute moral authority. However, the fact that these two regimes have mainly been the exception over the past 125 years reflects the very substantial force of the democratic and social justice tradition. (Fishman, 1999, p. 113)

Bernstein (1983) points to the fact of human plurality, which arises in part on the "depth and pervasiveness of conflict . . . which characterizes our theoretical and practical lives" (p. 223). In the theoretical realm, the social constructionist sees this conflict as emerging in part from our inability to detect ontological truth, leaving us with interpreting the world with a variety of competing perspectives. Within this view that there is no ontologically absolute proof that is attainable, Bernstein cites Pitkin and Shumer's (1982) discussion of how democratic politics is today our ideal pragmatic structure for dealing with conflict among people with different interests, perspectives and opinions –

> an encounter in which they reconsider and mutually revise opinions and interests, both individual and common. It happens always in a context of conflict, imperfect knowledge, knowledge, and uncertainty, but where community action is necessary. The resolutions achieved are always more or less temporary, subject to reconsideration, and rarely unanimous. What matters is not unanimity but discourse. The substantive common interest is only discovered or created in democratic political struggle, and it remains contested as much as shared. . . . Conflict . . .is what makes democracy work, what makes for the mutual revision of opinions and interests. (1982, p. 114)

To address the problem of anything-goes relativism, Rorty (1989) coined the term "pragmatic relativism," so named because it is a belief associated with philosophical pragmatists. Rorty characterizes the pragmatic relativism position as follows:

> there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from description of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society--*ours*-- uses in one or another area of inquiry. . . .
>
> To say that what is rational for us now to believe may not be *true*, is simply to say that somebody may come up with a better idea. It is to say that there is always room for improved belief, since new evidence, or new hypotheses, or a whole new vocabulary may come along. (Rorty, 1989, p. 37-38)

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This conception of relativism is called "pragmatic" because it holds that while in an ultimate or foundational sense there is no single objective truth, within the context of a particular society at a particular time, certain statements and the justification that backs them are judged as better in the sense that they are more relevant to promoting the solidarity and goals of some particular social group, be that a local community, a region of the country, our whole society, or the total global community. Rorty (1989) puts it this way:

> Pragmatists . . . view truth as, in William James' phrase, what it is good for *us* to believe. . . . For pragmatists, the desire for objectivity is not the desire to [ontologically] escape the limitations of one's community [to find a "higher, transcendent" truth], but simply the desire for as much intersubjective agreement as possible, the desire to extend the reference of "us" as far as we can. Insofar as pragmatists make a distinction between knowledge and opinion, it is simply the distinction between topics on which such agreement is relatively easy to get and topics on which agreement is relatively hard to get. (Rorty, 1989, p. 37)

In sum, while denying transhistorical and cross-cultural "foundational" standards, the adherent to pragmatic relativism

> points to the already established and agreed-upon procedures and standards our society now has for determining truth and morality in particular contexts. Examples are the procedures and standards used to elect democratically government officials, to settle civil and criminal disputes in our court system, to conduct academic scholarship in our universities, to carry out investigative journalism, and to describe "objectively" social behavior in quantitative surveys like the U.S. Census, using the statistical methods derived from natural science. (Fishman, 1999, p. 131)

CAUSALITY AS A PERSPECTIVE THAT CAN FUNCTION AS A PRAGMATIC CONCEPTUAL TOOL

Beyond Descriptive Generalization to Causal Mechanisms

Held (2006) raises the possibility in her article that I am only interested in descriptive generalities across cases, not in theory development, causal mechanisms, and associated general principles of human behavior and psychological change. For example, she suggests that I seem to want "a database of cases in which 'guidelines' or 'rules of thumb' will be set forth without theoretical/causal explanation, . . . [thinking] it best not to attempt to know *why or how* a certain approach tended not to help (i.e., produced/caused a beneficial effect) in a certain kind of case" (Held, 2006, p. 11).

This is not true. The main conceptual framework employed in my work, Peterson's (1991) Disciplined Inquiry model of professional practice, assumes that general technological and theoretical guidelines can in part be inductively derived by cross-case comparisons, leading to increasingly agreed upon principles – called "guiding conceptions" -- for improving practice in future cases. According to the Disciplined Inquiry model, these principles should have (a)

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theoretical and logical coherence and persuasiveness, (b) predictive validity in anticipating future behaviors and reported experiences, and (c) practical value in providing guidance in the design and implementation of psychological intervention programs in all areas of applied psychology, including psychotherapy. Within the context of philosophical pragmatism, the only characteristic that such principles lack is ontological objectivity. That is, in line with the above discussion. within philosophical pragmatism, these causal mechanisms and principles don't purport to mirror the way the world objectively is, independent of any human perception and interpretation of it. However, the pragmatist does view causal mechanisms and principles as important types of pragmatic *conceptual tools* for managing in and improving the world of human experience and behavior. Consistent with this point, I have earlier (Fishman, 1999) acknowledged the value the pragmatist attributes to the various types of causal mechanisms and other theoretical concepts in the history of mainstream, natural-science-oriented psychology:

> [The pragmatist employs] the natural science methodologies and concepts of positivism . . . but with a nonpositivistic purpose: they are used to achieve the democratically derived program goals of particular, historically and culturally situated social groups, not to uncover purported general laws of human nature. (Fishman, 1999, p. 6)

Polkinghorne (1992), an established thinker in the pragmatic tradition, also points out that pragmatism values scientific effort, just that the purpose of science is revised.

> Neopragmatism [contemporary philosophical pragmatism] allows for scientific effort, although the purpose of science is revised. Instead of being a search for underlying laws and truths of the universe, science serves to collect, organize, and distribute the practices that have produced their intended results. (Polkinghorne, 1992, p. 151)

In sum, the pragmatist honors the methodological and theoretical contributions of mainstream, natural-science-based, positivist psychology for their value as conceptual tools in solving practical problems, not as candidates for a single, ontologically objective truth. In my earlier words,

> The positivists have staked out psychometrically sophisticated and innovative methodologies that set high standards for rigorous, critical, and ingenious thinking about the complexities of measuring psychological phenomena. In addition, positivists have developed a rich supply of psychological theories and ideas that explore a variety of the vast array of possible perspectives that can be taken upon human behavior and action. (Fishman, 1999, p. 8)

Rorty (1982) turns to the history of physics to illustrate the difference between the pragmatic value of a particular perspective on the world and the claim that that perspective is a mirror of ontologically objective reality. Rorty illustrates this point by discussing the ontological nature of Newton's universal law of gravitation and three laws of motion, built on the early ideas of Copernicus and Galileo:

> Galileo and his followers discovered, and subsequent centuries have amply confirmed, that you get much better predictions by thinking of things as masses of particles blindly bumping

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> against each other than by thinking of them as Aristotle thought of them – animistically, teleologically, and anthropomorphically. They also discovered that you get a better handle on the universe by thinking of it as infinite and cold and comfortless than by thinking of it as finite, homey, planned, and relevant to human concerns . . . These [types of discoveries] are the basis of modern technological civilization. But they do not . . . tell us anything about . . . the language which nature itself uses, . . . [about] the Book of Nature. (Rorty, 1982, p. 116)

Rorty is saying yes, Newton's Laws are dramatically useful in developing powerful and sophisticated technologies (like the internet, satellite navigation systems, and space ships to the moon), and in persuasively explaining and predicting a vast number of discrete empirical observations. However, Newton's Laws don't necessarily represent the way the physical world "really" is from an ontologically objective point of view. Rather, while humans generally experience the world as narratively organized and imbued with human emotion and purpose -- and for some, with supernatural direction -- there is no way to decide through scientifically based observation whether this "finite, homey, and planned" view is ontologically correct or whether Newton's view of the world as "infinite and cold and comfortless" is ontologically correct.

In sum, within my pragmatic psychology paradigm, I value causal mechanisms and related concepts from mainstream psychology where quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence support their effectiveness in facilitating practical, psychological problem-solving. This encompasses the use of causal concepts for predicting and/or explaining behavior and experience in the service of promoting prevention and remediation of societally defined psychological difficulties, distress, and dysfunction.

Free Will and Determinism: It All Depends on How You Look at It

Held cites Miller's (2004) nonmechanistic concept of causation that comes more from the humanities and the law than from the natural science and mainstream social science.

> [Psychologists] are looking for the cause [of child abuse, alcoholism, depression, and antisocial behavior], not in the reductionistic or naturalistic sense but in the human quasi-legal sense of whom or what to hold responsible for these abhorrent human conditions. Moral judgment (not moralizing) must be implicit in one's conclusions. (Miller, 2004, p. 242; cited in Held, 2006, p. 13)

The pragmatist does not see a direct contradiction between this view of cause, which places free will at its center, and the mechanistic view of it that comes from mainstream psychology's adoption of the natural science approach to human behavior, which places determinism at its center. Rather, because the pragmatist does not proffer objective ontological status to either the natural science or humanistic/judicial view of cause, the pragmatist sees these simply as two different sets of perspectives for viewing a particular set of behavioral and experiential events. When to use each is a question of the goals and values of the users and how these concepts facilitate or retard those goals and values.

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CONCLUSIONS

Held (2006) and I agree on the importance of "the case study method and the database to which it gives rise . . . [in helping] us alleviate the harsh realities of human suffering" (p. 21). As should be clear from the above, Held's conventional science position and my pragmatist position also agree in the existence of objective knowledge following Held's definition of it. Specifically, in Held's (2006) words, "an objectivist *epistemology* is one in which the truth of (or warrant for) a claim does not depend on anyone's beliefs about the truth of (or warrant for) a claim" (p. 17). I have agreed that within defined knowledge systems (like a particular written and spoken language, the mathematical system of geometry, or a defined body of judicial case law), the objective truth of a statement is determined by its consistency within the logic of the knowledge system (coherence truth), or by its evidence-based claim to be of practical use in solving defined human problems (pragmatic truth). Within these knowledge systems, truth is thus independent of any particular community of knowers. My only difference with Held is that pragmatism and constructionism reject the possibility of a statement being objectively based upon its mirroring the ontological nature of external reality (correspondence truth), while the conventional model of science endorses the possibility of this type of objective truth.

In the arena of causal mechanisms and causal principles, I also agree with Held's conventional science position on the importance of causality in inductively developing generalized theories of human behavior and experience and of factors associated with their change. Where my pragmatic position differs with Held's is that pragmatism views causal mechanisms and principles as potentially helpful *conceptual tools* that are valuable to the extent that they can be helpful in resolving human problems and difficulties. Again, as a pragmatist, I would part company with conventional science's implication that such causal mechanisms and principles can be demonstrated to ontologically correspond to external reality.

In short, it is on the possibility of ontologically true knowledge that conventional science and pragmatism disagree. In many ways, this disagreement does not affect the usual conduct of psychotherapy research and practice, since both conventional science and pragmatism endorse: (a) the development of more and more effective therapies; (b) the documentation of effective therapies with quantitative and qualitative, process and outcome evidence; and (c) the development of more and more, logically and empirically persuasive causal principles of therapeutic change. Where this disagreement does have an impact, I suggest, is in conventional science's lack of openness to research methodologies that are outside the boundaries of experimental, quantitative group designs, because conventional science views knowledge generated by these experimental designs as ontologically privileged. In other words, the conventional science model assumes that external reality ontologically consists of a world of discrete, operationalizable variables that are woven together into universal causal laws, which parallel psychology's multivariate statistical models. In contrast, the pragmatist paradigm sees this model of the psychological world as parallel to Gallileo and his followers' view of the physical world as consisting of discrete "masses of particles blindly bumping against each other"

(Rorty, 1982, p. 116). As Rorty points out, while this Gallilean view has provided many excellent predictions for certain types of physical conditions, this does not "tell us anything about . . . the language which nature itself uses, . . . [about] the Book of Nature. (Rorty, 1982, p. 116).

In sum, the pragmatist does not reject many of the principles, theories, and methods of conventional science as they apply to psychotherapy. Rather, the pragmatist simply views these principles, theories, and methods as one of a number of different knowledge paradigms to be ultimately judged on their ability to help therapy clients achieve their goals in a way that also brings the approval of the larger society. In this spirit of openness to different paradigms, based upon their practical potential and intellectual clarity and coherence, the pragmatist embraces Peterson's (2004) view of psychology as "a pluralistic society" in the context of William James' original vision of the philosophical pragmatism:

> To James (1909/1977), the universe was not one but many, everywhere and always. . . . Only in the relationships among the parts could unity of the whole be reached. He rejected monistic views as forced distortions of nature. . . . The pluralistic world is. more like a federal republic than like an empire or kingdom. . . .
>
> The pluralistic road is certainly not an easy one. It does not provide the comfort of sameness and agreement. Instead it brings the turbulence of difference and dispute. But in the uncertainty and fluidity of pluralistic integration lie the grounds for constructive change. Through the bold assertions of its many constituents, the disagreements and confrontations that inevitably follow, and the creative resolutions that can then emerge, come the gifts of diversity. All creation comes of combining different elements. Pluralistic integration requires us all to open ourselves to those who are different from us and may oppose us. It requires us to honor the identities of others and to hear their claims, but also to press our own claims, and, beyond both, to find the common values that are vital to us all.
>
> Psychology cannot escape its plural nature. In the sense defined by William James, we are not one but many. . . . The only ontologically defensible, practically attainable solution for our discipline is to respect the cultures of [conventional] science and [alternatives to this in] practice for their own distinctive contributions to the larger society, develop each culture within its own framework, and continue to seek complementary, ultimately synergistic ways of helping the people we are pledged to serve. (Peterson, 2004, pp. 205-206)

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