

*Does the concept of the person vary cross-culturally?*

Richard A. Shweder & Edmund J. Bourne

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Our concern in this essay is with other people's conceptions of the person and ideas about the self. Our aim is to interpret a widespread mode of social thought often referred to as concrete, undifferentiated, context-specific, or occasion-bound thinking, a mode of social thought culminating in the view that specific situations determine the moral character of a particular action, that the individual person *per se* is neither an object of importance nor inherently worthy of respect, that the individual as moral agent ought not be distinguished from the social status (s)he occupies; a view that, indeed, the individual as an abstract *ethical and normative* category is not to be acknowledged.

Our aim, we wish to emphasize, is to interpret an alien mode of social thought. Thus, before we look at the person concepts of such peoples as the Oryya, Chhaku-Chhama, and Halmese we feel obliged to consider a more fundamental question: In what terms should we understand the understandings of other peoples and compare those understandings with our own?

For over 100 years anthropologists have tried to make sense of alien idea systems. For over 80 years anthropologists have been confronted with all sorts of incredible and often unbelievable beliefs, as well as all sorts of incredible and often unbelievable accounts of other people's beliefs. A review of the history of the anthropological attempt to translate the meaning of oracles and witchcraft, wandering and reincarnated souls, magical "therapies," unusual ideas about procreation, and all the other exotic ideational formations that have come their way would reveal, we believe, a tendency to rely on one of three interpretive models for rendering intelligible the apparent diversity of human understandings. These three interpretive models can be referred to as *universalism, evolutionism, and relativism*.

There is a fourth model; perhaps it should be named *confusionism*. (Confusionism) calls for the honest confession that one fails to comprehend the ideas of another. We will not have much to say about confusionism) in this essay. We would, however, like to confess, right here, that not infrequently we are left in a muddled condition, especially when we are told, without exception, such incredible things as, e.g., the Hongo-Hongo believe that their sorcerers are bushrats, their minds are

located in their knees, and their father is a tree, or when we read, e.g., that the Gink-Chamu cannot distinguish between the products of their imagination and the objects of their perceptions.

Many anthropological accounts lack intelligibility. One does not know what to make of them; whether to treat them as accurate reports about the confused and/or erroneous beliefs of others or dismiss them as bad translations; whether to search for common understandings hidden behind superficial idiomatic differences; or whether, alternatively, to generously assume that the ideas of the other form a coherent system derived from premises, or related to purposes, that the anthropologist has failed to appreciate. Although we will not have much to say about confusionism) we would like to discuss, however briefly, the three other deeply entrenched models of anthropological interpretation: *universalism, evolutionism, and relativism*.

Universalists are committed to the view that intellectual diversity is more apparent than real, that exotic idea systems, alien at first blush, are really more like our own than they initially appear.

Evolutionists are committed to the view that alien idea systems not only are truly different from our own, but are different in a special way; viz., other people's systems of ideas are really incipient and less adequate stages in the development of our own understandings.

Relativists, in contrast, are committed to the view that alien idea systems, while fundamentally different from our own, display an internal coherency which, on the one hand, can be understood but, on the other hand, cannot be judged.

The universalist opts for homogeneity. "Apparently different but really the same" is his slogan. Diversity is sacrificed to equality; equal because not different! The evolutionist, however, opts for hierarchy. Diversity is not only tolerated, it is expected, and it is ranked. "Different but unequal" is the slogan of the evolutionist. The relativist, in contrast, is a pluralist. "Different but equal" is his slogan; equality and diversity his "democratic" aspiration.

*Universalism, evolutionism, and relativism: interpretive rules of thumb*

Universalists, evolutionists, and relativists all try to process information about alien idea systems following rules of thumb peculiar to their interpretive model of choice. Indeed, the universalist, evolutionist, and relativist each has his way of processing data to help him arrive at his desired interpretation.

**UNIVERSALISM**

Confronted with the apparent diversity of human understandings, there are two powerful ways to discover universals in one's data: (a) emphasize general likenesses and overlook specific difference ("the higher-order generality rule"); and/or (b) examine only a subset of the evidence ("the data attenuation rule").

ling" term apply distinctively to both a younger sister and an older brother). Yet Nerlove and Romney consider only one portion of the referential range of "sibling terms" (nuclear family referents). Secure in the conviction that nuclear family referents are expandable prototypes, they decide not to examine the application in many cultures of "sibling" terms to such (disjunctive?) kin types as "cousins," etc.

3. *Universalism's benefits and costs.* There are benefits and costs to the adoption of a universalist stance. A major benefit is the thrill of recognition [My (god! They're just like me after all)] that comes with the identification of a significant point of resemblance. An Azande consults the chicken oracle (see Evans-Pritchard 1937). "Will I be killed on my journey to Z?" The chicken is administered a magical "poison". If the chicken dies it means "Yes"; if it lives, "No". The chicken lives. A second chicken is consulted. This time the chicken's survival is taken as a caution to stay at home. But, the chicken dies. Reassured, our Azande goes on the journey to Z. He is murdered en route! Do the Azande doubt the veracity of their oracle? Not! Instead they explain away the event in one of two ways. Counter-witchcraft was being practiced at the time of consultation, or perhaps women, standing too close, had polluted the consultation grounds. Should one fail to notice within these practices some of the methodological concepts of the Western applied scientist (?), viz., reliability checks (double consultations), interfering background variables (counter-witchcraft), and measurement error (pollution). The idioms differ, but they are easily overlooked in the light of the recognition that the Azande's search for truth relies on principles not unlike our own.

Universalism, however, has its difficulties. All too often the pursuit after a "higher-order generality" is like searching for the "real" archetype by divesting it of its leaves (Wittgenstein 1968, paragraph 64). The "higher-order" sphere is all too often a higher-order of vacuity, the air gets very thin.

Consider, for example, the concept of "justice" ("fairness" or "equity"). Stated as a higher-order generality ("treat like cases alike and different cases differently"), "justice" is a universal concept. Appropriate, however, the lauded emptiness of this higher-order formulation. As Hart (1961:155) remarks: the abstract concept of justice

cannot afford any definite guide to conduct . . . This is so because any set of human beings will resemble each other in some respects and differ from each other in others and, until it is established what resemblances and differences are relevant, 'treat like cases alike' must remain an empty form.

For example, Americans deny 10-year-olds the right to vote, enter into contracts, etc. This exclusion, however, does not violate our abstract concept of justice. Quite the contrary, it indicates that we subscribe to the belief that in certain crucial respects, children are different

1. *The higher-order generality rule.* Osgood's (1964) investigations of universals in connotative meaning illustrate the application of the "higher-order generality rule". Emphasizing the way things are alike, and ignoring the ways they are different, Osgood discovers that all peoples appraise objects and events in terms of three universal dimensions, viz. good vs. bad (evaluation), strong vs. weak (potency), and fast vs. slow (activity). The universals are discovered, in part, by moving to a level of discourse so general that "God" and "Ice Cream" are descriptively equivalent; both are perceived as good, strong, and active.

The tendency to overlook specific difference and emphasize general likeness is ubiquitous among universalists. In Levi-Strauss' mind (1961, 1966, 1969a, 1969b), for example, the distinction between, e.g., voiced/unvoiced (in phonetics), raw/cooked (in the culinary arts), and sexual reproduction/asexual reproduction (in the Oedipus Myth), and organy/endogamy (in marriage systems) are all rendered equivalent, each an example of a purported human tendency to think in terms of binary oppositions (is this a trivially true logical claim, or a false empirical claim?). For ethologists and sociobiologists it is "conversation" (in human primates) and "barking" (e.g., in canine folk) that are voiced in the same breath, each an example of a universal "signaling" function of communication systems [What does a cow say? Moot! What does a sheep say? Baal! What does a person say?], while for others it is "marriage" and "pair-bonding" whose general affinities are made much of at the expense of potentially significant grounds for divorce [whatever happened to the "sanctity" of marriage?].

2. *The data attenuation rule.* Not infrequently, the discovery of a universal is the product of a sophisticated process of data restriction and data attenuation. Berlin and Kay (1969), for example, discover universal prototypes for the definition of color categories, and a universal sequence for the emergence of a color lexicon. Their study begins with two applications of the data attenuation rule. First, "color" classification is equated with the task of partitioning a perceptual space, pre-defined in terms of hue, saturation, and intensity (thus, attenuating the referential range of the "color" concept as understood by, at least, some cultures (Conklin 1955)). Secondly, all color categories whose linguistic expression fails to meet certain formal criteria (e.g., superordination, monolexic unity) are eliminated from consideration. The consequence of the application of these two data attenuation rules is that 95% of the world's expressions for color and most of the world's color categories are dropped from the investigation.

A second illustration of the data attenuation rule can be found in Nerlove and Romney's (1967) work on universal cognitive processes underlying the formation of "sibling" terminological systems. A major finding of their study is the universal disinclination of the human mind to process disjunctive categories (e.g., it is rare to have the same "sib-

from adults (e.g., they lack the information and judgment to make informed decisions, etc.). From a cross-cultural and historical perspective there have been many places in the world where, given received wisdom and without relinquishing the "higher-order" concept of justice, the difference between male and female, Jew and Christian, Brahman and untouchable, Black and White, has seemed as obvious to others as the difference between an adult and a child seems to us. Unfortunately, all these concrete, culture-rich ("thick" if you will; see Quertz 1973) variations in the way people treat each other get bleached out of focus in the "higher-order" description of "justice" as an abstract universal. Universality of agreement wanes as we move from higher-order abstract principles to substantive cases.

Application of the "data attenuation rule" has its costs, as well. These costs are clearly understood by Berlin and Kay (1969:160) who note:

... it has been argued, to our minds convincingly, that to appreciate the full cultural significance of color words it is necessary to appreciate the full range of meanings, both referential and cognitive, and not restrict oneself arbitrarily to hue, saturation, and brightness. We thus make no claim — in fact we specifically deny — that our treatment of the various color terminologies presented here is an ethnographically revealing one.

The path traveled by the universalist is rarely the one that leads to ethnographic illumination; only occasionally does it lead to a powerful, context-rich universal generalization. However, when it does it should not be scorned.

EVOLUTIONISM

Confronted with the apparent diversity of human understandings, evolutionists rely on a powerful three-stage rule of thumb for ordering that variety into a sequence of lower to higher (Primitive to advanced, incipient to elaborated) forms; viz., (a) locate a normative model (e.g., the canons of propositional calculus, Bayes' rules of statistical inference, Newton's laws of motion, Rawls' theory of justice, Mill's rules for experimental reasoning, etc.); (b) treat the normative model as the endpoint of development; (c) describe diverse beliefs and understandings as steps on an ideational Jacob's ladder progressively moving in the direction of the normative endpoint (see, e.g., Pagel 1966; Kuhlberg 1969, 1971).

The normative model defines what it is to have an adequate understanding (e.g., given that  $P \rightarrow Q$  it is more adequate to conclude  $\sim Q \rightarrow \sim P$  than to conclude  $\sim P \rightarrow \sim Q$ ). Variations in thought are ranked in terms of their degree of approximation to the endpoint. The range is one of subsumption, progress, and hierarchical inclusion. Some forms of understanding are described as though they were incipient forms of other understandings, and those other forms of understanding are described as though they can do everything the incipient forms can

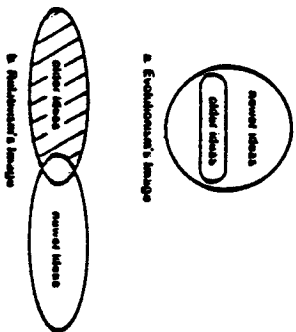


Figure 6.1. Evolutionism's and relativism's image of relationship between historically sequenced ideas (adapted from Feyerabend 1975:177-8)

do plus more (see Figure 6.1a); post-Copernican astronomy replaces pre-Copernican astronomy — experimental logic (Mill's laws of agreement and difference) replaces magical thinking (Frazer's laws of contagion and similarity). If the subsumed, less adequate form of understanding can also be time-dated, i.e., linked to early periods in history and/or childhood, so much the better.

Evolutionism has its appeal. For one thing, it permits the existence of variety. Instead of searching for "higher-order" equivalences it takes variety and difference at its face value (and tries to assign it a rank). Secondly, it does provide a yardstick (the normative model) for talking about progress. The vocabulary of the primitive vs. modern, adequate vs. inept, better vs. worse, adaptive vs. maladaptive, is highly "developed" in the evolutionist literature.

Evolutionism, however, has its pitfalls. There is no normative model for many domains of social thought — no way of saying whether one form of understanding is better or worse than another. Which is better? A kinship system where older and younger brothers are terminologically distinguished, or one where the distinction is not encoded? The mind boggles at the evolutionary presumption of the question. Which is better? A policy for allocating resources based on the principle "to each equal amounts" or one based on the principle "to each according to his work" (or "to each according to his needs"?). There seems to be no general answer (see Perelman 1963).

There is a second difficulty with the evolutionary model, viz., the problem of "presentism." "Presentism" is the tendency to perceive the ideas of others through the filter of one's own current concerns. This pattern of perception is diagrammed in Figure 6.1b (see Feyerabend 1975). It is all too easy to unwittingly rewrite (and distort) the historical and ontogenetic record on others' ideas, dropping out or overlinking those problems, ideas, and principles which are no longer of contemporary concern. This is especially true when one's search

through the ideas of others is guided by a contemporary normative model. But, consider the possibility that our ideas have succeeded the ideas of others, not through a process of subsumption, betterment, and advance, but rather, merely by "giving up" on the problems, principles, and concepts of our ancestors (see the hatched-in area of Figure 6.1b). "Presentism" obscures the historical record, making it appear our ideas can do everything the ideas of our predecessors could do, plus more, when all we may have done is shifted our field of interest and altered the questions to be answered.

#### RELATIVISM

Confronted with the apparent diversity of human understandings, relativists seek to preserve the integrity of the differences and establish the co-equality of the variegated "forms of life." Relativists typically process evidence according to two rules of thumb: (a) the "contextualization rule" and (b) the "principle of arbitrariness."

1. *The contextualization rule.* A primary goal of the relativist is to seek, and display, more and more information about the details of other peoples' objectives, premises, presuppositions, standards, knowledge, meanings, etc. [the famous "native's point of view"]; so much detail that the ideas and conduct of others come to make sense given the "context" (premises, standards, etc.). Thus, for example, Benedict (1946), in her classic analysis of Japanese culture, takes bits and pieces of Japanese conduct in World War II, their lack of respect for national sovereignty (e.g., the invasion of China and attack on Pearl Harbor), the suicide bombings, the "mistreatment" of American prisoners of war, etc., and places them in a conceptual framework (the Japanese understanding of the advantages and necessity of "taking one's proper place" in a domestic, national, and international hierarchy of individual, groups, and nations), a conceptual framework within which "imperialistic expansionism" is re-described as an obvious remedy for international anarchy and the "atrocities" of the camps are re-described as a valorous contempt for materialism and scorn of "damaged goods".

2. *The principle of arbitrariness.* A closely related goal of the relativist is to show that equally rational folk can look out on the "same" world and yet arrive at different understandings; the relativist must find a way for reason to leave us a free choice. To the extent that no rule of logic and no law of nature dictates what is proper or necessary for us to believe or value, that is, to the extent there is an element of "arbitrariness" or "free-choice" in our understandings, to that extent reason is consistent with relativism. Socrates may be right that the concept of "truth" implies "one" not many, but there are many points in a cognitive structure where questions of truth and falsity, validity, error, etc., are simply beside the point.

Hence, the passionate interest among relativists in the types of ideas underlying non-rational action, ideas that fall beyond the scope of scientific evaluation, for example, *constitutive presuppositions* (Collingwood 1972) (e.g., "all behavior is motivated by a desire to maximize pleasure and minimize pain"; what could possibly count as a disproof?), *performative utterances* (Austin 1962) (e.g., "You're fired"; "I dub thee . . ."; in such cases the problem of getting one's words to correspond to, or match, reality does not seem to arise) and other *declarative speech acts* (Searle 1979) (e.g., various acts of "definition"), *categorical judgments of value* (e.g., Hempel 1965) (e.g., "Killing is evil" and other avowals or expressions of a commitment to a norm of conduct) and, of course, Pareto's "sentiments" (1935).

Hence, the rejection among relativists of both the "innocent eye" (i.e., "we classify things as we do because that's the way things are") and the "absolute given" (i.e., "we classify things the way we do because that's the way people are") (Goodman 1968; quoted phrases from Volney Steffre: personal communication). For the relativist, knowledge, at its limits, is without foundation; what is of value and importance is a matter of consensus; social "facts" are created not discovered. The world of the relativist is a world where objects and events are not classified together because they are more alike than other things; quite the contrary, the relativist argues, objects and events seem to be alike because they have been classified together (Goodman 1972). And why have those folk classified things together in that way? That, the relativist will retort, "depends on their purposes." And, why do those folk pursue the purposes they pursue? That, the relativist will say, is a question for the historian.

3. *Relativism's benefits and costs.* Relativism, like universalism and evolutionism, has its distinctive benefits and costs. Relativism is consistent with a kind of pluralism or cognitive egalitarianism, a definite benefit, at least for some observers. Relativists provide us with a charitable rendition of the ideas of others, placing those ideas in a framework that makes it easier to credit others, not with confusion, error, or ignorance, but rather with an alternative vision of the possibilities of social life.

Relativism, however, has its problems. Despite its egalitarian intentions, relativism ironically lends support to a world based on intellectual domination and power assertion. The relativist views the understandings of others as self-contained, incommensurate, idealized universes (i.e., "paradigms"); across these universes there is no comparability, no common standard for rational criticism (see, e.g., Rorty 1979). Consequently, if people change idealized worlds (as they do), it can only be explained, by the relativist, in terms of domination, force, or non-rational conversion. And, if two or more peoples should disagree, as they often do, the only means of adjudication is "force of arms" — there is nothing to discuss. When "consensus" is the final

arbiter of what's real, numbers count, and the powerful and/or the masses have their way.

Kurt Vonnegut, in his novel *Slaughterhouse Five*, points to relativism's second name. Says Vonnegut:

I think of my education sometimes. I went to the University of Chicago for a while after the Second World War. I was a student in the department of anthropology. They taught me that nobody was ridiculous or bad or disgusting. Shortly before my father died he said to me — "You know you never wrote a story with a villain in it." I told him that was one of the things I learned in school after the war.

*An alternative concept of the person: the phenomenon*

Any observer of an apparently alien concept, belief, or value must address the question: in what terms shall this understanding be understood? How shall this idea be translated? In this section we describe an apparently alien concept of the person — we introduce the phenomenon of interest. In the next section we discuss universalist, evolutionary, and relativist interpretations of the phenomenon.

Many Western observers of *some* non-Western peoples have made note of a distinctive apperceptive style or mode of social thought; it goes under a variety of cognate descriptions — concrete, non-abstractive, non-generalizing, occasion-bound, context-specific, undifferentiated, situational.

Levy (1973:24) illustrates this "concrete style" of social thinking by reference to one of his Tahitian informants. Poria. Poria is asked to define the word *hau* which Levy glosses abstractly as "friend". Poria, however, responds by enumerating a list of restricted, context-dependent conditions:

A hau — we love each other — I come and get you to go to my house so that we may eat together. Sometimes we go and stroll together on the path. Sometimes I go to your house to eat. Sometimes I want you to help me with my work. Sometimes I go to help you. Sometimes we joke with the girls.

Levy notes that "much of village behavior having to do with personal and social description" is marked by an emphasis on "contexts and cases" (262), and is "oriented to richness of detail . . ." (268). He believes that Poria's thinking and the thinking of most Tahitian villagers involves "a calculus in which terms are understood on the basis of a huge number of contextual factors" (262). Numerous other observers in Africa, Central America, New Guinea, and Central Asia (e.g., Werner and Kaplan 1956; Humer et al. 1966; Pinget 1966; Horton 1967; Greenfield 1972; Luria 1976) concur in the observation that certain cultures perceive things (e.g., "an apple found in a store" and "an apple found on the ground") in terms of unique contextual features

(e.g., time, place, contemporaneous objects, co-occurrent events, etc.) while failing to generalize across cases or equate things in terms of cross-contextual invariances (e.g., they're both "apples"; see Price-Williams [1975:281] for an illuminating discussion of concrete thinking). Informants either respond to questions about how things are alike by enumerating the ways in which things are different, or else emphasize the way objects and events fit together in functional complexes or action sequences, without abstracting a common likeness.

This same style of concrete, contextualized, non-abstractive, apparently undifferentiated thinking is found in various cross-cultural reports about the concept of the "person." What is noted is a tendency to *not* abstract out a concept of the inviolate personality free of social role and social relationship — a tendency to not separate out, or distinguish, the individual from the social context.

Geertz (1975:48), for example, asserts that the Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however inerrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world's cultures.

There is, he notes, in Bali

. . . a persistent and systematic attempt to stylize all aspects of personal existence to the point where anything idiosyncratic, anything characteristic of the individual merely because he is who he is physically, psychologically or biographically, is muted in favor of his assigned place in the continuing, and, so it is thought, never-changing pageant that is Balinese life. It is dramatist personae, not actors, that endure; indeed it is dramatist personae, not actors, that in the proper sense really exist. Physically men come and go — mere incidents in a happen-stance history of no genuine importance, even to themselves. But the masks they wear, the stage they occupy, the parts they play, and most important, the spectacle they mount remain and constitute not the facade but the substance of things, not least the self (Geertz 1975:50).

Twenty years earlier, in a brilliant discussion of morality and personhood, Reid (1955) spoke in similar terms about the Gahuku-Gama of New Guinea. "The Gahuku-Gama conception of man 'does not allow for any clearly recognized distinction between the individual and the status which he occupies'" (255). The Gahuku-Gama do not distinguish an *ethical* category of the person. They fail

. . . to separate the individual from the social context and, ethically speaking, to grant him an intrinsic moral value apart from that which attaches to him as the occupant of a particular status (257).

The Gahuku-Gama recognize "no common measure of ethical content which would serve as a guide for the moral agent in whatever situation he finds himself" (260). For the Gahuku-Gama, people

are not conceived to be equidistant in a moral sense; their value does not reside in themselves as individuals or persons; it is dependent on the position they occupy within a system of inter-personal and inter-group relationships (259).

What this means is that for the Gahuku-Gama being human *per se* "does not necessarily establish a moral bond between individuals, nor does it provide an abstract standard against which all action can be judged... (261). Rather, the "specific context", the particular occasion, "determines the moral character of a particular action" (260). For example, the Gahuku-Gama believe it is wrong to kill members of their own tribe

but it is commendable to kill members of opposed tribes, always provided they are not related to him. Thus, a man is expected to avoid his maternal kinsmen in battle though other members of his own clan have no such moral obligation to these individuals (262).

Dumont's (1970:1, 9) observations on India almost sound redundant. He warns us against "indadvertently attributing the presence of the individual to societies in which he is not recognized", and he points to a relational, contextualized "logic" in which justice consists primarily in "ensuring that the proportions between social functions [and social roles] are adapted to the whole [i.e., society as a primary, not derivative, object]".

Geertz, Read, and Dumont contrast Bali, New Guinea, and India with a Western mode of social thought in which the "individual" is abstracted from the social role, and the moral responsibilities of this abstracted, inviolate individual are distinguished from his/her social responsibilities and duties. Read (1955:280) puts it this way: In the West the moral duties of the person are greater than any of the duties which the individual possesses as a member of society. His moral responsibilities, both to himself and others, transcend the given social context, are conceived to be independent of the social ties which link him to his fellows.

In the West, as Trilling (1972:24) so aptly remarks, the person, in violate in his self-image, supposes that he is

an object of interest to his fellow man [and worthy of respect?] not for the reason that he had achieved something notable or been witness to great events but simply because as an individual he is of consequence.

How are we to interpret this widespread mode of social thought in which the individual is not differentiated from the role, and where the person achieves no abstract, context-independent recognition?

The person in context: evolutionary, universalistic, and relativistic interpretations

#### THE EVOLUTIONARY ACCOUNT

In keeping with their respect for intellectual variety and their desire to rank diverse forms along a scale of progress, evolutionary theorists argue that concrete, occasion-bound thinking (in both the social and non-social domain) is unequally distributed across cultures and can be explained by reference to one of four types of cognitive "deficits," viz., the absence of (a) cognitive skills; (b) intellectual motivation; (c) pertinent information; or (d) linguistic tools.

1. *Deficit 1: Cognitive skills.* Luria's (1976) work illustrates the evolutionary emphasis on the absence of cognitive skills. He argues that "for some people abstract classification is a wholly alien procedure" (60), and he suggests that illiterate, unschooled peasants in the Uzbekistan and Kirghistan regions of Central Asia lack the skill to "isolate (abstract) a common feature" of things "as a basis for comparison" (80-81). Luria credits schools with fostering the ability to abstract, to generalize and to think scientifically (also see Bruner et al. [1966] on schooling effects and Greenfield [1972] and Geudy [1977] on literacy effects).

Kohlberg (1969, 1971) adopts a similar approach. His evolutionary scheme for the ethical category of the person would account for the occasion-bound, socially contextualized person concept of the Balinese, Gahuku-Gama, and Hindu by locating it as a stage in the evolution of an adequate moral orientation in which respect for the abstract person transcends social roles. Thus, for example, the Gahuku-Gama view that the moral value of life cannot be separated from the social status of a person, and the cogent view that in a "catastrophe" important people, people of status should be saved first, would be interpreted by Kohlberg as an early childlike form of understanding, an initial step on the ladder ascending to the more mature recognition of universal respect for the value of life *per se*. For Kohlberg, movement through the stages of his evolutionary scheme is ultimately explained by reference to the development of certain cognitive processing skills, e.g., the ability to differentiate, take the perspective of another, and generalize.

2. *Deficit 2: Intellectual motivation.* Levy's (1973:269-270) work illustrates the evolutionary emphasis on intellectual motivation instead of cognitive skill. Levy interprets concrete thinking as an adaptation to life in a "cultural cocoon." Tahitian villagers, he argues, are deeply "embedded" in their own mundane daily contexts. They are not motivated to reflect upon the alternative cultural practices that surround them (e.g., the Chinese) nor do they have any need to conceptually locate their own customs in a more general comparative framework. Consequently, much of Tahitian village behavior "having to do with

personal and social description" is marked by an emphasis on "contexts and cases" (262) and is "oriented to richness of detail . . ." (268). Levy speculates that such contextual embeddedness is "not conducive to science [and abstraction]" (269-270).

3. *Deficit 3: Pertinent information.* Horton's (1967) evolutionary interpretation explains concrete thinking by reference to informational limitations. Context-embeddedness, he argues, is primarily a cognitive concomitant of living in a "closed intellectual predicament", one too limited in opportunities to become aware of alternative visions of reality. Informational opportunities wax with the development of external trade, literacy, and urbanization, and thus these three conditions, Horton argues, are conducive to the development of abstract modes of thought. Also see Super et al. (1977) for a discussion of the informational conditions favoring abstract thought. They conclude that cultures that are "materially simple will rarely require [abstract] categorical organization . . ."

4. *Deficit 4: Linguistic tools.* It is occasionally suggested that concrete thinkers are speakers of impoverished languages, viz. languages lacking *general terms* as a symbolic resource (e.g., Jespersen 1934). Thus, e.g., in Tasmanian each variety of gum-tree and wattle-tree has a name but there is no equivalent for the expression "a tree", while in Bororo (the classic illustration) each parrot has its special name but the general lexical entry "parrot" is absent. Deficient in their symbolic resources, lacking general terms, speakers of such languages are said to be prone to overlook the likenesses between things; hence the failure to abstract.

#### THE UNIVERSALIST ACCOUNT

Evolutionary theorists, as we have just seen, argue that some people's are distinctively concrete in their thinking; this distinctive mode of thought is explained by reference to deficits in cognitive processing skills, intellectual motivation, pertinent information, or requisite tools. Universalists, in contrast, are skeptical of the claim that some people's are concrete thinkers, others abstract thinkers. From the perspective of the universalist, *attributions of differential concreteness* (or abstractness) by one people about another are illusory and amount to little more than an indication that the category system of the observer fails to align with the category system of the people observed.

There are three claims implicit in the universalist interpretation of concrete and/or abstract thinking. First, it is argued that apparent evidence of concrete vs. abstract thinking is *equally* present in all cultures (concrete vs. abstract thinking is not a *variable* that can be used to distinguish one culture from another). Secondly, it is argued, the attribution of concreteness or abstractness to other people's thinking is the inevitable result of the confrontation between uncalibrated conceptual systems. More specifically, the universalist argues, we describe

other people's thinking as concrete when they overlook likenesses or truths that we emphasize; we describe their thinking as abstract where they emphasize likenesses or truths that we overlook. Finally, it is argued, since no one conceptual system can take note of, or encode, all possible likenesses, or record all possible truths, where conceptual systems clash there will always be areas of both apparent concreteness and apparent abstractness. The works of Kroeber (1969) and Frake (1962) illustrate the universalist interpretation.

Frake's (1962) universalist argument is advanced against the evolutionary view of Jespersen (1934) that the mind of the "primitive" is concrete (overlook's likenesses) in its classification of flora and fauna (remember those "parrots"! Ironically, Kroeber's (1969) universalist argument is advanced against the opposite evolutionary view (Morgan 1871) that the mind of the "primitive" is excessively abstract (overlook's differences) in its classification of kinsmen (e.g., a "father-in-law" and a "grandfather" are similarly labeled in the Dakota language).

It would be a mistake to conclude from this irony that primitive technological systems are concrete when it comes to plants and animals yet abstract for kinsmen. Rather, the main point of the universalist interpretation is that the contrast between concrete and abstract systems of classification is an *illusion* that:

. . . has its origin in the point of view of investigators, who, on approaching foreign languages, have been impressed with their failure to discriminate certain relationships (e.g., father-in-law and grandfather) between which the languages of civilized Europe distinguish, and who, in the enthusiasm of formulating general [evolutionary] theories from such facts, have forgotten that their own languages are filled with entirely analogous groupings or classifications which custom has made so familiar and natural that they are not felt as such (e.g., overlooking the difference between cousins older and younger than oneself and denoting them both with the same term). (Kroeber 1969:77)

Frake (1962:75) makes a similar point. He remarks that there is "no necessary reason" that other people should heed those particular attributes which, for the English-speaker, make equivalent all the diverse individual organisms he labels "parrots" [see Findley 1979 for an example of the way attribute selection can radically influence which organisms get categorized together]. As Frake notes, any comparison of undesignated category systems will reveal cases where the other's thought seems quite concrete (they overlook likenesses that we emphasize) as well as cases where their thought seems quite abstract (they emphasize likenesses that we overlook).

To this point we have described the "logic" of universalist, evolutionary and relativist understandings of other people's understandings, and we have characterized the evolutionary and universalist interpretations of concrete, context-dependent, occasion-bound

thinking. We now focus our attention on one specific example of concrete thinking, that is, occasion-bound *social* thinking, more particularly, the concept of the context-dependent person. In presenting the results of a cross-cultural study of person description in India and the United States, we display our reasons for rejecting the evolutionary and universalist interpretations of the Hindu, Balinese, and Chakrabarti-Gunn context-dependent person concept. Finally, we construct an alternative, relativist interpretation which argues that the context-dependent concept of the person is one aspect of a broader socio-centric "organic" (or holistic) conception of the relationship of the individual to society. It is a feature of holistic thinking that "units" (organs, body parts, groups, individuals, etc.) are believed to be necessarily altered by the *relations* into which they enter (Phillips 1976). We argue that concrete thinking (as a general phenomenon) is a by-product of the commitment to a holistic world view, and we discuss the implications of the socio-centric organic conception of the individual-social relationship for the developing ego's view of its "self".

#### *Contexts and cases: a study of person description in India and the United States*

It is by reference to "contexts and cases" that Oriyas in the old town of Bhubaneswar (Orissa, India) describe the personalities of their friends, neighbors, and workmates. These personal accounts of Oriyas are concrete and relational. They tell you what someone has done; behavioral instances are often mentioned. They tell you where it was done. They tell you to whom or with whom it was done. The descriptive attention of Oriyas is directed towards the behavioral context in which particular behavioral instances occurred, e.g., "whoever becomes his friend, he remembers him forever, and will always help him out of his troubles" (Jaha sange thare sanga huichanti, tanku sabudina pain mane rakthihanti o tankara jati kichhi subidha hue, tanku dabaku esta karanti), "has no cultivatable land, but likes to cultivate the land of others" (Caso jani nahi, ahahe para jani casa karibaku bhala paniti), "when a quarrel arises, cannot resist the temptation of saying a word" (Gandogolotae hele pade nakchi rahi paranti mabi), "will talk right in the face of even a British Governor" (ham saheb hele madhaya muhe muhe jabab diyanti), "comes forward whenever there is an occasion to address a public meeting" (Sobha samitire kalibaku agun), "behaves properly with guests but feels sorry if money is spent on them" (Bandhu handhaha asile bhala hyabaha dekhanti, kintu tanku paisa khareo hele dukha koranti).

This concrete-relational way of thinking about other persons differs from the abstract style of our American informants. Americans tell you what is true of a person's behavior (e.g., he's friendly, arrogant, and intelligent) while tending to overlook behavioral context. Below we discuss the results of a comparison of Oriya and American personality

descriptions. As we shall see, the striking tendency of Oriyas to be more concrete and relational than Americans does not readily lend itself to evolutionary interpretation in terms of either (a) relative amounts of formal schooling; (b) relative degrees of literacy; (c) relative socio-economic status; (d) the presence or absence of abstract terms in one's language; (e) the absence of skills of abstraction among Oriyas; or (f) relative awareness of alternative behavioral contexts or variations in behavior.

The concrete-relational style of Oriya social thought seems unrelated to variations in cognitive skill, intellectual motivation, available information, and linguistic resources. By elimination, we are led to consider the way a culture's world view and master metaphors *per se* influence the relationship between what one thinks about and how one thinks. We consider differences in Indian and American conceptualizations of the relationship of the individual and society with special reference to the socio-centric organic vs. egocentric reductionist view of "man-in-society".

#### METHODOLOGY

**1. Informants.** The 17 informants in the American sample came from three separate groups: (1) counselling psychologists (3 women, 2 men); (2) a college fraternity (6 men), and (3) nursery school teachers (6 women). In each group they had known each other for at least one year. Their ages ranged from 19 to 47, and they all had received or were about to complete a college education. They all lived in or around Chicago, Illinois. Socio-economically they were predominantly middle-class.

The 70 Indian informants resided in the old town... of Bhubaneswar, Orissa. They were selected on the basis of caste criteria as part of a general enquiry into household composition and caste interaction patterns. Thus, the full range of the local caste hierarchy was represented. With two exceptions the Oriyas were all males and spanned a wider age range (18-70) than the Americans. Educational variability among them was also greater, ranging from no formal education to the attainment of the M.A. degree. Seventeen informants had no education at all. Eighteen informants were illiterate.

Caste, formal schooling, and literacy are not orthogonal in the Indian sample. Informants from the lower castes tend to be less educated and illiterate, although there are a number of informants from the upper castes who are literate but relatively uneducated. The confounding of caste, literacy, and schooling in the sample is less worrisome than it might at first appear. The cultural differences in concrete-relational thinking, to be reported below, are stable across the entire Indian sample and do not vary by caste, education, or literacy. Uneducated, illiterate untouchables and highly educated, literate Brahmins differ from Americans in the same way and do not significantly differ from each other.

2. *The task.* Informants in both populations responded to the task of describing a close acquaintance. However, in the Indian group each informant described up to three friends, neighbors, or workmates, whereas in the American group each described the other four or five members of his/her group. There were also slight differences in the instructions and format of the descriptive task between the two cultures, an inevitable consequence of the fact that they had originally been associated with independent studies. Indian informants were presented with the instructions: "Thinker *critra*, prakriti, o *dyachara* bisyare male *halahabare kabanu*" (Tell me in depth about so-and-so's character, nature [personality] and behavior), whereas Americans were asked: "How would you characterize so-and-so's personality?" Indians could respond in as many or few ways as they chose (they averaged between seven and eight descriptive phrases), whereas Americans were asked to provide 20 descriptive sentences or phrases. Finally, Indians responded orally while Americans wrote out their description.

Because these procedural differences could have interacted with the cultural difference observed on the various dependent variables (see results section), the following "ex-post-facto" study was done with a sample of 10 Americans. Informants were divided into two groups and given one or the other of the two instructions mentioned above. In each of these groups some informants were permitted to make as many responses as they wished, the others told to give 20 responses. All responses were given orally. While the different instructions had a slight, statistically nonsignificant effect on the tendency of informants to give concrete or abstract descriptions, this effect was nominal in comparison with that associated with cultural differences, as reported in the results section.

3. *The coding of descriptions.* To facilitate coding, all descriptions were broken down into constituent sentences. Where a sentence was compound or complex, it was further broken down into units, each of which contained no more than one subject-predicate-object sequence. These units were subsequently referred to as "descriptive phrases." Each descriptive phrase was typed on a 3 x 5 card. In this fashion a total of 3,451 descriptive phrases for both cultures was obtained.

A coding system was developed to enable judges to decide on the presence or absence of a number of features related to concrete thinking, in particular (a) descriptive reference to abstract traits; (b) descriptive reference to concrete action; (c) descriptive incorporation of contextual qualifications.

An abstract trait reference (abbreviated "7") was operationally defined as any attribute that answered the question "What kind of person is the rater?" The judgment was made independently of the presence or absence of contextual qualifications in the descriptive phrase. Thus "she is stubborn" and "she is stubborn about family matters" would

both be coded "7", although the final coding for the two phrases would differ in the specification of additional contextual qualifiers.

An action reference ("A") answered the question "Is this something the rater does?" This judgment also was made independently of the presence or absence of contextual qualifiers. Thus, "she uses dirty language" and "she uses dirty language when her friends give her advice about family matters" would both be coded "A," though they differ in the specification of additional contextual qualifiers.

Pure emotive-evaluative terms ("7E") such as "he is a good man" were not considered traits ("7") in our final analysis. One reason for drawing the distinction was the reference to (moral) "character" (*critra*) in the Oriya instructions. This tended to elicit a ritualized initial response from most informants. They would first say "he is a good man" or "he is not a good man" and then go on with their description. "7E" phrases in both the American and Oriya descriptions were dropped from the analysis discussed below. The total number of descriptive phrases actually analyzed numbered 3,209 (1,524 Oriya, 1,685 American).

Contextual qualifications were coded under the following categories:

*Personal Reference:* (a) reference to a specific individual, often denoted by a proper or common noun (e.g., "he gets angry with his father"), coded "P1"; (b) reference to a specific group of others (e.g., "he makes fun of his family") coded "P2"; (c) reference to people or others in general (e.g., "he is honest with others") coded "P3"; (d) reference to the person described himself (e.g., he gets angry with himself") coded "SR"; (e) reference to the rater (e.g., "he gets angry with me") coded "RR".

*Qualification:* (a) temporal: statement of when or how frequently the attribute occurs (e.g., "last year he did favors frequently"); coded "time"; (b) locative: statement of where or in what location the attribute occurs (e.g., "At school she puts on a frown") coded "place"; (c) general qualification: any statement of the conditions under which an attribute occurs or obtains (e.g., "He gets irritated if provoked") coded "qual"; (d) inferential qualification: statement of the conditions under which the rater makes the attribution (e.g., "judging from what others say, he is reserved") coded "inf"; (e) any phrase which states an action, trait, etc. without qualification is coded "No qualification" (Noqual).

A coding category called *Miscellaneous Types* allowed us to make more refined judgments about the presence or absence of references to traits or actions:

*Miscellaneous Types:* (a) a reference to what the rater likes (*L* or *LA*), (b) wants, seeks, or desires (*D* or *DA*), (c) experiences (*E* or *EA*), (d) feels (*F* or *FA*), (e) is interested in (*I* or *IA*), (f) is capable of or able to do (*C* or *CA*), (g) values (*V* or *VA*), (h) a reference to what type of person the rater is (e.g., "he's a joker, a

both be coded "P", although the final coding for the two phrases would differ in the specification of additional contextual qualifiers.

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Pure emotive-evaluative terms ("TE") such as "he is a good man" were not considered traits ("T") in our final analysis. One reason for drawing the distinction was the reference to (moral) "character" (*caritra*) in the Oriya instructions. This tended to elicit a ritualized initial response from most informants. They would first say "he is a good man" or "he is not a good man" and then go on with their description. "TE" phrases in both the American and Oriya descriptions were dropped from the analysis discussed below. The total number of descriptive phrases actually analyzed numbered 3,209 (1,524 Oriya, 1,685 American).

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An abstract trait reference (abbreviated "T") was operationally defined as any attribute that answered the question "What kind of person is the ratee?" The judgment was made independently of the presence or absence of contextual qualifications in the descriptive phrase. Thus "she is stubborn" and "she is stubborn about family matters" would

friend," etc.) (R). (i) a reference to the *social role* the ratce fills (e.g., "he's a leader," "he's a teacher," etc.) (R social), or (j) a reference to the *physical characteristics* of the ratce (Phys).

The coding system provided explicit criteria, with positive examples, for the identification of all the preceding categories. Phrases which were refractory to any of the categories were coded "questionable" (?). Two illustrations of a descriptive "phrase" and its coding according to the above system follow:

- (a) "He jokes with his friends" (Coding: A, P2).  
 (b) "She is stubborn" (Coding: 7, Noqual).

Several composite categories consisting of combinations of those listed above were also defined. These categories can be arranged along two dimensions of abstractness - concreteness, which, following Levy (1973), we shall label "Cases" and "Contexts". They are defined as follows:

**Cases:** The contrast between trait-type references ("7" or "R" or "Rsocial") (e.g., "he is a leader"), on the one hand, and action references ("A" or "LA" or "DA") (e.g., "he lends people money"), on the other hand.

**Contexts:** The contrast between context-free references ("No-qual") (e.g., "he is verbally abusive"), on the one hand, and context-dependent references ("P1" or "P2" or "P" or "time" or "place") (e.g., "he is verbally abusive to his father-in-law whenever they meet at his home"), on the other hand.

4. *Reliability and the determination of consensual codings.* Four judges, all graduate students, were trained to use the coding system. At least two judges independently coded all 3,451 phrases comprising the basic data. In a majority of cases three or all four of the judges coded the phrase.

Judges were originally asked to provide their first, second, third, etc. alternative codings of a phrase in cases where there was some ambiguity about the correct coding. Only the first coding of each judge was used in our study. If anything, this reduced intercoder agreement (reliability) from what it would have been if the "closest" codings of a phrase among all of the two, three, or four judges' several alternatives had been used.

For the final data analysis it was necessary to arrive at a single, common coding for each phrase. Two alternative procedures suggested themselves at this point: (1) judges might have discussed the discrepancies among their independent codings for each phrase and achieved a consensus or (2) a mechanical procedure could be used to derive a "consensual coding" from among the two to four alternatives for each phrase. The latter procedure was chosen for two reasons. First, time considerations advised against the laborious process of having judges reconcile their differences for each of the 3,451 phrases. Secondly, a

mechanical procedure ensured that exactly the same impartial procedure would be applied to each set of alternative codings for a phrase. Otherwise, consensual codings would have been based upon the subjective decisions of different combinations of judges.

A computer program was devised to consider the alternative codings for a particular phrase and include in the final, consensual coding any category (i.e., trait, action, personal reference, etc.) which occurred in 2 out of 2 independent codings, 2 out of 3, 3 out of 3, 3 out of 4, 4 out of 4 (thus, e.g., excluding cases where the category occurred in only 2 out of 4 codings). To illustrate, suppose four judges' codings in a particular item were as follows: (1) 7, P3, time, qual; (2) 7, P1, qual; (3) R, P3, qual; and (4) 7, qual. The consensual coding here, on the basis of the above criterion, would be "7, qual".

Out of a total of 3,451 phrases, this procedure achieved a consensual coding for 3,290 phrases or 95% of the corpus. This in itself suggests a relatively high level of interjudge agreement. Interjudge reliability was operationalized more precisely, however, by determining the percentage out of the total number of instances of all categories among the alternative codings of a phrase which were represented in the consensual coding. To illustrate, in the above example the two categories comprising the consensual coding - "7" and "qual" - occur seven times among the various alternative codings. Since the total number of instances of all categories among the alternatives is 12, it follows that 7/12, or approximately 58%, of the alternative codings are represented in the consensual coding. In brief, this particular reliability index estimated the proportion of variance among the alternative codings which was "common" or consensual.

Averaging over the interjudge reliability estimates for the total of 3,290 phrases for which consensual codings were obtained, the mean estimate was found to be 77%. This level of agreement seems both satisfactory and surprising, given the difficulty the judges reported in applying the coding system.

5. *Data analysis.* With the consensual codings of phrases available, it was possible to compare the frequency and proportion of occurrence of any category between the two cultures or among caste, hierarchy, or educational groups within India. This constituted the first step of the data analysis.

Chi-square tests were performed to test the significance of the difference in frequencies observed for each comparison from the expected frequency. The major results are reported in the following section.

The second step of the data analysis examined the relationship between the two composite categories representing the "cases" and "contexts" dimensions of abstraction discussed above. Each dimension was dichotomized. The "cases" dimension was scored 1 or 0 depending upon whether a particular phrase contained a trait, type, or social role attribution (7, R, Rsocial) or any of the action attributions

included under the composite category (*A*, *LA*, *DA*) (see the section on the coding system above). The "contexts" dimension was scored 1 if the phrase contained any instance of the category *P*<sub>1</sub>, *P*<sub>2</sub>, *P*<sub>3</sub>, time, place, and 0 if it contained no qualification (i.e., was coded NoQual).

## RESULTS

1. *Contexts*. Oriyas are more likely to say "she brings cakes to my family on festival days". Americans are more likely to say "she is friendly". Contextual qualifications having to do with personal reference ("P<sub>1</sub>", "P<sub>2</sub>", "P<sub>3</sub>", "time", "place") each occur significantly more often in Oriya descriptions of personality ( $p < .001$  for all five variables). American descriptions are noteworthy for the frequency of descriptions that are entirely unqualified by context ("Noqual") ( $p < .001$ ). There are two exceptions. Americans use more self-referential qualifiers ("SK") (e.g., "she is beginning to accept herself"; "he is hard on himself") than Oriyas ( $p < .001$ ). Americans also use more inferential qualifiers ("inf") (e.g., "judging from what others say, he is very reserved") ( $p < .001$ ). Earlier we discussed a composite variable entitled "Contexts" (*P*<sub>1</sub>, *P*<sub>2</sub>, *P*<sub>3</sub>, time, place, vs. Noqual). The ratio of context-free to context-dependent phrases is 3 to 1 in the American descriptions and 1 to 1 in the Oriya descriptions.

2. *Cases*. Oriyas tell you what someone has done, e.g., he shouts curses at his neighbors. The emphasis is upon behavioral occurrences or "cases". Americans tell you what is true of what someone has done, e.g., he is aggressive and hostile. Americans describe personality by means of trait ("T") (e.g., "friendly") and type ("R") (e.g., "a friend") concepts ( $p < .001$ ). Oriyas describe personality by reference to actions ("A", "LA", "DA") ( $p < .01$  for all three variables). The only time Americans are more likely than Oriyas to mention what someone does is when they describe a person's capabilities ("CA";  $p = < .05$ ) or interests ("IA";  $p = < .01$ ).

Earlier we discussed a composite variable entitled "Cases" (*A*, *LA*, *DA*, vs. *T*, *R*, *RSocial*). The ratio of abstractions to actions is 3 to 1 in the American descriptions but only 1 to 1.8 in the Oriya descriptions.

3. *Contexts and cases*. Case reference and context reference are not entirely independent descriptive acts, although their associational relationship, while statistically significant ( $p = < .001$ ), is only weak to modest ( $\Phi = .30$  for the Oriyas and .18 for the Americans). The relationship can be summarized as follows: There is a greater tendency to contextualize descriptions that make reference to a behavioral case. One is more likely to contextualize "he curses" [his mother-in-law] than "he is aggressive" [to his mother-in-law]. "He is aggressive" is more likely to stand alone. We emphasize again that the positive association between cases and contexts is weak to modest.

## DISCUSSION

Oriyas are more concrete than Americans in their descriptions of personality. 80% of Oriya descriptions are either contextually qualified (*P*<sub>1</sub>, *P*<sub>2</sub>, *P*<sub>3</sub>, time, place) or make reference to a behavioral instance (*A*, *LA*, *DA*) (in contrast to 56% for the Americans). 46% of American descriptions are both context-free (Noqual) and abstract (*T*, *R*, *RSocial*) (in contrast to 20% for the Oriyas). This result compares favorably with the findings of Fiske and Cox (n.d.). When American informants were asked to describe someone "so that someone else would know what it's like to be around this person," 40% of the items were abstract traits. Trait attributions were twice as frequent as references to behavioral patterns.

How is this cross-cultural difference in the thinking of Americans and Oriyas to be explained? We believe that each of the following plausible evolutionary hypotheses is *not* supported by the evidence.

1. *Hypothesis 1*: The Oriyas have less formal schooling than the Americans. Therefore, they are more concrete.

Formal schooling is often viewed by evolutionary theorists as a condition for the development of skills of abstraction (e.g., Bruner et al. 1966; Luria 1976). Considered as an aggregate, the Oriyas are less educated than the Americans. 24% of the Oriya descriptive phrases came from informants who had never been to school. 65% came from informants with less than three years of schooling. Nevertheless, the relative concreteness of the Oriya personality descriptions is not related to this difference in education. Table 6.1 shows that the descriptive phrases elicited from Oriyas with an educational level comparable to the Americans (beyond high school) are more concrete than the American descriptive phrases. In the Oriyan sample, concreteness does not significantly vary across educational levels for either "cases" ( $p = n.s.$ ) or "contexts" ( $p = n.s.$ ). Concrete thinking in the personality domain transcends variations in formal schooling experience. See Table 6.2.

2. *Hypothesis 2*: The literacy level of the Oriyas is less than the Americans'. Therefore, they are more concrete.

Literacy is often cited by evolutionary theorists as a condition for the development of skills of abstraction (e.g., Greenfield 1972; Luria 1976; Goodly 1977). The overall literacy level of the Oriyas is certainly less than the Americans. 25% of the Oriya descriptive phrases were elicited from entirely illiterate informants. Nevertheless, this relative difference in literacy levels does not explain the relative concreteness of Oriya descriptions of personality. Literate and illiterate Oriyas do not significantly differ in the relative concreteness of their personality descriptions for either "cases" ( $p = n.s.$ ) or "contexts" ( $p = n.s.$ ). Concrete thinking in the personality domain transcends variations in literacy in Orissa. Moreover, if the illiterate Oriya informants are elim-

ined from the sample, the difference in concrete thinking between Americans and literate Oriyas continues to be significant. See Table 6.1

3. *Hypothesis 3*: The Oriyas are of lower socio-economic status than the Americans. Therefore, they are more concrete.

Social and economic impoverishment is sometimes cited by evolutionary theorists as a condition retarding the development of skills of abstraction (e.g., Jafra 1976). Considered as an aggregate, the Oriya sample is probably of lower socio-economic status than the American. We say "probably" because the notion of relative socio-economic status is difficult to apply in a comparison of India and the United States. A high status Brahman can be relatively impoverished without serious threat to his/her caste position. Wealthy and powerful informants can come from middle-level or even relatively low-status castes. However, since 16% of the descriptive phrases came from Brahms, an untouchable or so-called "scheduled" caste, and since these informants were uniformly impoverished, it seems safe to conclude that by most standards the Oriyas, as an aggregate, are not as high status as the Americans.

Socio-economic status, an elusive cross-cultural yardstick, does not seem to explain the relative difference in concrete thinking in the personality domain between the two cultures. Within Orissa, concrete thinking does not vary by caste status for either "cases" ( $tp = 0.51$ ) or "contexts" ( $tp = 0.53$ ). A comparison of Brahman informants to American informants continues to reveal a cultural difference in concrete thinking: Brahman informants differ little from the overall Oriyan sample (see Table 6.1). In fact, the truly remarkable feature of Tables 6.1 and 6.2 is the stability of the evidence of concrete thinking across all the Oriyan sub-samples. In Orissa the concrete style of personality description transcends variations in education, hierarchy, and caste.

4. *Hypothesis 4*: Concrete-abstract thinking is a global cognitive process variable that distinguishes Oriyas from Americans. Oriyas lack the skill to abstract or generalize across cases.

5. *Hypothesis 5*: The Oriya language lacks general terms with which to refer to individual differences in behavior. Therefore Oriyas are deficient in linguistic resources for generating abstract descriptions of personality.

An investigation carried out by Shweder (1972; see Chapters 2 and 4 for a detailed discussion) makes it apparent that hypotheses 4 and 5 are not very helpful. The study concerned the influence of pre-existing conceptual schemes and taxonomic structures on judgment. A sub-set of the descriptive phrases elicited from our Oriya informants played a part in the study. The study revealed the ability of our Oriya informants to generate and intellectually manipulate abstract behavioral descriptions, and to recognize and utilize conceptual differences among them

Table 6.1. Comparison of the relative emphasis on contexts and cases in the descriptive phrases of all Americans, all Oriyas, and various sub-groups of Oriyas

	All Americans	Oriyas						
		All Oriyas	Beyond high school	No school	Literate	Illiterate	Brahmans	Bauris
Context-dependent ( $P_1, P_2, P_3$ , time, place)	28.3%	49.6%	48.3%	51.8%	48.4%	53.2%	50.6%	50.4%
Context-free (Noqual)	71.7%	50.4%	51.7%	48.2%	51.4%	46.8%	49.4%	49.6%
<i>n</i> =	1685	1505	215	35	1135	370	494	244
Actions (A, DA, LA)	25.4%	64.8%	58.8%	66.7%	64.6%	65.5%	66.1%	70.1%
Abstractions (T, R, RSocial)	74.6%	35.2%	41.2%	33.3%	35.4%	34.5%	33.9%	29.9%
<i>n</i> =	1333	1194	117	282	901	293	392	201



volume lexicon of the Oriya language, 1931-1940, should dissuade anyone who believes our Oriya informants speak a language that is lacking in abstract personality trait and type concepts.)

Oriya informants have no difficulty recognizing and arranging things in terms of overarching conceptual likenesses. This was most clearly revealed by a second sorting task study. 81 personality trait and type concepts (see Figure 6.2) were selected to represent the 420 terms that had been generated in the first sorting task. They were written on cards and presented to 25 Brahman informants from the community whose concrete style of person description we have been discussing. (Except for one additional feature, the sorting task was identical to the one previously discussed. Informants were asked to place items together that "went together" in people. They were asked to label (or describe) the piles. They were also asked to indicate which items in each pile were exemplary instances of the concept suggested by the pile. After an initial sorting they were asked to construct abstract hierarchies or taxonomies by collapsing the initial piles into a small number of general categories. Again they were asked to label (or describe) the categories, etc. The hierarchies of all 25 informants can be found in Shweder (1972:Appendix 1).

A measure of association between all possible pairs of 81 terms was calculated on the basis of the sorting task data. The particular measure has been described by Burton (1964:81-84). It is a normal variate score which is sensitive to three indices of "proximity" between a pair of terms. The primary index of "proximity" is the number of times two terms are placed together in the same pile over a sample of informants. This simple frequency count is adjusted to the number of terms in the pile in question (the larger the pile, the less proximate the two terms) and the total number of piles made by the particular informant (the fewer the piles, the less proximate the two terms). The final measure of association is a Z score. It was calculated using each level in the hierarchy of each informant as if it were the sorting task of a different informant. The measure was thus based on 71 partitionings of the 81 terms into piles. Subsequent analysis revealed that a simple frequency count of the number of times two items appear together in a pile over each of the hierarchical levels of each of the informants correlates .98 (Pearson  $r$ ) with the Z score used in our analysis.

The matrix of association among all possible pairs of 81 terms generated from the second sorting task was scaled in two-dimensional space using the multidimensional scaling program (MDS-CAL) devised by Donald C. Ohwiler. A two-dimensional spatial representation of the associational relationships among the 81 terms is shown in Figure 6.2.

The most relevant feature of the scaling solution for our present discussion is that it demonstrates that our Oriya informants have consistently classified the terms on the basis of two independent underlying conceptual likenesses that they have abstracted from the 81 terms. The

vertical axis in Figure 6.2 is interpretable as a "dominance vs. subordination" (or "power") dimension. The horizontal axis is interpretable as a "social desirability" dimension. In its abstractness, generality, and dimensional content the Oriya scaling solution in Figure 6.2 is comparable to the conceptual organization of the personality domain discovered in America (see, e.g., Leary and Coffey 1955; Lorr and McNair 1963, 1965; also see White 1980 on the possible universality of the scaling solution in Figure 6.2). Figure 6.2 suggests that the concreteness displayed by our Oriya informants when they freely describe personality or answer a request for information about someone's character, personality (nature), and behavior is *not* an indication of a deficit in the cognitive skills of abstraction and generalization. Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5 must be rejected.

**6. Hypothesis 6:** Oriyas live in a "closed" intellectual environment in which they never have to confront alternative customs, behavioral styles, or viewpoints. However, abstract thinking (the search for likenesses between diverse phenomenal presupposes that one has access to information about variant phenomena and different perspectives. Oriyas, lacking such information, are disinclined to abstract or generalize across cases.

Hypothesis 6 can be construed at a global level or at a level that is specific to the way Oriyas freely describe personality. At a global level it might be argued that Oriyas are so culturally insulated that they ought to display concrete thinking in all domains. We have already discussed the evidence that has led us to reject the notion that Oriyas lack the ability to abstract (see Hypothesis 4). There are also a number of features of life in the old town of Bhubaneswar and India in general that make it difficult to even seriously entertain the hypothesis that Oriyas live in a "closed" informational environment.

There are 24 Oriya castes (including five major Brahman sub-castes) represented in the residential wards and quarters of the old town of Bhubaneswar. There is considerable consensus concerning the relative status position of these castes, a judgment that takes into account the relative "purity" of the customs and behavior of a caste community. The concept of a caste hierarchically pre-supposes (a) an awareness of the diverse life styles of interdependent communities (e.g., do they eat meat, do they let their widows remarry, do they cut their own hair, wash their own clothes, etc.); (b) the ability to evaluate and rank caste communities in terms of the common yardstick of "purity" (see, e.g., Dumont 1970). India is a land where diversity has always been accounted for by means of the sophisticated device of explicit hierarchical interdependence. Oriyas, evolutionists to the core, encourage diversity and rank it.

Caste disputes over relative status are a frequent occurrence in Orissa. Whenever they occur, one has the opportunity to observe social cognition in action over matters of importance to the participants. What

wash the ritual clothing that B performers wear in one particular religious ceremony on one particular day. It is reasoned that ritual cloth is not polluted even if worn by a B. The B's are pleased. At least the A's wash their clothing on some occasion. They never wash the C's clothes (as the C's are seen to be informed, and redundantly reminded). The A's are pleased. They can continue marrying their daughters at no cost to their community's status. And the C's? They go back to cleaning the latrines in the B ward. The absence of diversity and the nonrecognition of alternative perspectives is just an Indian problem.

However, hypothesis 6 might be construed narrowly. It might be argued that Americans are more likely to experience their intimates in diverse behavioral settings, and thus are more likely to abstract out a common feature of their behavior for personality diagnosis. We can only suggest that the situation with our Oriya and American informants may be the reverse of that supposed by hypothesis 6. Ethnographic observation suggests that our Oriya informants experience their intimates in a relatively small and standard set of contexts, e.g., at work, in family affairs, in ritual contexts, at public meetings, etc. They also have much second-hand knowledge via gossip and rumor. However, the number of settings in which teachers in a nursery school, college students in a fraternity and psychologists in a counseling center experience one another may be even less. Hypothesis 6 does not seem relevant to the cultural differences we have discovered in the concrete vs. abstract way Oriyas vs. Americans describe individual differences.

We seem to be left in an explanatory void. In their free descriptions of personality Oriyas are more concrete than Americans. They describe their intimates by reference to behavioral instances (causes) and they qualify their descriptions by reference to contexts. These differences hold up even when one is comparing Americans to literate Oriyas, educated Oriyas, and high caste Oriyas. Within the Oriya community, the concrete style of describing individual differences is stable across castes and across educational and literacy levels. The difference cannot be explained in terms of the "intellectual predicament" of the Oriyas. They are aware of alternative behavioral styles. It is not a reflection of a deficiency in skills of abstraction. In sorting tasks, Oriyas display a facile ability to think abstractly. The difference has little to do with education, literacy, socio-economic status or language. It seems to be a cultural phenomenon, and it is perhaps as a cultural phenomenon that we should try to understand it.

*A relativist theory of the context-dependent self: holism and its cognitive consequences*

As we have seen, Oriyas are less prone than Americans to describe people they know in abstract, context-free terms. Instead of saying so-and-so is "principled" they tend to say "he does not disclose secrets".

one sees is a keen sensitivity to behavioral variations and to the way those behavioral variations will be judged from a third person perspective, e.g., in the eyes of a particular outside community or in the eyes of the general community.

A characteristic pattern of Oriyan social thought surfaces in disputes over the relative status of caste communities. Consider a typical instance. Three untouchable castes are involved in a dispute over the relative status of the two lowest. The issue at stake is simply, "who is the lowest of the low?" In order of relative "purity" the cast of castes includes community A (they are washerman), community B (they are agricultural laborers), and community C (they are scavengers, basketmakers, and drummers). A's wash other people's dirty linen. The "unclean" nature of this work guarantees their untouchable status. Nevertheless, A's are unquestionably higher in rank than either of the other two communities; their relative superiority is asserted and in part constituted by their refusal to wash B or C clothing. B's and C's are too impure even for the A's. The A's are the highest of the untouchable castes. Their superiority was never assailed in the dispute that arose between the B's and C's. In fact, the competitive status claims of the B's and C's could only be resolved because both communities accepted unquestionably the A's perspective on matters of "purity". At the time the dispute surfaced, the C's were generally thought to be the most "polluted" of all the castes. Their caste position was asserted and in part constituted by their traditional activity of cleaning the latrines (and thus handling excrement) in the wards of other castes. But then events got underway.

(a) The status ploy by the C's. They refuse to clean the latrines in the B ward, thus, symbolically asserting their superiority. The move is effective. The B's have a serious dilemma. Either the B's must let their ward latrines accumulate excrement, etc., thereby polluting their neighborhoods, associating themselves with filth, confirming their untouchable status, and aggravating an already unpleasant living condition, or else they must clean their own latrines, thereby sacrificing the one taboo or restraint they have to their credit that distinguishes them from the C's in the eyes of outside communities. What to do?

(b) B-A status negotiations. B representatives approach representatives of the A community. They seek a trump card to use against their C's. In fact, they seek no less than to convince the A's to wash their clothes. "Impossible", assert the A's. "Your linen would pollute us and disgrace our community." The B's persist. They remind the A's that without the B's, A weddings could not take place. B's blow the conch shell at A weddings; they threaten to withdraw. The ploy is effective. Either the A's must cease marrying their children (that's no option) or else they must blow the conch shell themselves or find someone else to do it (Would it really be a wedding?).

(c) B-A compromise. A compromise is struck. The A's will wash B clothing. Not all B clothing. Not even most B clothing. They will

Instead of saying so-and-so is "selfish" they tend to say "he is hesitant to give away money to his family". While this difference in person perception is only a "tendency" (e.g., 46% abstract, context-free descriptions from Americans, 20% from Oryas), it is a pervasive tendency, stable across Orya sub-samples, a tendency significant enough to reject a universalist interpretation of context-dependent thinking.

Our results also lend little support to an evolutionary interpretation. As noted earlier, Orya informants do not lack skills of generalization and abstraction. They are aware that the behavior of someone who "does not become partial while imparting justice" and "does not disclose secrets" can be described as "principled" (*intibadi*); they recognize that there are likens that link together such very different behavioral occurrences as imparting justice and keeping secrets. If asked to select from a corpus of concrete behaviors those that generally "go together" in people, Oryas, like Americans, will utilize conceptual likens to assist them in the task ("all those are principled behaviors"; see hypothesis 5 above; also Shweder 1972, 1975, 1977a, 1977b, 1980a, 1980b; D'Andrade 1965, 1973, 1974; Shweder & D'Andrade 1979, 1980). Similarly, our results suggest that the concrete mode of person perception of our Orya informants cannot be explained by reference to deficient information, motivation, or linguistic resources (see hypotheses 1-6 above). Why then are Oryas more prone than Americans to describe their intimates by reference to "cases and contexts"?

#### HOW TO CONSTRUCT A RELATIVIST INTERPRETATION OF CONCRETE THINKING

Relativists acknowledge that concrete, contextualized, occasion-bound thinking is unevenly distributed across human cultures. However, it is the position of the relativist that the prevalence of context-dependent thinking in some cultures tells us little about underlying deficits in cognitive processing skills, intellectual motivation, available information, or linguistic tools. The trick for the relativist is to acknowledge diversity while shunning the evolutionary notion of "cultural deficits". How can this be done?

1. *Distinguish ideational products from intellectual processes.* Why are Oryas more prone than Americans to describe their intimates by reference to "cases and contexts"? Relativists answer this question by drawing a sharp distinction between intellectual *process* and ideational *product*. The relativist hypothesizes that cultures differ less in their *basic* cognitive skills (e.g., generalization, abstraction, reversibility) than in the metaphors by which they live (Akoff & Johnson 1980), the world hypotheses (Pepper 1972) to which they subscribe, and the ideas underlying their social action. Thus, according to a relativist account, the Oryas, Hindus, and Chinku-Gama are perfectly competent information processors, not unskilled at differentiating, generalizing, and taking the perspective of others, etc. What really distin-

guishes them from us is that they place so little value on differentiating (e.g., person from role), generalizing (e.g., "treat outsiders like insiders"), or abstracting (e.g., the concept of "humanity"). The relativist is quick to point out, they show so little interest in such intellectual moves because Oryas, Hindus, and other such folk live by a metaphor and subscribe to a world-premise that directs their attention and passions to particular systems, relationally conceived and contextually appraised. Indeed, a central tenet of a relativist interpretation of context-dependent person perception is that *the metaphors by which people live and the world views to which they subscribe mediate the relationship between what one thinks about and how one thinks.*

2. *Holism: A mediating world premise.* Holism is a mode of thought elaborating the implications of the "part-whole" relationship: viz., (a) what's true of, or right for, the whole is not necessarily true of, or right for, any or all of the parts of the whole (e.g., "an arm can throw a football", and "an elbow is part of the arm" does not imply that "an elbow can throw a football"); (b) diverse parts of the whole are not necessarily alike in any crucial respects (e.g., while different "kinds of" canines, say terriers and spaniels, are alike in some characteristic ways, different "parts of" a body, say finger nails and red blood cells, or different "parts of" an automobile, say the axle and the fan belt, need not commune in any way whatsoever); (c) each part is defined by the particular relationships into which it enters within the specific whole of which it is a part (e.g., try defining a "tongue" or "trike" without functional, relational, or contextual references). For a holist, "unit" parts are necessarily altered by the relations into which they enter (Phillips 1976).

From a holistic perspective unit-parts (e.g., an elbow) change their essential properties when isolated from the unit-wholes (e.g., an arm) of which they are a part. Thus, the holist concludes, it is not possible to understand or appraise an entity in isolation, in the abstract. The holist is prone to seek contextual clarification before making a judgment; the holist is disinclined to examine or judge things *in vacuo*.

3. *The body: "A metaphor people live by".* All societies are confronted by the same small set of existential questions, and some societies even try to answer them. A minimal set includes: (a) the problem of "haves" vs. "have-nots". It is a fact of life that the things all people want are unevenly distributed within any society. Have-nots must be told in convincing terms why they have not. "Haves" must have confidence that their privileges are justifiable and legitimate; (b) the problem of *our* way of life vs. *their* way of life. Diversity of custom, value, belief, and practice is also a fact of life. Why should I live this way and not some other way? "There but for fortune goes you or goes I" is not a satisfying answer; (c) the problem of the relationship of nature to culture. Are we merely "marked apes", or better yet "rational leath-

Oriyan culture is not Zapotec. Indians do peer into one another's hearts and minds; Indians, unlike the Zapotecs, do have a concept of "autonomous individualism". But, and this is the main point, for an Indian to be an autonomous individual one must leave society. The autonomous individual is the holy man, the renouncer, the *sadhu*, the "drop out" (Dumont 1960, 1970). Yet even here the goal is not to find one's distinctive identity but rather to merge one's soul with the soul of others. When Indians peer into one another's hearts and minds they are more likely than most peoples to look for the ultimate universal, the ground of all things, God.

What makes Western culture special, then, is the concept "autonomous distinctive individual living-in-society". What makes Indian culture special is the concept "autonomous non-distinctive individual living-outside-society". When it comes to "man-in-society," Indian views are not unique (indeed, their views are prototypical and lucid expressions of a widespread mode of social thought), but they do diverge considerably from the "natural man" tradition of Western social thought. In America, man-in-society conceive of themselves free of the relationships of hierarchy and exchange that govern all social ties and are so central to theories of the self in Orissa.

The sociocentric conception of the individual-social relationship lends itself to an organic metaphor. Indeed in holistic sociocentric cultures like India the human body, conceived as an interdependent system, is frequently taken as a metaphor for society (and society, conceived as an organic whole, is sometimes taken as a metaphor for nature).

The human body is a pregnant metaphor. It has its ruler (the brain), its servants (the limbs), etc. Political affairs, interpersonal dyads, family organization are all easily conceived after a model of differentiated parts arranged in a hierarchy of functions in the service of the whole.

What we think follows from a holistic world view and sociocentric organic solution to the problem of the individual-social relationship are some of the features of the context-dependent, occasion-bound concept of the person: (a) no attempt to distinguish the individual from the status s/he occupies; (b) the view that obligations and rights are differentially apportioned by role, group etc.; (c) a disinclination to ascribe intrinsic moral worth to persons merely because they are persons. [To ask of a holistic: "Is killing wrong?" is like asking a morphologist or physiologist to assess the value of a body part or organ without knowledge of, or reference to, its function in the interdependent organic structure of this or that particular species.] Indeed, with their explicit cultural recognition and even deification of obligatory, particularistic interdependence, Oriyans would seem to be culturally primed to see context and social relationships as a necessary condition for behavior.

By contrast, in the West, as Dumont (1970) notes, each person is conceived of as "a particular incarnation of abstract humanity", a modal replica of general humanity. A kind of sacred personalized self is

erless bipeds", or still yet better "the children of god"; (d) the problem of the relationship of the individual to the group, to society, to the collectivity. There seem to be relatively few "solutions" to this last problem; the "sociocentric" solution subordinates individual interests to the good of the collectivity while in the "egocentric" solution society becomes the servant of the individual, i.e., society is imagined to have been created to serve the interests of some idealized autonomous, abstract individual existing free of society yet living in society.

Holistic cultures seem to embrace a sociocentric conception of the relationship of individual to society, a sociocentric conception with an organic twist. Some Indologists (see Dumont 1960, 1970:184-186; Marriott 1976), for example, have noted that the concept of an autonomous, bounded, abstract individual existing free of society yet living in society is uncharacteristic of Indian social thought. "Man-in-society", for Indians, is not an "autonomous, indivisible, bounded unit" (see Marriott 1976). Like most peoples, Indians do have a concept of "man-in-society" but "man-in-society" is not an autonomous individual. He is regulated by strict rules of interdependence that are context-specific and particularistic, rules governing exchanges of services, rules governing behavior to kinsmen, rules governing marriage, etc. (See our earlier discussion of negotiations over caste status; hypothesis 6 above.)

The idea that man-in-society is not an autonomous individual is not unique to India. Selby's (1974, 1975) discussion of Zapotec culture in Oaxaca, Mexico makes this apparent. Selby (1974:62-66, 1975) argues that the "folk explanatory model that puts responsibility for morality and care on the individual" is "deeply rooted in Western thought". It is "as old as Thucydides, who wrote 2,400 years ago and was rediscovered and glorified in the Renaissance and Reformation". Indeed, in the West, the fact that good works (e.g., scientific discoveries) are often the products of base motives (e.g., envy) is treated as a disturbing mathema, a glaring insult to our faith in the individual as the ultimate measure of all things. It is otherwise among the Zapotecs. Selby explicates the Zapotec expression "we see the face, but do not know what is in the heart" as follows: It is

not an expression of despair. They [Zapotecs] do not have to know what is in the heart, because it isn't defined as being very interesting and it shouldn't have anything to do with human relations.

With regard to perceptions of deviant behavior, Selby notes

[Zapotecs] do not, therefore, have to overcome their own prejudices about the character of people who go wrong. They know their own society and how it works, and they are aware of the sociological nature of deviance. They have no need to peer into people's hearts and minds . . . [my emphasis].

Selby presents case material indicating that even blatantly deviant acts (e.g., murder) do not elicit characterological attributions.

developed and the individual qua individual is seen as inviolate, a supreme value in and of itself. The "self" becomes an object of interest *per se*. Free to undertake projects of personal expression, personal narratives, autobiographies, diaries, mirrors, separate rooms, early separation from bed, body, and breast of mother, personal space — the autonomous individual imagines the incredible, that he lives within an inviolate protected region (the extended boundaries of the self) where he is "free to choose" (see Friedman & Friedman 1980 for the earliest articulation of this incredible belief), where what he does "is his own business".

More than that, the inviolate self views social relationships as a derivative matter, arising out of consent and contract between autonomous individuals. Society is viewed as mere "association" (see Diamond 1970). It, thus, hardly seems surprising that despite much evidence to the contrary (Hartshorne & May 1928; Newcomb 1929; Mischel 1968; D'Andrade 1974; Shweder 1975, 1979a; Nisbett 1980), our culture continues to promote the fiction that within the person one can find a stable core "character". Nor is it surprising that this abstract individual, "man-as-voluntary-agent", is protected by deeply entrenched moral and legal principles prescribing privacy and proscribing unwanted invasions of person, property, and other extensions of the self. Americans are culturally primed to search for abstract summaries of the autonomous individual behind the social role and social appearance.

4. *From concrete thinking in particular to concrete thinking in general.* We have argued that concrete, "cases and contexts" person perception is an expression of a holistic world premise and sociocentric organic conception of the relationship of the individual to society. But, what of concrete thinking in other domains? For example, what about the evidence on "functional complexes", i.e., the tendency for informants in some cultures to respond to requests about how things are alike by linking the things together in an action sequence or activity structure? (Consider one of Luria's (1976:56) informants. The informant is presented with four objects (hammer-saw-log-hatchet). He is asked: "...which of these things could you call by one word". He is told: "...one fellow picked three things — the hammer, saw, and hatchet — and said they were alike". The informant responds: "A saw, a hammer, and a hatchet all have to work together. But the log has to be there too... if you have to split something you need a hatchet".

To interpret this type of finding within a relativist framework one might speculate that from the point of view of a holistic thinker it makes no sense to ignore the functional interdependencies among objects and events. Indeed, Luria's illiterate, unschooled peasants repeatedly try, in vain, to explain to him that it is "stupid" to ignore the way objects and events fit together in action sequences (e.g., 1976:54, 77). One is reminded of Chick's (1968) Kpelle informant who insisted on grouping

objects into functional complexes while commenting "a wise man can do no other". Only when asked, "How would a fool group the objects" did he give the Westerner what he wanted, a linguistically-defined equivalence structure!

Is it farfetched to imagine that holism, the sociocentric conception of the individual-social relationship, and the organic metaphor have a generalized influence on cognition. Perhaps! But, one should not overlook the following fact about the cultural organization of knowledge: Although in our culture it is the "natural" sciences that have an elevated position, in many non-Western cultures (see Fortes 1959; Smith 1961; Durkheim & Mauss 1963; Horton 1968) much of the intellectual action is in the arena of *social* thought. For us it is the organization of knowledge in physics and chemistry that is adopted wholesale as the ideal for social understanding. More than a few social scientists are busy at work searching for a "periodic table" of social elements. Many more have been enamored of physical metaphors (forces, energy, mechanisms, etc.). In the West, the physical world has become the model of the social world. Why should not a reverse extension take place in other cultures, the social order as the model of nature. Metaphors, deliberately selected to guide our thinking, often have generalized effects on how we think.

#### PRIVACY AND THE SOCIALIZATION OF THE INVOLATE SELF

We have sketched the outline of a relativist interpretation of both "cases and contexts" person perception, in particular, and concrete thinking in general. The concept of the context-dependent person, we have argued, is one expression of a broader sociocentric organic view of the relationship of the individual to society which in turn is an aspect of the holistic world view adopted by many cultures. The holistic model, the sociocentric premise, and the organic metaphor focus one's attention on the context-dependent relationship of part to part and part to whole; the holist, convinced that objects and events are necessarily altered by the relations into which they enter, is theoretically primed to contextualize objects and events, and theoretically disinclined to appraise things in vacuo, in the abstract.

To the question "Does the Concept of the Person Vary Cross-Culturally?" our answer is obviously "yes"; we have tried to identify two major alternative conceptualizations of the individual-social relationship, viz. the "egocentric contractual" and the "sociocentric organic". It is crucial to recognize that neither of these conceptualizations of the relationship of the individual to society has the epistemological status of a scientific category. They are not inductive generalizations. They are not the discoveries of individual perception. Quite the contrary, the egocentric and sociocentric views of man are creations of the collective imagination. They are ideas, *premises* by which people guide their lives, and only to the extent a people lives by them do they have force. How do people live by their world views?

It is instructive to reflect, for example, on the socialization of autonomy in the West.

We find it tempting to argue that Western individualism has its origins in the institution of privacy — that privacy promotes a passion or need for autonomy, which, for the sake of our sense of personal integrity, requires privacy (see Trilling 1972:24). Socialization is territorialistic. The young are subject to all sorts of invasions, intrusions, and manipulations of their personhood, autonomy, and privacy. Where they go, when they sleep, what they eat, how they look, all the intimacies of the self are managed for them, typically without consent. Heteronomy is the universal starting point for socialization; it may or may not be the end point.

It is sobering to acknowledge that our sense of personal inviolability is a violatable social gift, the product of what *others* are willing to respect and protect us from, the product of the way we are handled and reacted to, the product of the rights and privileges we are granted by others in numerous "territories of the self" (Goffman 1971) (e.g., vis-à-vis eating, grooming, hair length, clothing style, when and where we sleep, who we associate with, personal possessions, etc.). Simmel (1968:482) notes that "the right to privacy asserts the sacredness of the person". And, where are these "assertions" redundantly (even if tacitly) reiterated? Well, the assertion is there in the respect shown by a parent for a child's "security blanket". It's there as well when an adult asks of a three-year-old "What do you want to eat for dinner?" and again in the knock on the door before entering the child's personal space, his private bedroom, another replica of the assertion.

The ego's view of its "self" is the product of the collective imagination. In the West, the messages implicit in many of our child handling practices may well socialize deep *intuitions* about the "indecency" of outside (external) intrusions, regulations, or invasions of our imagined inviolatable self. Practices cultivate intuitions, intuitions about what's decent, which then support such Western notions as "free to choose" (Friedman & Friedman 1980), "autonomy in decision-making", "sanctuary" and "my own business" (see the literature on privacy law, e.g., Bostwick 1976; Cicerly 1977).

Of course not all cultures socialize autonomy or redundantly confirm the right of the individual to projects of personal expression, to a body, mind, and room of his own. To members of socioethnic organic cultures the concept of the autonomous individual, free to choose and mind his own business, must feel alien, a bizarre idea cutting the self off from the interdependent whole, damning it to a life of isolation and loneliness (Kakar 1978:86). Linked to each other in an interdependent system, members of organic cultures take an active interest in one another's affairs, and feel at ease in regulating and being regulated. Indeed, others are the means to one's functioning and vice versa.

It is also sobering to reflect on the psychic costs, the existential penalties of our egocentrism, our autonomous individualism. There are

costs to having no larger framework within which to locate the self. Many in our culture lack a meaningful orientation to the past. We come from nowhere, the product of a random genetic accident. Many lack a meaningful orientation to the future. We are going nowhere — at best we view ourselves as "machines" that will one day run down. The social order we view as the product of our making — an "association" based on contract and individual consent. In our view, society is dependent on us. And what are our gods? Personal success and wealth; "the tangible evidences of financial success have come to symbolize . . . the whole expectancy of ego satisfaction" (Smith 1952:398). Cnt drift from any larger whole, the self has become the measure of all things, clutching to a faith that some "invisible hand" will by sleight of hand right things in the end.

Of course what we've just said about egocentrism and autonomy in the West could easily be rewritten in terms of psychic benefits and one should not forget that socioecentrism has severe costs as well. Perhaps the real point is that the costs and benefits of egocentrism and socioecentrism are not the same (*pace* universalism), nor are the benefits mostly on one side and the costs mostly on the other (*pace* evolutionism).

#### Conclusion

In 1929 Edward Sapir remarked that "the worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached". In this essay we have tried to show that different peoples not only adopt distinct world views, but that these world views have a decisive influence on cognitive functioning.

People around the world do not all think alike. Nor are the differences in thought that do exist necessarily to be explained by reference to differences or "deficits" in cognitive processing skills, intellectual motivation, available information, or linguistic resources. It is well known in cognitive science that what one thinks about can be decisive for how one thinks (e.g., Wason & Johnson-Laird, 1972). What's not yet fully appreciated is that the relationship between what one thinks about (e.g., other people) and how one thinks (e.g., "contexts and cases") may be mediated by the world premise to which one is committed (e.g., holism) and by the metaphors by which one lives (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

#### Note

Recipient of the 1982 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Sudo-Psychological Prize. Reprinted with the permission of Reidel Publishing Co. from A. J. Marsella and G. M. White, eds., *Cultural Conceptions of Mental Health and Therapy*, pp. 97-137. Copyright © 1982 by D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, Holland.

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