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## State of the Field: Human Sociality and our Expanding Circle

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### **Abstract**

The first part of this essay provides a brief summary of this journal's first editorial, which examined eight needed developments and eight critical contexts for global inquiry. The second part addresses our expanding circle of ethics, which starts with kin but has gradually increased to include tribes, states, nations, and even the world. It is our expanding circle of ethics that has led to a heightened awareness of equality, the product of a noble goal with origins in recent social justice movements. The aim of this essay is to assert that the field has a promising future by including both the local and the global, a position that reflects how our own moral sense has moved beyond kin relations to the entire human family.

### **Introduction**

One of the great pleasures of psychology is that it can reveal our deepest biases and beliefs, a useful trick for anyone interested in self-improvement. Consider the halo effect. It is a human curiosity how someone who is handsome or beautiful will be granted more latitude than someone who is average or ugly. We assume that attractive people are smarter, friendlier, more adept at a wider range of skills, and even occupy a loftier moral ground. We think these things of beautiful people not because they are true but because they tap into our own desire for approval and status. Perhaps most interesting about this bias is not that psychology can reveal its effects or prove that we like elegance, fitness, or beauty. It is interesting because, despite its obviousness, the fact goes almost unnoticed or unchecked. You can teach someone all about the halo effect and then help them try to counter it in everyday life, but it will invariably fail. The halo effect is not only invisible; it is an agonizingly deep aspect of our psychological makeup that can only be weakened through extensive education (Kahneman, 2011).

The modern denial of culture suffers from a similar slight, although for different reasons. Ours is a climate that resists the notion of a common or core set of values and beliefs, an elementary

form of sociality that might actually permeate a cluster of people in a specific geographic region. On the one hand, this makes sense because every person has different talents and traits. Any parent with more than one child knows that an instruction manual used for one is unlikely to work very well for the other. Even identical twins are known to be no more alike as senior citizens than any other randomly selected pair of people (Harris, 2006). On the other hand, anyone who has ever left their native land for even a brief jaunt into a foreign culture knows that some things really are different, even if they are unable to figure out why. This means that something has to bind people who are unlike us, and the most likely candidate for that is culture.

This essay attempts to upend the problem of why a tacit theory of sociology, even when acknowledged in secret, is sometimes reviled in public. It is my claim that a sociological theory of culture is debunked for two main reasons, each of which has a basis in otherwise sound ideas. This essay examines these two problems by first recapping our journal's inaugural editorial. That introduction outlined eight needed developments and eight critical contexts for global inquiry, all of which have been stunted because of two main reasons. The first of these is best understood through what is now known as our expanding circle, which has seen our radius of reciprocity go beyond kin to now include friends, colleagues, groups, tribes, states, nations, and even the world. The second is a fear of inequality, a predictable offshoot of societies that nurture the ethical doctrine of the expanding circle. Many well-intentioned scholars deny a sociological theory of culture because they worry it will descend into mere stereotype. There is little doubt that the conditions that set in motion an expanding circle are firmly entrenched in otherwise profound ethical goals. But taken to a logical end, they result in anxiety and fear about how best to work in a global context. In fact, my goal is to convince you of this point through simple but often overlooked theories of human sociality.

### **State of the Field**

The inaugural issue of this journal featured an introduction by its founding editor that outlined eight needed developments and eight critical contexts for global inquiry (Thatcher, 2010). The aim of these developments and contexts was to call for engagement and participation, an attempt to incite involvement from the larger global community. The call was meant to address a few outstanding concerns of the field and its implications for a global audience. At the root of these differences is a fundamental aspect of what makes different groups of people tick, a need to acknowledge such differences, and to then fold them within our best practices and research methods. The hope is for these recommendations to serve as a springboard for future work, in either agreement or conflict. Here are those eight developments and eight critical contexts.

The first needed development is to move from the local to the global. As Thatcher documents, the vast majority of intercultural research takes place within the perspective of equality matching and not communal sharing (2010). This is an important point because if a researcher is attempting to understand another culture, one that may or may not be individualistic in nature, then such a method is likely to be informed by her cultural context. That is, if a researcher hails from a culture that cultivates equality matching and she studies one that prefers communal sharing, then her methods and results are likely to reflect a local way of viewing the world. A researcher may think she is doing international or global research by virtue of having crossed an international border, but if her lens is primarily *X* then she will view *Y* as though it is or should

be X. Such practices may be sincere in an attempt to strive for a global framework but will suffer the consequences of having remained local.

The second development is moving beyond monocultural methods. Again, if a researcher assumes a framework based on equality matching as an ideal, then that is going to inform everything from the hypothesis to the kinds of questions asked, data collected, and even its analysis. The real problem, though, is that it affects one's philosophical worldview. In the jargon of research, this can mean anything from logical positivism to social construction. But in terms of the field's current status, it more often means neocolonialism, orientalism, and ethnocentrism, philosophies that depend on equality matching at the expense of communal sharing.

A third development is a willingness to act on a global framework by not reflexively invoking a method that emphasizes equality matching. Instead of assuming that all cultures want to be individualistic, or that they should be studied in this way, it is far more fruitful to think of cultures as equal but different. This very notion hits at the heart of the entire problem because it is based on the assumption that equality must be analogous to sameness. In terms of logic, this is known as a fallacy of equivocation because it confuses one thing for something else despite all evidence to the contrary. According to this line of reasoning, one should not compare an apple and an orange because the very act of comparison will elevate one over the other. While this can certainly happen, it can only take place if one is willing to slide down a dangerous slippery slope. Even though one is an apple and the other is an orange they are both, after all, just fruit. Similarly, the fourth needed development is moving from equality matching to multiple levels of analysis. One way to study culture is to systematize it, not because societies abide by a set of discrete physical laws but because of the utility of such an approach. It is crucial to not merely zoom in and out of a given culture to understand it at its many levels, but to also see how one part also affects other parts. This perspective can only take place if researchers extract themselves from the perspective of equality matching.

The fifth point is a call for basic quantitative literacy. The majority of scholars interested in this journal come from some kind of a humanities background. Despite the many advantages of learning about human nature through language, literature, literacy, and linguistics, these disciplines are not always quick to use a range of analytical tools. In fact, most research methods currently in use embrace only one end of the continuum. At the far end sits ethnography, which is a research method popularized by anthropologists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to help study foreign cultures. Its methods are not overtly systematic, requiring little more than a pen, paper, and a willingness to live among an indigenous population long enough to write a paper, thesis, or book. Hypotheses, research questions, pilot studies, formalized methodologies, data triangulation, and debriefing are not commonly part of ethnographic research.

This is entirely fine, of course, until scholars borrow these methods to study phenomena for which a fair amount is already known. Instead of using a more rigorous qualitative methodology, or even a quantitative one, scholars have typically borrowed anthropological methods without actually visiting a foreign culture. Ethnographic methods are only useful in new and novel situations, something that is hard to find these days. It is quite possible that a continuation of these methods prevail because there is so little quantitative literacy in the field and even less desire to self-correct.

The sixth needed development calls for humility, reflexivity, and flexibility. This might be good advice for many of us, but it certainly applies to researchers who believe that culture should be examined from one and only one perspective. Humility helps provide a realistic assessment of our place in the world, reflexivity the ability to act on it, and flexibility the skills to adapt as conditions change. This point cannot be understated because most intercultural conflict takes place somewhere along these three points. Flexibility is arguably the most important of the three because, in abundance, it can help weather problems of humility and reflexivity. Regardless of their relationship, the advice is not only good in life but is actually critical in terms of culture.

The seventh is a need for effective theory and practice. This is of such special importance that it is difficult to summarize in a single paragraph. Most readers of this journal are comfortable with and probably enjoy negotiating the complexities of theory, a pleasure not enjoyed by everyone. Theoretical inquiry takes place through abstraction, an ability to see how two or more parts might fit together within a larger sphere of knowledge. While there will always be a need for pure theorists, we also need people who can apply these ideas to practical situations. The difference between theorists and those who apply its ideas captures the essence of how one group of people study culture in terms of equality matching and another group studies culture in terms of comparative frameworks.

The last needed development is a workable ethics that can be used in a global context. An ethical system based on subjective opinion of highly localized context might be theoretically advantageous but will fail to meet the test of application within a global framework. As will be addressed in the following section, all neurotypical people are endowed with an innate moral sense that must adapt to the demands of a given situation. This does not mean that ethics is a subjective affair, only that life is a complex theatre of human activity.

Thatcher goes on to illustrate how these eight needed developments can and should be examined in eight critical contexts, although he points out many more. The eight that he lists include second language studies and neuroscience, information technology, organizational behavior and global relations, distance education, legal traditions, health literacy, instructional design, and intercultural curriculum and research. In each of these endeavors, there is a need to study not only ways in which theory may arise and then explain these problems but also how these same ideas can be put to good use.

All of these obstacles are based on two key social movements. The first of these is what philosopher Peter Singer has coined *the expanding circle*. Ours is a species that has an innate capacity for kin reciprocity in which we share a close bond with members of our family. This is an important point to make because the same cannot be said of colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers. There has to be some kind of reason why we clog the airports every holiday. For various reasons, we have pushed the boundaries of kin relations to also include members of the group. We are much more likely to do favors for close friends than for someone who resides outside of the group. Singer argues that this is not an innate urge, like the one for family, but one based on the elements of sociality and a higher level of reason (2011).

The second movement is what I call a fear of inequality, which has roots in obviously good and upstanding views about how different people should be treated. The problem is that the drive to

treat other people fairly does not come as naturally as our own family. The first question that should pop up in such a situation is why this should be the case and how it effects work in the field. The moral implications of how we arrived at fearing inequality must first begin with how we ever reasoned our way into an expanding circle of moral reciprocity.

### **The expanding circle**

In 1981, Australian philosopher Peter Singer wrote a book called *The Expanding Circle*. In it Singer tried to fold in new research from evolutionary psychology and, in particular, E. O. Wilson's landmark work *Sociobiology*. One of the key points made by Wilson was that the animal kingdom seemed to betray an unusual paradox. If natural selection is about survival of the fittest, nasty in tooth and claw, then how is it that altruism can be found in species ranging from birds to elephants to humans? It seemed that any organism willing to do a selfless act for another was hardly doing anything that would help it survive and, quite possibly, might even be hastening itself to an early grave. Singer reasoned that the answer to this question was neither exclusively biological nor exclusively behavioral, but a combination of both. Singer set out to discover the building blocks of what makes people do good acts when there seems to be no obvious incentive. Resolving this question is not only fundamental for readers of this journal, but actually sets in place a foundation for figuring out how we got to our hyperactive attention to equality.

Singer starts off with a few examples from the non-human animal kingdom (we are, after all, just one mammal among many). Blackbirds and thrushes are known to give out warning calls when a hawk is seen overhead. These calls presumably serve as warnings for other birds in the area but also seem to come at some cost. Any time a bird gives out a warning, it does so at an increased risk of being eaten. Although these calls are more difficult to locate than others, they surely put birds at greater risk than merely hiding among branches. Singer starts off by asking why birds would bother doing such a thing when it seems to confer no advantage and considerable disadvantage. He then goes on to list other animals such as wild dogs, gazelles, elephants, and other primates that also show acts of altruism with no obvious expectation of reciprocity. There is even the curious act of when animals forego a chance to kill a rival. Singer notes that a wolf who admits defeat will bear the underside of its neck in deference to his victor, who could but does not inflict a final lashing. If the victor is from the same social group, he will simply leave without a kill.

The origin of our altruism begins with kin, the bonds that bind our closest relatives. Its logic is defined not by what is best for the group, a common misunderstanding, but by what is best for our genes. This is because your children possess roughly fifty percent of your genes, your siblings possess fifty percent of your genes, and their children possess twenty-five percent of your genes, and so on. Devotion to your children and the odds that you would risk your life for theirs is not based on their charming smiles or aptitude for music or mathematics. It is because they share roughly fifty percent of your genetic makeup; they are vessels for passing on the family line. When you die, you can rest assured that a sizeable part of your genetic information will be passed onto future generations. In some biological way you are helping obtain a degree of immortality, a fact that helps explain the source of your moral impulse.

The link between evolutionary psychology, sociobiology, and ethics is obviously more complicated than this. We care for and do generous acts for non-kin because we like them, want to see them do well, share some view for how the world works, and enjoy an inexplicable connection. Even though we share no genetic bond there is another kind of link, that of friendship. But according to Singer, we have not stopped at the boundary that encapsulates family and friends. Our moral radius has gradually pushed farther away to also include tribes, groups, clans, states, nations, and even the entire planet. This might seem like an odd claim because there is no reason to believe that we have an innate tendency to care sincerely for strangers on the other side of the globe. If Singer is right then how can this be and why?

According to Wright, three key traits in our species helped perpetuate the expanding circle (1996). They include cognition, language, and an emotional repertoire. Cognition refers to an ability to abstract through intuitive theories about how the world works. Each of us has an intuitive notion of “objects, forces, paths, places, states, substances, and other people’s desires and beliefs” (Pinker, 2010). We can take these abstract ideas to the natural world, use them to solve problems, scale up to higher levels of abstraction, which can then be used to solve even more difficult problems. The ability to coopt intuitive theories for solving problems is one sign of intelligence that leads to even higher levels of abstract problem solving, traits that would have been selected for by filling a cognitive niche (Pinker, 2010).

Wright then goes on to argue that another reason for our expanding moral radius is because of our species’ knack for language, which is distinct from communication. Language may be defined as the ability to take a finite inventory of words and string them together in a nearly-infinite array of combinatorial sentences. This is distinct from communication, which is the ability to convey an intentional signal to another organism without the benefit of recursion. Birds may be the most familiar example of a species that can communicate, but only outside the limits of language. Even bacteria communicate, but only on a chemical level. Most people rarely stop to think about the miracle of language, but just imagine what life would be like if you forever lost this basic skill. But perhaps the most important aspect of language is that it has the ability to explode individual knowledge. I can give you some of my fruit and fish but I can also use language to explain how you can get even more.

The third and final reason moral sentiments have expanded our circle is because of a heightened emotional repertoire. This refers to a theory of mind, which is the ability to intuit the thoughts, values, feelings, and beliefs of other minds. Compared to other primates, we are a highly social species that must figure out how to negotiate a vast and sometimes complex network of individual minds. Evidence for this is found not only in the complex plots of our poems, literature, and movies but also in the thickness of our neocortex, which is directly related to sociality (Dunbar, 1998). An emotional repertoire also gives us the option of viewing the world through different eyes. If you are in conflict with someone, then it may be easier to disarm the situation through empathy, the ability to understand another person’s perspective.

These three aspects of our species’ makeup—cognition, language, and an emotional repertoire—help explain how we expanded our moral circle to go beyond the boundaries of kin and even close friends. But we have not simply expanded our moral circle to embrace people unlike us; we have also curtailed rates of violence. Some people find this to be a difficult idea to accept,

although the data is clear. Whether it is measured across centuries, generations, or decades, rates of violence have been declining steadily in nearly every corner of the globe.

The rise and consolidation of nation states first set this remarkable fact in motion. Although it may seem to confound existing notions of how violence might decrease, it is actually beneficial if an overarching presence can police a region. Over time we saw a humanitarian revolution in which various forms of corporal punishment were abandoned, such as the global trend in eliminating the death penalty for non-lethal crimes. There was also the human rights revolution, which saw a host of social improvements. Vulnerable populations such as racial minorities, women, children, homosexuals, and even animals have been rightfully granted equal rights, first in theory but eventually and over time in practice. Statistical rates from around the world indicate an expanding circle through a reduction in hate crimes, racist attitudes, an increase in women's rights, a reduction in domestic violence, better treatment of children, the decriminalization of homosexuality, and even animal rights. This last improvement can be seen in revised handling practices, an increase in vegetarianism, and even the oversight of animal welfare on the sets of blockbuster movies (Pinker, 2011).

Of special interest to readers of this journal is a much broader reason for why rates of violence have declined, and that is international trade. This may seem the least likely of explanations for our expanding moral circle and why you have a smaller chance of being murdered today than at any other time in recorded history. Yet, there is a very good reason why it makes sense. It is relatively easy to imagine killing someone with whom you do no business, as there is no mutual interdependence. But the moment you begin trading with an adversary, the odds of either of you killing the other drop dramatically. A common example of this anxiety is found in the difference between the US and China, with some people fearing that China will present an overbearing threat to the US and its allies. China's burgeoning space program, spy satellites, and military arsenal would seem to suggest a serious threat to western countries. Although theoretically true, the activation of this impulse seems farfetched. We owe China an awful lot of money, and they make all our stuff. Launching missiles at each other is not an especially useful business plan.

This provides further proof that our circle has not only expanded in a qualitative sense; it has also improved quantitatively. The expanding circle that Singer presciently derived over thirty years ago is not just about bringing more people into an orbit of ethics but of also improving those principles already in place. Our gift for higher order thinking, language, and a sophisticated emotional repertoire gives us the means to break free from a circle of kin to a much larger sphere of sociality. But important as they are, groups do not provide the ultimate solution.

### **Fear of inequality**

The fear of inequality begins not with the individual but with a natural desire to form groups, extends into the goal of keeping unwanted people out, and is reinforced through observations that are elevated to stereotype. Although its logic is bolstered by social pressures, its motives are innate (Hammond & Axelrod, 2006).

Despite the odds that most people strive to be free of dependence and control, there is little question that our species has an innate drive to form groups (Axelrod, 1986). Social groups are the foundation of our personal and professional lives. Even the most independent among us must



acknowledge that we get something useful out of friends and family. There is no society on the planet that fails to value the formation of groups, as it is impossible to think of other people without also thinking about how they fit into a larger social order. This is not to say that groups just expect people to be mindless clones. In fact, the institution of groups have to exploit a number of tricks to keep people from defecting, as anyone familiar with indoctrinations, rites, and rituals can attest (Atran 1998).

Perhaps the best known example of how people will happily join a group, no matter how arbitrary, occurred in the Riceville, Iowa classroom of Jane Elliott. The story takes place in April of 1968, right after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. She was unsure of how to explain the loss of King, a difficulty made more apparent by the fact that Riceville was an all-white town. She decided to separate her students into two groups, one with blue eyes and other with brown. She explained how people with brown eyes were superior to people with blue eyes. All of the students with blue eyes had to sit at the back of the classroom. Students with brown eyes were told they were smarter, had more time to play at recess, were fitted with a collar so they could be identified at a distance, and were instructed to avoid socializing with blue-eyed students. The result was swift and shocking. Students with brown eyes became mean and discriminatory, even to the point of dissolving long-standing alliances and friendships. The following day Elliott decided to try another test, this time telling the class she was all wrong about eye color. It was not brown-eyed people who were superior, but people with blue eyes. This had an equal but opposite effect. Fifteen years later students from Elliott's class were interviewed for a PBS special where it was said that this experience was the single most important learning event of their lives. The power of groups can be strong.

The fear of inequality begins not with a few bad apples but with our very own species. There was nothing unusual about Elliott's class. While her students attended an all-white school in rural Iowa, that does not explain the results. The problem is that we are, as a species, wholly vested in delineating one group of people from the next and then making sure others stay out of our group. While some groups cultivate values that make them more insular than others, the problem is actually far deeper. There is simply not enough time or resources to befriend everyone, which means we have to pick and choose. This trial-and-error process is not an environmental offshoot of a social motive but a deep instinctual trait. In terms of nature and nurture—and it is surely a combination of both—there is little doubt that evolution has stamped our species with a taste for ethnocentrism (Axelrod, 1986; Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). We expect our independence but relish the safety of groups, and that means keeping others at bay.

The traits of ethnocentrism are defined by a range of behaviors that can be easily observed. Such variables may include appearance, ornamentation, politics, socioeconomics, religion, and even language and accent. The pursuit and maintenance of ethnocentrism is thought to place significant cognitive demands on a person, as there is a linear link in primates between degree of sociality and thickness of neocortex (Dunbar, 1998; Hammond & Axelrod, 2006). While there is little controversy in the claim that social and cultural inputs greatly affect the nature of ethnocentrism, there is extensive evidence supporting an innate predisposition for in-group behaviors. This turns out to be true even in the absence of direct environmental pressure or when the group is merely abstract. It is not simply the difference between brown and blue eyes; it can be about people and traits we have never before seen.

### **Communal sharing**

Although group membership confers a number of advantages, it also comes at some cost. In fact, joining and maintaining membership in a group typically requires a series of endless costs that are most noticeable at the beginning. There is also an extraordinary range of groups with which to participate, including family, education, health, recreation, and religion. Regardless of the group, all are guided by a core set of principles that reflect and reinforce their dynamics. They start off with trying to figure out what other people think. This extends into solving practical and existential problems reinforced through social rituals that are exploited through several cognitive quirks (Fiske, 1992; 2004).

A theory of mind is what neurotypical people use when they try to infer the thoughts, values, feelings, and beliefs of other minds (Atran, 1998). Taken to one end of the spectrum, a theory of mind is the same cognitive faculty used to infer the presence of souls, gods, and spirits (minus a material body). A second feature of group membership is that it provides a number of benefits typically unavailable to individual people by helping solve a number of practical and existential problems. Practical problems may include hunting, gathering, and forming friendships and alliances. Groups can also help solve existential problems, especially when the practical fails. If science, law, and medicine are unable to grant certainty, then perhaps one can appeal to a higher authority. The third feature of group membership is that it often deals in matters that can be neither proven nor disproven. If a practical or existential matter appeals to no empirical proof then ceremony may be useful. Ceremony and commensal meals create a sense of social cohesion, a goal that can be solidified by people willing to endure great costs such as sacrificing animals, crops, and foreskins.

The fourth and final feature of group membership is that it takes place by exploiting a series of cognitive quirks. The first of these is that it creates a sense of social cohesion. Families might be the prototype of group membership. Even though “you can’t choose your family,” there has to be some reason why people clog the airports around the holidays every year. Many people willfully visit their families on a fairly regular basis, even if begrudgingly, while the same cannot be said of colleagues, acquaintances, or strangers. The fact that non-kin relations do not enjoy the same family bonds helps explain why colleagues and acquaintances have to construct a series of rituals. To cite a religious example, the words “brethren,” “brother,” and “our father” seem designed to solve this very problem.

Communal sharing is exploited by a second cognitive quirk, that of celebration. Birthdays, anniversaries, religious rites and rites of passage, initiations, judicial proceedings, and educational achievements are all examples of human endeavors that attempt to exploit a drive for communal sharing. A third cognitive quirk is ritualistic motion. Sports, medical procedures, and religious events all attempt to create a sense of communal sharing through ritualistic motion. In religious ceremonies, members of a church may stand, sing, and wave their hands in unison. Individual worshippers become submerged in the movement of the group. This is analogous to other behaviors seen in the animal kingdom, such as the V formation of birds. Unified movement that reinforces communal sharing takes place in many organisms or people who attempt to replicate the benefits of a single superorganism.

The fourth and final cognitive quirk exploited in the name of communal sharing is self-sacrifice. Because group membership confers a number of advantages it is important to weed out defectors, and one way of doing that is to erect obstacles or tests that only the dedicated are likely to satisfy. A player who regularly takes his last foul for the team, a soldier who charges the enemy line, and a mother who offers her son's foreskin are all examples of the kinds of sacrifice required to gain admission into and remain a member of a group.

The point is that communal sharing or in-group membership succeeds only because it requires its members to find a common bond, and few bonds are stronger than identifying how others are different. While societies have to deploy a number of tricks to get people to buy into group membership, it is hardly a monumental request. People who decide to go alone do so under tremendous uncertainty and the possibility that plans will not unfold in their favor.

### **Equality matching**

If group benefits occupy one elementary form of sociality, then its inverse is equality matching. Although it is possible to collapse both values onto a single scale, it can also be useful to treat them as mutually exclusive. Unlike communal sharing, whereby the individual is absorbed within a group, equality matching is concerned with autonomy and fair treatment. Its logic is defined by a need and desire to contribute and distribute resources equally, a strong moral impulse for individual freedom, personal opinion, and the free-flow of ideas. If communal sharing is about making sure people conform, then equality matching is about figuring out how best to persuade.

One way to think about the difference between communal sharing and equality matching is through a third form of elementary sociality—authority ranking (Fiske, 1992; 2004). All societies have a social physics in terms of space, time, magnitude, and force. Each of us occupies a finite amount of space, proceeds through it at a particular rate of time, is in possession of a given magnitude, and is capable of a certain amount of force. This means that people higher up on the food chain tend to be taller or made to appear that way, walk in front of the group instead of behind, enter first and wait less, and are capable of wielding social, political, financial, or physical force. A judge, king, or tyrant wears bulky or elaborate attire, is bigger or sits higher, walks in front or is carried along a procession, and can exercise authority by withholding or removing resources.

Societies move away from authority ranking and toward equality matching for a variety of reasons, although one of the most important is socioeconomic. It is helpful to think of the relationship between socioeconomic status and equality matching as a linear function in which one increases simultaneously with the other. Consider what happens to a small family that lives in an even smaller home. Suppose there are six members of the family, two parents and four children, and a total of only two bedrooms. The master bedroom goes to the parents and the other goes to the remaining four children. It can be tricky sharing two rooms with six people, so the family does most of their socializing in the living room where a television and radio are shared. The smaller physical space means less privacy, independence, and freedom but comes with the added bonus of stronger family bonds through increased contact time. What happens if this same family wins the lottery?

Our family of six and their once-modest income now has the luxury of scaling up to a much larger home where everyone gets a room of their own, proper furniture, and personalized entertainment. Because each member of the family has their own space, there is far less reason to spend time in the living room watching television, listening to the radio, and socializing. The family has deemphasized its value of communal sharing and reallocated its energies toward equality matching. A shift from the group to the individual means more privacy, independence, and freedom but at the cost of weaker family bonds from decreased contact time. This does not mean that one member of the family will no longer help a sibling or parent, but it does suggest a weakened link between each of its members. The difference between shared and private rooms is unlikely to be consequential among kin, although the same could not be said of non-kin.

It is this very dynamic of moving away from in-group preference and toward equality matching that captures the essence of the fear of inequality. As groups of people acquire greater socioeconomic wealth, so too does their inclination for equality matching. Less emphasis on groups and conformity results in greater degrees of personal freedom and non-conformity. The shift from communal sharing to equality matching is a process that leads to a fear of inequality. With greater individual freedom comes an anxiety about making sure everyone is equally free.

One way to think of this is to return to our family. Before winning the lottery, the ritual of dinner was likely to be centered around a shared social experience. Much like societies with strong values toward communal sharing, our family before the lottery was probably less concerned about making sure that everyone took an equal amount of food. Instead, meals would have been seen as a collective experience in which everyone may or may not have invested the same amount of time, energy, and resources. Meals would have been eaten together in the same room and at roughly the same time each day. Counter this with what happens when the group is a little less cohesive, in part because of a larger house, more personal space, and the monetary means to take care of meals on an individual basis. Instead of a collective experience, everyone is able to find food on their own terms. This may mean having dinner together, although it is far more likely that, over time, each person will simply eat according to personal whim and schedules.

Another way to think of how commensal meals can help explain the shift from communal sharing to equality matching is by looking at these same rituals around the world. In many societies, the act of preparing, consuming, and ritualizing meals is a central aspect of social life. French and Italian societies may spend hours with family and friends at any given meal, while the same cannot be said of Australians or Canadians. There has to be some reason why everyone collects around a mesab in Ethiopia, eating with their hands from the same enormous platter of food. While in the US, it is widely known that people are more likely to scream their order into a plastic clown, exchange money through a small window, and receive their feast in a small paper bag. This is not to say that mesabs and fast food are the cause of communal sharing or equality matching, but they are certainly aligned with a larger set of values about the pressures of conformity versus the effort and anxiety of equality.

### **Conclusion**

In this journal's first issue, Thatcher presented eight needed developments and eight critical contexts that can and should be used for global inquiry. Moving from the local to the global, moving beyond monocultural methods, having the courage to act in a global context, distancing *Rhetoric, Professional Communication, and Globalization* December, 2011, Volume 2, Number 1, 1-14.

ourselves from equality matching to better understand societies that nurture communal sharing, basic quantitative literacy, a sense of humility and flexibility, effectively applying the problems of theory to those of practice, and finding a workable global ethic are the eight areas of needed development.

As Thatcher further notes, each of these problems can be studied in a wide range of affairs. They include second language studies and neuroscience, information technology, organizational behavior, distance education, legal traditions, health literacy, instructional design, and intercultural research. All of these areas can be improved by scholars who maintain the importance of an expanding moral circle, assuming one avoids taking its precepts to their logical limit. Equality for every person is a worthy goal that speaks to how far we have come, but it should also not instill in us an equal but paralyzing fear that the only way to achieve it is through extreme subjectivity. The modern denial of culture has been a steady work in progress, one that surfaced from the high ideals of equal rights, social justice, and an expanding moral sense. Without question, the catalyst for the social relativism of today is rooted in the civil rights movement, the right of women to vote and attend university, greater understanding of disability, and the increased awareness of sexual orientation. That our species has identified these previously overlooked or stigmatized groups of people is a testament to the awesome progress we have made, with a promise that more success in these areas will follow.

At the same time, a rejection of all innate faculties in the name of equality has led us down a dark, unproductive, and even volatile path. There is no truth, what is right for me is not for you, cancer may be genetic but intelligence is not, and even morality is pushed off into an irrational corner of obscurity. One of the great hallmarks of our recent past was realizing that certain groups of people are not inferior just because they look different. At the same time, rejecting fallacious assumptions about the predisposition of certain demographics should not be countered by an equal and equally absurd assumption that everything is idiosyncratically personal. Just because our ancestors were embarrassingly wrong about the intelligence and competence of certain groups of people does not mean that these things are entirely a function of the environment. This is just sliding down the other side of the same slippery slope. There is good evidence, in fact, that intelligence has been increasing across the board for decades, that it can be improved with training, and that a sizeable portion of it is heritable (Harris, 2006). Despite fears that some people have about appearing daft, it should be entirely respectable to admit that not everything is decided by environmental proxy.

Such extreme thinking has magnified two intellectual fallouts, a flawed theory of mind and the fear of inequality. The ability to infer the thoughts, values, feelings, and beliefs of other minds is one aspect of human sociality. Our ancestors' ability to guess what other people were thinking aided them in a wide range of human affairs. Ours is a hypersocial species that deals in such matters as conflict, cooperation, mind reading, manipulation, coordination, plausible deniability, rational ignorance, and the cultural transmission of knowledge (Krebs and Dawkins, 1984). We carry out these aspects of public life through a social physics of space, time, magnitude, and force. This is especially evident in matters of authority ranking, which is a testing ground for two other elementary forms of sociality—communal sharing and equality matching. A society's shift from in-group preference to equality matching is one that often coincides with greater socioeconomic prosperity, heightened personal freedom, and equality matching.

Theory of mind, the expanding circle, and a fear of inequality help explain the problem of why people confuse a theory of psychology for sociology. An unchecked theory of mind results in the assumption that other minds want the same thing and are even driven by the same motives and goals. It is likely that the other minds problem is responsible for considerable miscommunication, one that gets magnified the instant it crosses cultures. This, in turn, leads to even greater problems as societies shift toward individual autonomy. The other minds problem is likely to enhance the predisposition a society may have for equality.

All of this leads toward the dilemma of mixing a theory of psychology for one of sociology. Psychology deals with individual minds while sociology deals with them as a group. If theory of mind and a fear of inequality cause one to focus on what each person thinks then that in itself will lead one toward psychology instead of sociology. This is not to say that an emphasis on psychology is wrong, only that it is incapable of explaining how large groups of people carry on with the daily business of life. Getting away from the notion that everything true must also be subjective is the first step, one that will help us self-correct a different injustice that is our modern denial of culture.

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