# An Interactivist-Hermeneutic Metatheory for Positive Psychology

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ABSTRACT. Drawing on Bickhard's interactivism along with philosophical hermeneutics, we outline a plausible ontology of human action and development that might serve as a metatheory for positive psychology. Our non-dualistic metatheory rests on a distributed notion of agency. The kinds of morally imbued social practices that are identified by hermeneutic theorists constitute one level of agency. At the first level of agency, persons are already committed, at least by implication, to folk psychologies that cover positive emotion, positive traits, and positive institutions. Higher levels of agency and knowing emerge through the process of development. The higher knowing levels incorporate the capacity for conscious self-reflexive awareness, which permits the person to consciously deliberate and form theories of the good person and the good life. These more consciously formed positive folk psychologies are always in a dialectical relationship with the more implicit and embodied understandings of the good life as manifested in social practices, emotional experiences, and habitual thoughts. We suggest that this framework helps to account for the 'diversity of goods' that underlie our lives and to clarify the relationship that the professional positive psychologist will have with his or her native folk psychology.

KEY WORDS: critical psychology, cultural psychology, flourishing, good life, happiness, individualism, interactivism, philosophy of social science, positive psychology, well-being

Critics both within and outside of psychology have persuasively argued for a number of years that despite aspirations to be an ahistorical, value- and culture-free science, psychological theory, research, and practice are all heavily influenced by Western values and assumptions. Today's positive psychology runs the same risk, as the papers in this special issue attest. The uncritical transmission of culturally specific and contestable values and assumptions

will continue unless two issues are addressed in the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of positive psychology.

The first issue is the inevitably value-laden nature of psychology. Seligman (2002) has encouraged positive psychologists to suppose that they can step around the messiness of trying to be prescriptive:

> … the theory is not a morality or a world-view; it is a description. I strongly believe that science is morally neutral (but ethically relevant). The theory put forward in this book describes what the pleasant life, the good life, and the meaningful life are. It describes how to get these lives and what the consequences of living them are. It does not *prescribe* these lives for you, nor does it, as a theory, value any of these lives above the others.

> It would be disingenuous to deny that I personally value the meaningful life above the good life, which in turn I value above the pleasant life. But the grounds for my valuing these lives are external to the theory. I value contribution to the whole above contribution just to the self, and I value the achieving of potential above living for the moment. (p. 303)

These days a value-free conception of social science is widely questioned, both by philosophers of science (e.g., Laudan, 1984; Taylor, 1989) and by theoretical and philosophical psychologists (e.g., Christopher, 1999; Guignon, 2002; Held, 2005; Sundararajan, 2005). And among all the scientific enterprises that might aspire to value-freedom, *positive psychology* would seem to have some of the dimmest prospects. Without judgments that optimistic attitudes are good for human beings and pessimistic attitudes are bad, or that integrity is part of a good life for us and lack of integrity is not, how much positive psychology would there be for Seligman (2002) to enunciate? How could the subject matter of positive psychology be defined in the first place? As Woolfolk and Wasserman (2005) have noted, declaring that positive psychology makes no prescriptions

> … is a little like an MBA program alleging that it is neutral with respect to the benefits of capitalism or that an education that teaches one how to be successful and earn a great deal of money, in no sense advocates economic achievement. (pp. 88–89).

The value-free assumption does not merely contradict many of the conclusions that positive psychologists wish to draw. It impedes the future growth of positive psychology, because it provides no incentive for developing the conceptual resources to recognize cultural values and assumptions. Theoretical and philosophical psychologists generally regard such assumptions as embedded in psychological theory and research, or as presupposed in these activities. Positive psychologists, on the other hand, too often take these kinds of assumptions for granted.

The second issue to be addressed by positive psychology is the attempted separation of descriptive science from prescriptive value commitments. That separation, in turn, is symptomatic of a tendency in Western culture to bifurcate a wide range of phenomena: fact vs. value, self vs. other, subjective vs.

objective, mind vs. body, reason vs. emotion, and so on. Such dualism, we believe, stultifies the progress of psychology in general, and, unless checked, will hamper the promise of contemporary positive psychology.

We think so, first of all, because these dualistic presuppositions are in error. A considerable amount of scholarship challenges the ontological veracity of dualism. Emerging non-dualistic ontologies of the person, so we would argue, are more successful in modeling human agency and human social realities.

Second, the dualistic presuppositions themselves derive from a particular cultural orientation to life. If we do not recognize this, the underlying cultural orientation will be uncritically perpetuated in our theories, research, and practice, and different cultural orientations will be missed or misunderstood. Which, in turn, will undermine the universal aspirations of positive psychology.

In this paper we draw on the interactivism of Mark Bickhard along with the philosophical hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Charles Taylor to outline a plausible ontology of human action and development. This nondualistic metatheory rests on a distributed notion of agency. The kinds of morally imbued social practices identified by hermeneutic theorists constitute one level of agency. At this first level of agency, persons are already committed, at least by implication, to folk psychologies that cover the subject matter of positive psychology: positive emotions, positive traits, and positive social institutions. Other levels of agency and knowing emerge in the course of human development. The higher knowing levels are characterized by self-reflexive awareness, which permits the person to consciously deliberate and form explicit theories of the good person and the good life. These more consciously formed positive folk psychologies are always in a dialectical relationship with the more implicit and embodied understandings of the good life that are manifested in social practices, emotional experiences, and habitual thoughts.

We suggest that this framework helps to account for the 'diversity of goods' (Taylor, 1985) that underlies our lives and also helps to clarify the relationship that the professional positive psychologist will have with his or her native folk psychology. We begin by discussing two aspects of interactivism—implicitness and the knowing levels—that we contend will provide a more specific and more integrated ontology for positive psychology.

## Knowing Level 1: Being-in-the-World and Engaged Agency

From the interactive standpoint, our most basic way of knowing, at Knowing Level 1, comes through interaction in the world. Knowledge begins procedurally: infants and children learn how to do or accomplish various things. Initially their ways of getting these things done are relatively simple. For instance, babies learn that kicking the crib makes the mobile shake or that crying elicits a certain kind of response from a caregiver. Through variation

and selection, human beings learn functional patterns of interacting with the physical and social world.

Babies and young children lack the self-knowing 'I' or ego that Descartes (1641/1960) treated as fundamental and that many philosophers and psychologists are still following him in doing. Until age 4 or so, human beings know and learn without ever knowing that they know. What they know pertains to the external environment: which types of interactions are possible, which consequences those interactions will have. Internal experiences are part of knowing and learning about the environment, but not until later in development will children know anything *about* their experiences.

According to the hermeneutic philosopher Martin Heidegger (1927/1962), we are, at the most basic level, beings engaged in the world doing something, or being-in-the-world. He maintains that we are born into, and take over in a preconscious way, social traditions and practices along with the meanings that are implicit in them. Infants, for instance, learn to participate in varieties of social interactions such as peek-a-boo. Older children learn how to navigate through the social interactions involved in ordering and eating food at a McDonald's restaurant. Importantly, children have learned numerous patterns of interaction, physical and social, well before establishing any sense of themselves as a separate, conscious ego. Children exhibit a type of engaged and embodied agency not centered in any explicit sense of self.

When we are fully engaged in life activities, our subjectivity or self-awareness is often noticeably absent. We make judgments about other people (Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Gladwell, 2005; Wilson, 2002) and render many of our decisions (Klein, 1998) without consciously knowing how we do them. Musicians, dancers, artists, and athletes have all made reference to being caught up in the flow of activity and having no room for self-conscious awareness (Csikszentmihályi, 1990). Indeed, it is often self-consciousness that inhibits people or pulls them out of the smooth flow of interaction. In the words of the behind-the-plate philosopher Yogi Berra (n.d.), 'How can you hit and think at the same time?' Heidegger claims that being-in-the-world precedes our coming to distinguish a subject and an object, a self and an other, a mind and a body, facts and values. It is our most basic way of functioning in life.

Heidegger further sought to transcend the diremption between fact and value by pointing out how concern, care, and signification structure human lives. What we attend to and how we allocate our time and energy all indicate what we care about and value. Our behavior, emotions, and thought make presuppositions about what is real, important, and valuable. As Bickhard (1992a, 2004) puts it, a valuing process is inherent in all human functioning. Taylor (1989) contends that '[s]elfhood and the good, or in another way selfhood and morality, turn out to be inextricably intertwined themes' (p. 3).

One indication that human agency is basically being-in-the-world comes from research on the early development of memory. The kind of memory that

could capture explicit perception of objects and of the self has been referred to as episodic or event-based memory. For the episodes to be part of our own life story, like our recollection of the birthday party we had when we were 5 years old, something further is required: autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is what enables us to retain the type of self-conscious occurrences that Descartes insisted were fundamental. But memory researchers see autobiographical memory as a developmental achievement, not a starting place. The most rudimentary form is procedural or enactive memory—remembering how to do things in concrete situations, without self-consciousness (Nelson, 1992, 1994; Tulving, 1985, 1987; Tulving & Schachter, 1990). When a baby remembers how to make the mobile above her crib move (by kicking it), she is using procedural memory. The developmental primacy of remembering how to accomplish certain things is consistent with Heidegger's view that human agency is 'primordially' the type of embodied and engaged agency he describes as being-in-the-world.

We could multiply examples from the earliest stages of human development, but need not do so to make our point. And it is not as though we ever outgrow Knowing Level 1; a good deal of mature adult functioning is still being-in-the-world, dependent on quick recognition of situations where action is necessary, or rapid judgments about other human beings whose basis normally remains unknown to us (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bargh & Ferguson, 2000; Bargh & Williams, 2006; Gladwell, 2005; Klein, 1998; Wilson, 2002).

## Implicitness

Most schools of thought in psychology assume that for something outside us to have a lasting influence, we must internalize it. Somehow it needs to be brought into each person's mind and made present there (Bickhard, 1992a; Bickhard & Christopher, 1994). For instance, attachment theorists have discussed 'internal working models' of self and other that are based on the child's experience with primary caretakers (Bowlby, 1988; Bretherton, 1993; Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). But the goals that the baby sets, the ways of acting that the baby is learning, and the baby's emotional responses do not require an explicit conception either of what the baby is like, or of what the caregiver is like; the baby can develop preferences and expectations that *presuppose* that the caregiver is reliable without constructing any internal model whatsoever concerning the caregiver's character or likely future behavior. Even in adulthood, it is unwise to assume that unconscious biases in judgment or decision-making are always the result of past conscious value choices, when they are readily acquired and even modified without the involvement of conscious processes (Gladwell, 2005; Wilson, 2002).

Interactivism takes implicitness to be a crucial feature both of being-in-the-world and of social practices. Implicitness explains how certain things can be

functionally true *of* an entity in interaction with its environment without having to be anywhere *within* the entity (Bickhard, 1993, 1999). In particular, implicitness provides a way to model and understand how family and culture, including familial and cultural norms, can influence early development without having to assume that infants and toddlers have yet acquired the means to cognize those influences. Even in adulthood, when we can think consciously about cultural norms and sometimes do, much of their influence on us remains implicit.

For instance, the patterns of interaction that the infant develops within the family constellation and his or her position in that constellation embody any number of implicit presuppositions. Imagine an American infant in the 1950s raised in an emotionally distant and unresponsive family that adhered to clock-based caretaking routines (such as a strict timetable for feeding) and a belief that 'crying it out' alone promotes emotional maturity. Initially the infant will cry for food, attention, emotional responsiveness, and other basic needs. However, soon he will discover that such cries go unheeded. Furthermore, crying only aggravates his discomfort by adding physiological and emotional stress. The infant may learn that quietude offers the best solution in such an environment, for while his cries continue to go unheeded, he avoids the unpleasant effects of physiological arousal (sore throat, exhaustion, burning eyes, etc.).

Quietude as a response to distress directly presupposes that no one would respond if he were to cry—precisely what he has in fact experienced. But the presupposition is entirely implicit. There is no explicit representation or belief about his mother or father's response, and as a young infant, he does not have the cognitive capacity for any such explicit representations.

What's more, functional patterns of interaction and ways of being will have *layers* of presuppositions. Lack of responsiveness to the infant *per se* presupposes that no one cares about the infant's emotional needs. The infant's quietude presupposes that others *value* time and schedules more than they value the child's emotional life. A lack of caring or a lower priority can in turn presuppose that the infant is not *worthy* of being cared for or given priority. A lack of worthiness can presuppose that the infant is not *lovable* or has some defect that makes him aversive to others. The kinds of presuppositions discussed in this example are not simply presuppositions true of *the child*. They are presuppositions concerning the *child in his environment*. They pertain to patterns of interaction that undercut and transcend simple dichotomies of self and object.

The infant and young child are cognitively incapable of differentiating the properties of the current environment from other possible environments; the ability to recognize alternative possibilities is a developmental achievement (Piaget, 1981/1987a, 1983/1987b). Nor are they capable of differentiating who contributes what to any given interaction. Nor can they differentiate a sense of self from the totality of their being.

One specific pattern of interaction thus entails cascading presuppositions about the nature of the self, of others, of the world, of life. Meanwhile, the

interactivist notion of implicitness guards against prematurely attributing such presuppositions to explicit cognitive elements (internal representations, beliefs, schemata, etc.) in the child's mind.

As a consequence, interactive patterns are not something that the child as a distinct entity has or engages in. They are not just the child's differentiated adjustment to this particular situation; they are central to who the child is. The interactive patterns afford ways of being that are implicitly about the entire world, actual and potential, not just this part of it into which she has been 'thrown.' The child is initially not able to differentiate the ways of being that she has learned from other possible ways of being. Until those differentiations have been made, the presuppositions that are relevant to the current environment hold for *all environments at all times*. So, returning to our previous example, the presupposition is not that my caretakers don't care for me at particular times of the day, but instead that no one cares for me and no one will ever care for me. As Bickhard and Christopher (1994) summarized, 'A lack of differentiation of this situation from others, of these caregivers from others, implicitly presupposes totality, again without any explicit cognitions or cognitive capabilities on the part of the infant' (p. 244).

The notion of implicitness provides critical leverage for analyzing and critiquing theories of child and adult development, including those used by positive psychologists. Many of the existing ways of modeling the developing personality credit the infant and child with capabilities not yet acquired. Typically, theories account for the child's behavior by positing some beliefs or representational structures: internal working models, low self-esteem, or unconscious self and object representations. The standard tendency is to assume that such explicit representational structures are present but not conscious. The developmental theorist is then obliged to explain how these representational structures were acquired, how an infant or toddler could use them even if they had been acquired, where they are, and why they can't be located. These problems do not arise with the notion of implicitness.

The notion of implicitness enables us to explain how the infant can develop ways of being in the world whose presuppositions about core personality issues are far in advance of her actual cognitive capacities. Such presuppositions are implicit in the infant's functioning, and in how it is organized; they are not explicitly cognized, or represented at all.

What's more, Knowing Level 1 remains the ground of being throughout life. Nonetheless, our treatment of reflective abstraction will show how some presuppositions can become explicit.

## Reflective Abstraction

Interactivism provides a process-oriented framework for addressing how the various forms of self-conscious awareness emerge from being-in-the-world,

or Knowing Level 1. Interactivism draws on Piaget's (1950/1973, 1974/1976, 1974/1978, 1977/2001) key notion of 'reflecting abstraction,' the process that, in his later writings, was hypothesized to account for the emergence of thinking at a higher stage out of thinking at a lower stage. Interactivism does not, however, rely on the common interpretations of Piaget's theory that posit overarching structures for each stage of development; for Piaget, stages were ways to classify instances of thinking, not whole children (Chapman, 1988). Interactivism does not even share the preference that Piaget developed in his middle period to define stages by their characteristic cognitive structures, such as the INRC group for formal operations. Instead, interactivism puts its reliance on reflective abstraction. Reflective abstraction is 'the relationship between adjacent levels of knowing—in which properties resident in a given level, implicit in the organization or functioning of that level, are explicitly known at the next higher level' (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986, p. 85).

Piaget (1977/2001) understood reflecting abstraction as involving phases of projection and reorganizing reflection. Interactivism posits two somewhat different phases. The abstractive phase takes one of the implicit properties of the prior level of knowing and abstracts it into an explicit representation. The reflective phase is more complicated but relies on externalizing steps and aspects of internal processing.

> Suppose that a system could learn to create external indicators of various points in and aspects of its own internal processes—as it was actually engaged in those processes. The indicators would manifest properties of the organization and functioning of those internal processes. From the indicators, the system could then abstract properties of the processes that yielded those indicators. (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986, p. 86)

Language commonly serves this role of creating external indicators and thus allows for the possibility of the functional ascent through higher levels of knowing. Note, in particular, that unaided introspection is simply one way of doing reflective abstraction. It is not necessarily the most productive or effective way of doing it. We are often best able to know ourselves 'not by inward turning and introspection' in the manner of Descartes, 'but by catching sight of ourselves as we are engaged and preoccupied in everyday contexts' (Guignon, 1984, p. 232). And as Wilson (2002) concludes after summarizing the limitations of introspection, 'By being careful observers of our own actions, we can learn a lot about ourselves' (p. 203).

One classic example of reflective abstraction involves navigating a wire maze that requires backtracking in order to get the crossbar past an obstacle. Children aged 7 and 8 learn to get through the maze successfully, but they cannot describe their moves correctly in language or draw them accurately. Nor can they make a correct comparison between backtracking in the wire maze and an analogous move in a problem involving a toy locomotive, two train cars, and a turntable that will hold only the locomotive and one car.

There is an additional step of reflective abstraction before their conscious descriptions catch up with their unconscious skill; indeed, it is not until around age 12 that children can correctly anticipate how to solve both the wire maze problem and the turntable problem, and immediately recognize how they are similar (Blanchet, 1981; Piaget, 1977/2001).

Another classic example of reflective abstraction is the widely cited study by Bechara, Damasio, Tranel, and Damasio (1997), in which normal adults were playing a gambling game in which cards from two decks produced a net loss if played, while cards from another two decks produced a net gain. Normal adults quickly began to avoid cards from the net-loss-producing decks, and their palms began to sweat when they handled them. But it took many more trials for the participants to consciously realize that these cards should be avoided because playing them would lead to a net loss. Here both learning and an emotional response preceded reflective abstraction and conscious realizing.

We will never be able to perform reflective abstraction on everything that we know at Level 1. In some cases, we do not know how to become conscious of something that we know how to do, and we may never find a way to do so. In other cases, we *could* engage in reflective abstraction, but only if we discovered the right kinds of external indicators, or were shown how by others who have discovered them. According to Gladwell (2005), we can improve our unreflective judgments of the taste and texture of Oreo cookies. But the improvement comes not by unaided introspection, but through mastering a complex scheme for explicitly rating taste and texture on multiple dimensions. We can categorize other people's facial expressions more accurately than we could at Level 1, but to do so we will need to be instructed in an explicit system of criteria, such as Paul Ekman's facial coding system (Ekman & Rosenberg, 1997). Each of these schemes was the product of reflective abstraction done by experts, and our own reflective abstraction will be called on in its turn if we are to master them.

What's more, when reflective abstraction is possible, we typically actualize it in some areas, but not in others. (Hence, for instance, Branden's [1994] challenges to bring 5 percent more consciousness to our actions in the workplace, or to our family relationships.) We can function at a particular knowing level with regard to one issue while failing to do so on a related issue. Consequently, interactivism tries not to overstate how much of ourselves we can actually know. From the interactivist standpoint, as in the hermeneutic positions of Heidegger (1927/1962), Gadamer (1960/1975), and Taylor (1989), we are situated in our lives and can become conscious of different, but always partial, aspects of ourselves.

In Heidegger's (1927/1962) words, we are 'proximally and for the most part' being-in-the-world; in other words, Knowing Level 1 remains ontologically primary. Let us turn now to the higher knowing levels and how they emerge out of engaged, embodied agency, or being-in-the-world.

## Knowing Level 2

As children mature cognitively, they begin to develop a Level 2, at which they can understand, know, and make explicit what is implicit at Knowing Level 1. The child begins to reflectively abstract from the patterns of interaction that he or she has learned. Because knowing is an irreflexive relation (the knower does not stand in a knowing relationship with itself), the first knowing level knows its environment, but cannot know itself.

At the first level of knowing, a child is a person, and *is* a self, but is as yet unable to know that self or *have* a self. At the second level of knowing, it is the first level of knowing that has come to serve as the environment to be interacted with and known, so at Level 2, the child begins to know himself.

At Knowing Level 2, children are now able to know about the goals they hold at Level 1, instead of merely acting on them, and to form goals about the kind of goals they want to have. At Level 2 the child can organize his Level 1 goals around higher-order goals. Elsewhere (Campbell, Christopher, & Bickhard, 2002) we have described these goals about goals as *values*. An example of a transition to Level 2 would be a child who develops a value of not getting her parents upset. While such a child might have a Level 1 goal of investigating what is in her mother's home office, she would learn to suppress or subordinate or de-select such a goal because it conflicts with the Level 2 goal of not upsetting her mother. Such a Level 2 goal will direct the formation and selection of a variety of goals at Level 1.

The child's emerging self-knowledge *may* take the form of self-beliefs or self-descriptive statements that can be articulated to others. Psychologists have usually understood our self-conceptions in these ways, which are relatively easy to gather evidence about. Research programs that ask people who they are, how they are different from other people, and what is important to them are probing instances of thinking at Level 2 (or higher). For researchers like William Damon (1984; Damon & Hart, 1988), studies of the self and its development begin with self-statements. From an interactivist perspective, psychologists err in treating self-statements or other Level 2 productions as if they *were* the child's self.

As Charles Taylor (1985) notes, the ascension from Knowing Level 1 (the 'sub-personal agent') to Knowing Level 2 (the 'self-aware agent') involves the constitution of new personal meanings as well as the understanding of old ones:

> … we have to understand the step from sub-personal agent to person not just as an increase in consciousness in the sense of the power to form representations of self and world, but much more as the onset of a range of significances which are essentially those of self-aware agents. Our self-consciousness doesn't offer us [just] a representation of these significances; rather it is partly constitutive of them, for they concern standards holding of persons qua persons, and which can only be understood within the life of a person. (p. 265)

There is reasonably strong evidence to suggest that Knowing Level 2 emerges around 4 years of age (Bickhard, 1992b; Campbell, 1992). The emergence of young children's ability to be conscious of their own thinking and that of others has been explored in diverse ways; best-known are the empirical studies of children's ability to recognize that people can have false beliefs (Flavell, Flavell, & Green, 1983; Flavell, Green, & Flavell, 1986; Gopnik & Astington, 1988; Perner, 1991, 1992). There is also evidence that around age 4, children develop autobiographical memory, or memory for events that explicitly involve the self (Nelson, 1992, 1994). Far from being the initial form of memory, autobiographical memory develops only after enactive, then semantic, then episodic memory (Tulving, 1985, 1987; Tulving & Schachter, 1990); in its earlier form, the toddler's memory for events involves no reference to the self, or to its role in his or her life story.

## Knowing Level 3 and Beyond

Reflective abstraction hasn't finished its work at Knowing Level 2. The knowing levels are potentially infinite (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986). Aspects of the second knowing level can be known at Level 3; aspects of Level 3 can be known at a Level 4, and so on. Since there are new forms of implicitness at each knowing level, there is also new material to become known at the next higher level. At Level 3 the person can begin the process Erikson (1950) termed identity formation. While operating at Level 2, the child *is* an identity but does not *have* an identity. At Level 3, however, the child can begin to have an identity. To have an identity means to know who one is, to compare that way of being to other possible ways of being, to explicitly evaluate it, maybe to try to transform it (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986).

An example of a Knowing Level 3 development is explicit knowledge of the discounting principle, as described by Wilson (2002, pp. 57–59). According to the discounting principle, any activity that is enjoyable or worth performing simply for the satisfaction that it brings to the agent will come to be seen as less valuable if it is done to obtain an external reward; consequently, the agent will do less of that activity in the future. Three- to 5-year-olds will act as though the discounting principle is true: for instance, they will play less with marking pens if they have been explicitly rewarded for doing so than if they have not been given rewards. Doing less of an activity for which one has been rewarded is a metagoal-level phenomenon, so the discounting principle is implicit in this Knowing Level 2 metastrategy. But it is not until age 8 or 9 that children will predict that characters in a story will do less of an activity if they are rewarded for it than if they do it simply because they find it interesting (younger children seem to think that the characters will be *more* motivated to carry out an intrinsically satisfying activity for which

they are rewarded). Later on, college students often have to be prompted to reflect on their behavior before they realize that the discounting principle applies to their own motivation in an experimental setting.

At Level 3 we can form *metavalues* or values about values. Among these are explicit judgments about what kind of a person we are and what kind of a person we ought to be. What Taylor (1985) calls 'strong evaluations,' such as judgments about the kind of person who would stand up to peer pressure to defend another child who is being picked on, are normally at Level 3. The available empirical research (a good deal less plentiful than findings on the emergence of Level 2) suggests that Level 3 begins to emerge from 9 to 11 years of age (Campbell & Bickhard, 1986).

The knowing levels are potentially unbounded in several ways. Further levels can always emerge; there is no a priori limit on them. As far as values are concerned, we can easily imagine a fourth knowing level that entails analyzing, comparing, and critiquing the kind of metavalues that are constructed at Level 3 (Campbell et al., 2002; Moshman, 1995). Significantly for the present discussion, this is the level at which moral philosophy and moral psychology have usually operated.

## Implications for Positive Psychology

The interactivist-hermeneutic understanding of the person has a number of implications for positive psychology. First, it would require positive psychologists to take a hard look at the question, 'What is the self that is the subject of positive psychology?' Positive psychology would need to give better guidance to its empirical research program and to its typologies, such as the Values in Action Project (Peterson & Seligman, 2004a), by developing a psychological ontology. Answers to such basic questions as what a character trait is, or what the detailed functioning of a character strength is like, or whether one can have bravery or integrity or zest for life without practical wisdom can be found only within such an ontology. Though in our opinion a worked-out ontology of the person (Bickhard, 2004, 2008; Christopher & Bickhard, 2007) would yield critiques of the cultural roots of much theory and research in positive psychology, it would also provide an alternative that neither carries forward the diremption between facts and norms nor treats individual human beings as isolated atomic agents whose relations to other atomic agents are purely external.

An interactivist-hermeneutic ontology begins with the observation that human beings are already living out answers to the question, 'What constitutes a good life?' (Guignon, 1983; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999). This is the case whether we are considering Knowing Level 1, and the embodied and situated form of agency that it exemplifies, or the unfolding of self and personality at the multiple higher knowing levels.

Positive psychology needs to consider social practices and life forms as different 'takes' on the good and thereby begin to comprehensively document moral visions across cultures and history. A significant barrier to success in this endeavor is the lack of attention to Knowing Level 1 in most of positive psychology. As Heidegger (1927/1962) notes when he says that our lives are 'structures of care,' values and meanings are implicit in our daily patterns of interaction. Or as Taylor (1985) writes,

> There is always a pretheoretical understanding of what is going on among members of a society, which is formulated in the descriptions of self and other which are involved in the institutions and practices of that society. A society is among other things a set of institutions and practices, and these cannot exist and be carried on without certain self-understandings. (p. 93)

Seligman's (2002) pleasant life, good life, and meaningful life are 'always already' present in patterns of interaction and social practices.

We live out implicit understandings of what's pleasant, good, and meaningful in the responses we make moment-by-moment. Because for the most part we, to again use Heidegger's words, are thrown into an intersubjective world of social practices, we begin by taking over the understandings of what's pleasant, good, and meaningful that underlie these social practices. And if what's pleasant, good, and meaningful constitutes the scope of positive psychology, then every society already has at least a folk positive psychology. According to Catherine Lutz (1988), the ability of the Ifaluk in Micronesia to feel *fago*, a complex emotion that includes a mixture of sadness, love, compassion, and longing, is a sign of maturity and well-being. For the Ifaluk, *fago* helps to demarcate their own positive folk psychology. In some societies significant portions of the positive folk psychology may be enacted at Knowing Level 1 but remain implicit, without articulation, definition, or delineation.

By contrast, the Values in Action project (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004b) drew its catalog of strengths and virtues only from those conceptions of the good life that have been put forward in literate societies with a tradition of sustained philosophical activity. Whether in the process full justice was done to the Level 3 or 4 perspectives of Aristotle (Fowers, 2005; Mruk, 2006; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Woolfolk & Wasserman, 2005) or of Confucius (Sundararajan, 2005), their ideas were considered. Being able to feel *fago* had no chance at all of being included in the catalog of character strengths.

Interactivism serves to integrate what's at Knowing Level 1—unconscious cognitive processes, embodied and procedural knowledge, participation in social practices—into a developmental framework in which more conscious types of agency are emergent properties. More and more often psychologists are positing the existence of two types of cognitive processing, as, for instance, Wilson (2002; Wilson & Dunn, 2004; Wilson, Lindsey,

& Schooler, 2000) does when he distinguishes between the adaptive uncon-scious and the conscious self. But interactivism goes well beyond any binary distinction between conscious and unconscious, or implicit and explicit. It enhances our understanding of the more conscious levels by indi-cating a potentially unbounded progression beyond Knowing Level 1, and it hypothesizes a process of reflective abstraction that explains the emer-gence of each higher level.

The most significant implication of the interactivist-hermeneutic ontology is the need to use methods that can tap into the different knowing levels. The pleasant, the good, and the meaningful function at different levels of knowing simultaneously. Implicit in the explicit methods most often relied on by positive psychologists, such as self-report questionnaires about character strengths, happiness, and life satisfaction, is the presupposition that by adult-hood the normal human self is an unproblematic unity (a unity both within and across levels). But self-esteem, life satisfaction, and the various positive traits appear to have multiple dimensions, not all of them available to con-sciousness—just as the self does more generally.

Not only do we need to be able to tap multiple levels of knowing, espe-cially the widely neglected Knowing Level 1, but we also need to figure out ways to get at ambivalence and what Wilson (2002) has referred to as dual attitudes that can exist within the same knowing level. Our methods must keep pace or run the risk of distorting the subject matter. The interactivist-hermeneutic framework that we have been elaborating here is equipped to handle ambivalence, implicit self-evaluations at variance with explicit self-conceptions, implicit life satisfaction that fails to match responses to a life satisfaction questionnaire, or courage or kindness more easily shown under some circumstances than others.

No one today will dispute that there are limitations to self-report measures (e.g., Schwarz, 1999). The contribution of the interactivist-hermeneutic metatheory is to situate these limitations within a broader view of the person. Self-report measures require the participant to be operating from at least the second Knowing Level. As a result, they cannot directly access Knowing Level 1. At best, they can offer higher knowing level perspectives on what is taking place at Level 1. Often these perspectives will consist of the individ-ual's theories or guesses about what is going on there; in the worst case, they may be entirely inaccurate assessments (Wilson, 2002).

A method that has been fairly distinctive to positive psychology is experi-ence sampling, as developed by Csikszentmihályi (e.g., 1990). By asking participants to respond to measures and questionnaires in the moment, expe-rience sampling tries to eliminate recall biases, the impact of autobiographi-cal memory, and the use of heuristics in response patterns. According to Scollon, Kim-Prieto, and Diener (2003), experience sampling can 'delve beyond single-time self-report measurement to answer complex questions about lives' and can 'provide solutions to nagging methodological problems,

such as memory biases' (p. 5). In partial support of our contention that the self is distributed across knowing levels, Scollon et al. note that '[d]iscrepancies between on-line and global self-report measures have been demonstrated in a variety of research areas, such as coping and emotion' (p. 11).

Most discussions about the relative merits of experience sampling versus global recall measures orbit around the problem of bias. This discourse makes two presuppositions: first, the concern with accurate assessment of the person's experience seems to assume one bedrock value on one dimension of the person (e.g., a single value on one global happiness dimension) that different assessment techniques do better or worse at capturing; second, there is a presupposition that the individual is unified and consistent, so there must be only one level of happiness that needs tracking—although it may fluctuate with time and mood.

While issues of method are important in themselves, what gets overlooked is any ontological view of the person that might frame these issues in a dramatically different way. The knowing levels model suggests that there are different levels of agency and that different methods will be better or worse at accessing these levels. Moreover, the interactivist model explicitly claims that people are *not* always consistent and unified, across levels or even within levels. Our behavior, attitudes, values, and beliefs are often at odds with each other and themselves (cf. Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Wilson et al., 2000). Current methodological discussions do not seem able to capture this complexity and richness.

In attempting to capture what's pleasant, good, and meaningful at different levels, we will certainly need to move beyond self-report measures. For instance, inquiring into the way that psychological well-being would be understood in non-Western cultures, we (Smith, Türk-Smith, & Christopher, 1998, 2007) focused on understandings of the good person. We thought that this was a more seminal notion, not dependent on the Western dichotomy of psychological versus physical well-being. Our first step was to explore prototypes of the category by asking participants in seven cultures to freely list characteristics or qualities of the good person. This study, which resulted in some interesting findings, needs, however, to be seen as a partial response to the inquiry, in part because it does not reach down to Knowing Level 1. To get at the issue in the way that does justice to all the knowing levels of the interactivist ontology, we need to supplement our project with fieldwork and behavioral analysis, a study of folklore, myths, legends, and so forth. A few examples of efforts in positive psychology that offer a promise of a broadened repertoire of methods include the use by Brunstein, Schultheiss, and Grässman (1998) of both projective and self-report measures, and the application by Kim (2004) of Implicit Association Test techniques to the measurement of implicit life satisfaction. In addition to multimethod research endeavors, it will also be important to explore developmental changes in the structure of what's pleasant, good, and meaningful.

**Meaningful Life**

One place where the interactivist model might make a difference is in the study of the good and meaningful life. Existing empirical research on this subject has made some valuable contributions. For instance, King and Napa (1998) found evidence that meaning in life and happiness are essential to the American folk concept of the good life. More recently, King, Hicks, Krull, and Del Gaiso (2006) assessed meaning in life both as judged globally and as experienced in a daily manner. However, the authors acknowledge that much of this work relies on self-report measures. Other studies have used narrative procedures (Bauer & McAdams, 2004a, 2004b; Bauer, McAdams, & Sakaeda, 2005). Both of these methods, however, rely on Knowing Level 2 at a minimum. And we have already mentioned how self-report measures cannot begin to capture the complexity and tension that can exist within levels. Neither approach can begin to assess the notions of meaning that are implicit in behavioral interactions, social practices, and behavioral choices.

A groundbreaking book, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self* (Csikszentmihályi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), used experience sampling to assess a key aspect of the meaningful life: the importance that people attributed to various objects that they owned, and the reasons why some were more important than others. Although experience sampling still requires some kind of description in language by the participant, it yields data about actual interactions, practices, and choices in context. Despite the promise of its method and findings, the book inspired little by way of follow-up. It remains among the untapped resources of the positive psychology movement.

**Subjective Happiness**

It is not as though positive psychologists have been entirely oblivious to the concerns we are raising. Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) question the adequacy of current measures of positive states. They point out:

> Many happiness researchers subscribe to the notion that happiness is necessarily subjective and is essentially whatever the individual defines it to be (e.g., Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, [2005]). If happiness is in the eye of the beholder, then self-report measures are the only appropriate measures. We do not think this approach is solid enough: Even though individuals may be the best judge of how happy they are at the moment, they may not be accurate historians with respect to when and in what types of situations they were happy in the past. One challenge for researchers is to develop better behavior-based, domain specific assessment tools. (p. 420)

We concur with Seligman et al., but want to add to their concern. Studies by Bargh (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bargh & Williams, 2006), Greenwald (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Greenwald et al., 2002), and Wilson (Wilson &

Dunn, 2004), as well as Klein (1998) and others, repeatedly challenge the assumption that our self-knowledge is always accurate or captures all there is. An adequate ontological framework would lead to an even larger appreciation of what's desirable. From our perspective, an assessment of happiness would ideally need to be able to capture Knowing Level 1, which might be partly assessable through Seligman et al.'s 'behavior-based' assessment tools. It would also need to be sensitive to the 'dual attitudes' and 'ambivalence' that exist throughout the knowing levels. Too many measures assume there is an 'eye of the beholder,' the standpoint of a single atomistic self, instead of a subject with, to use Bakhtin's term, a polyphony of voices (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Morson & Emerson, 1990). Finally, there is a need to recognize the multiplicity of levels that are typically subsumed under 'subjective' or 'conscious.' From the interactive standpoint, there is not just one level of conscious awareness but iterative levels: 2, 3, 4, and so on.

## Towards a Critically Attuned Positive Psychology

The ontology presented here makes it clear that culturally situated values are always present in all human functioning. It is impossible to be neutral, whether neutrality is understood as value-free or culture-free. As Robert Bellah and his colleagues observed, any social science makes

> … assumptions about the nature of persons, the nature of society, and the relation between persons and society. It also, whether it admits it or not, makes assumptions about good persons and a good society and considers how far these conceptions are embodied in our actual society. (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 301)

As a number of papers in this issue have suggested, along with a variety of other recent critiques (Christopher, 1999; Fowers, 2005; Guignon, 2002; Held, 2005; Sundararajan, 2005; Woolfolk & Wasserman, 2005), positive psychology is no more immune to this condition than is any other branch or specialty of the social sciences. Indeed, most positive psychologists prescribe so widely and overtly as to pull the credibility out from under any protestations of value-neutrality, though some of their implied cultural assumptions might still escape a casual observer.

Given the inescapability of such cultural values and assumptions, we recommend giving up our pretensions to value-neutrality, instead adopting an approach that Bellah and his colleagues have termed *social science as moral inquiry* or *social science as public philosophy* (Bellah et al., 1985; Haan, Bellah, Rabinow, & Sullivan, 1983). From this perspective, positive psychology, like the social sciences more broadly, would be acknowledged to be 'a tradition, or set of traditions, deeply rooted in the philosophical and humanistic (and, to more than a small extent, the religious) history of the West'

(Bellah et al., 1985, p. 301). Recognizing our cultural and historical embed-dedness can remind us that our assumptions about what a person is and what a person should be or become are 'contestable and that the choice of assumptions involves controversies that lie deep in the history of Western thought' (p. 301). As a form of public philosophy, positive psychology 'would make the philosophical conversation concerning these matters its own' (p. 301).

From our standpoint, positive psychology understood as a moral inquiry is free to employ all of the resources of science, both empirical and theoretical. It is also free to prescribe, so long as its prescriptions are identified as such and the reasons for them are open to inspection. A positive psychology that puts forward an explicit ontology of the person will, for instance, be able to argue for the disunity of the virtues against those (e.g., Aristotle, c. 330 BC/1962; Fowers, 2005; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006) who insist on their unity. It could give a principled argument for the exclusion of pride (or greatness of soul) from the list of character strengths against those who maintain that it is a virtue, and humility or modesty is not (e.g., Aristotle, c. 330 BC/1962; Branden, 1994; Mruk, 2006), instead of flicking it away because '[t]he latter two [mag-nificence and greatness of soul] might sound strange to the modern reader' (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005, p. 208). Further discussion could then evolve dialec-tically as these rationales, and the ontology to which they appeal, are examined and critiqued.

Like the study of moral development—another social science specialty in which value-neutrality is a non-starter (Campbell & Christopher, 1996a, 1996b; Campbell et al., 2002; Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987; Walker & Pitts, 1998)—positive psychology needs to account for the forms and man-ners of human functioning that its researchers and theorists do not recom-mend—indeed, that may instantiate outlooks substantially opposed to theirs—as well as those that it does recommend. In all, then, there is an urgent need to move to a higher level of knowing concerning positive psychology, its implicit values and assumptions, and the culture from which it has sprung.

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