

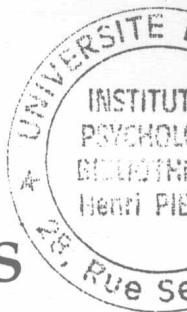


**LANGUAGE, THOUGHT, AND CULTURE: *Advances in the  
Study of Cognition***

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# Indigenous Psychologies

## *The Anthropology of the Self*

Edited by

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12263

1981



**ACADEMIC PRESS**

*A Subsidiary of Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers*

London New York Toronto Sydney San Francisco

ACADEMIC PRESS INC. (LONDON) LTD.  
24-28 Oval Road  
London NW1

U.S. Edition published by  
ACADEMIC PRESS INC.  
111 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10003

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Indigenous psychologies.

1. Man—Psychology

2. Anthropology

I. Heelas, P. L. F. II. Lock, A. J.

155.2 BF697

ISBN 0-12-336480-9

LCCCN 80-42267

Typeset by Oxford Publishing Services, Oxford  
Printed by St. Edmundsbury Press, Bury St. Edmunds

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## Foreword\*



This book is unique in its ambition and richness and its publication should surely be greeted as a major event. It is not every day that we are able to witness so much talent exploring in such depth a theme which is both topical and new. Such mastery of thought coupled with erudition provide the reader with a pleasure which is all too rare in this domain not to be mentioned right at the start. The breadth of the subject obviously exceeds the competence of any one individual, and many of my remarks must necessarily run the risk of seeming hasty and superficial. But how can one resist the temptation to make some contribution, however modest, to such an enterprise?

The combination of social psychology and anthropology is for me both a symbol and an event. I have been waiting for this for too long not to be overjoyed at seeing it taking shape at last. From time to time, what may be called "retro-revolutions" are observable in the sciences. These are returns to the past—back to problems, ideas or methods which have been forgotten or even banished. They unveil for us a whole aspect of reality which has been neglected, another mode of thought. As a result, an entire field of research is reactivated in what amounts to a revolution.

However, one cannot make a complete return to the past if there is to be progress. By grouping anthropology and social psychology around indigenous psychologies, the authors of this volume have returned to what was, in fact, the original aim of our science. In this connection it is sufficient to mention the *Völkerpsychologie* of Wundt, the *Totem and Taboo* of Freud and the numerous works of Werner. They give an idea of what was, and, in my opinion, still is the true purpose of social psychology. This is how it used to appear to anthropologists such as Mauss or Rivers, and to psychologists such as Bartlett, McDougall or Vygotsky.

Under the influence of behaviourist psychology and functional sociology, our science has moved away from its original aim and has been transformed into a science of behaviour and social relationships (read: inter-individual). We know the effects of this development. First, the act of separating general mechanisms from specific contents, of dissociating the study of *how* one perceives, thinks and acts from *what* one thinks, perceives and does. Second, the attempt to reduce the role of the context, particularly the social context, in the definition of phenomena, in order to increase it with fragments of behaviour which are always dissected in the same way. When this has been done, elements of social context are hastily re-introduced, in the same way that elements are re-introduced into our food-stuffs in the form of medicaments (vitamins, proteins, etc.) which were originally eliminated from the food in mass production. Finally there is the ambition to

\*Translated by Kathleen J. Heelas

explain without describing, to isolate a fundamental mechanism—cognitive dissonance, presentation, etc.—without proceeding to a careful description of explicable phenomena. This description is, however, the basis of all true science.

I believe that the lack of interest of related disciplines in social psychology is largely due to its phenomenological poverty. It lacks a language capable of stating the facts which it sets out to study, thereby rendering real accumulation of knowledge barely possible. In these circumstances, bringing it back to its original aim by associating it with anthropology reverses the development: and so one re-discovers the necessity of uniting mechanism and content, phenomenon and context, explanation and description.

The principle, which I have expounded elsewhere, is that when one gets to the root of the matter, *social psychology is a science of culture, and particularly of our culture. It is, or should be, the anthropology of the modern world.* From the language of ideologies and interpersonal relationships to the education of children, and from mass communication to works of art, social psychology is central. Realizing this can bring about an internal revolution for each of us. This book is an excellent means of initiating this awakening of conscience. And furthermore, it comes just at the right time.

The notion of indigenous psychology brings us back to representations of personality, affective and intellectual life, which form the basis of common-sense. The astonishing thing is that it has taken so long for its importance to be perceived. It is a notion which is at the same time both easy and difficult to understand. From the epistemological point of view it is easy to grasp because of a contrast. Let us suppose that on the one hand everyone carries some naive psychology with him in his daily round. On the other hand, naive psychologies are also born in clinics and laboratories. Indigenous psychologies are situated next to the former, but not entirely. It must be recognized that they have an element in common with the latter, namely, their character of close observation and systematization of common ideas. In fact, if one follows, as I have been able to do, conversations in a village or pub, one understands how much a psychology develops. On the basis of local standards, the participants proceed to a continuous exchange concerning the protocol of the conduct of certain people, their motives and intentions. The regular discussion of these protocols leads to a diagnosis, and concludes with a series of maxims and proverbs or hypotheses founded on a conception of human nature. As such "pathological" cases are numerous, there is no lack of amateur therapists whether they be barmen, fortune-tellers, priests or rabbis. No doubt the theories are sometimes "erroneous"—but those of scientists are not always true either.

It is apparent that indigenous psychologies, far from being what is generally understood by the word "naive" are in no way "brutal", "inconsistent" or "wild". In one sense they are systematic, enclosed in the armour of traditions of language and dominant images, and in this way more rigid than science. In their structure they realize the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the union of contraries; a fluid, spontaneous content and a very elaborate form. This is what brings them close to the psychologies of Freud, Heider or Le Bon. On the other hand, the artificial psychology of scientists always eliminates one of the oppositions and maintains equili-

brium between the proposed hypotheses and facts constructed to confirm or deny them. Paraphrasing a famous maxim of Marx, one could say that "naive" psychologies seek to interpret reality, whereas "scientific" psychologies seek to transform it. Consequently, it is quite right to treat indigenous psychologies in the same way as those of Heider and Freud are treated, and vice versa. In any case Freud would certainly not have objected to this. He always accepted "common" sense, and took a great many elements from it in his creative work.

The most difficult part of the idea, however, is also the most trivial, namely how to ascertain the domain of the psychological. The difficulty arises from the fact that this domain is bounded by culture and evolves with history, so varying from societies in which the individual is the psychological to those in which psychology is taken away from the human self. Thus if the individual is accepted as a term, in a secularized world, the other obligatory term is the environment, nature. It is a matter of binary psychology. Most of our theories, scientific and naive, are conceived in this framework as are so many solutions of the tension between the interior world and the exterior world. But a great many civilizations add a third term: gods, demons, ancestors, and so on. In other words, they construct ternary psychologies in which the individual may sometimes be an appearance, sometimes a reality. Even in our civilization, mystical experience, possession, psychic initiation, etc. are residual examples.

It seems to me that one of the most important problems raised in this book is that of the boundaries of the psychic sphere in different cultures. The distinction between binary and ternary cultures could contribute to a first classification of diverse spheres, in order to grasp their specific dynamics.

There is nothing surprising in a notion having easy and difficult aspects at the same time. In fact, as always happens in the face of an original work, one is stimulated to go further. Indigenous social psychologies provide entry to the concrete lives of groups and societies. Based on research that I have carried out, it is possible to imagine the following strategy. First, the description and analysis of the classification of persons would represent a step forward in comprehending the ways man thinks and makes his culture. Every community actually constructs its own typology of individuals, a physiognomy and character study accompanied by recipes for dealing with each type: the timid, the irritable, etc. It also supplies a more or less complete explanation of the reasons for which an individual belongs to one category or another and behaves in a particular way and not another. We only have to look at our society to see how far racism is founded on such a typology, justified by a view of the human psyche far more than by a view of human biology. The types are usually stereotypes, sometimes even incarnated in carnival and theatre characters.

A second point of access to indigenous social psychologies concerns techniques of influence. Although they are found everywhere and provide the most diverse material and intellectual vehicles, constants can nevertheless be extracted from them. In all societies, there is a specialization of methods and rules which facilitate implicit action by one individual on another or on the community. These techniques bring into play factors and psychic notions to heal or to control men. Their purpose is to bring about the passage of the individual to the collective, and the



conscious to the unconscious, making co-ordination possible. To see how fascinating the study of these techniques can be, one only needs open Francis Yates', *The Art of Memory*. It is amazing to learn that from its birth occidental rhetoric has elaborated a very coherent vision of mental work, of arousing emotions by means of language, and of manipulation of memory to produce the desired effect. Yates analyses the succession of these "psycho-sociological" theories which teach the orator to compose his memory, which is collective by definition, and to make use of it at the opportune moment to captivate and control his audience. The verity of these theories is open to dispute, but their value is indisputable: they have been the backbone of the political system for several thousands of years.

In the present crisis period which our science is going through, such indigenous social psychologies are more necessary than ever, because they inform us about "human nature" and motives for action. Accordingly, we learn *from* them *about* them. Think for example of the extraordinary harvest which could be gathered by examination of methods of hypnosis or of "theories of conspiracy" in history (measured with the little that we know of the phenomena of prerogatives). There are some sciences which suffer more from a lack of facts than from a lack of theories. This is the malady of social psychology. The remedy? Give it a phenomenology rather than an epistemology, and so allow in a breath of fresh air.

I have been given the honour of writing this Foreword because twenty years ago I studied an indigenous psychology, that of the French. Or rather I should say one of their indigenous psychologies, because every society possesses several. There followed detailed research on social representations of psychic and physical life, health and sickness, and so forth. The concern is with cognitive forms, the purpose of which is to allow members of the group to communicate in order to establish their physical and social reality. They are often unconscious, latent, or implicit. Without such representations we could not act nor exchange sentiments or ideas. They support our language and our relationships quite well. Obviously, everything that we study under the rubric "implicit theories of personality"—and there are also implicit theories of society, conflict, justice, human nature and so on—plays a part in the representative universe of society.

As an example of what happens when the indigenous is neglected, consider research on the attribution process. This seeks to elucidate why the behaviour of a person is attributed to the environment or to the person himself. Just as a scientific description of phenomena cannot take place without a theory, so in a society there can be no attribution without a social representation of individuals, collective relationships, the economy, etc. If two people attribute the cause of damage, one to the person (laziness) and the other to the situation (crisis), it is certainly not because they possess different information. It is a safe bet that their conceptions of the structure of society differ diametrically: one tends rather to the right, the other to the left. Without this clarification, I think that the study of attribution, limited to close relationships, has not taught us anything about social psychology itself, in spite of its popularity.

In addition, many areas of research, particularly those concerning relationships between parents and young children, would profit by taking proper account of

social perception. From the child's first day it is bathed in an environment of maternal "chats", a sort of mental and emotional laboratory in which the "theories" which will be applied to it and which will fashion its personality will be forged. Knowing the genesis of these assumptions—knowing the indigenous psychologies—would allow a new approach to the phenomenon of socialization in general. Perhaps this is one of the points needed for re-connecting the neglected bonds between child and social psychology.

Social psychology tends to pay little attention to ideological facts, language or symbolism. It has therefore been usual for the body of research on social perception to remain restricted and isolated in France. But now, thanks mainly to the efforts of our English colleagues who are going ahead on new routes, the spirit has changed. Concerning my own, complementary, research two points are relevant:

- In the study of social perceptions, attention is often brought to bear on the transformation of "scientific" into "naive" or "vernacular" theory. The reason for this is simple: we are interested in the genesis of common-sense. In our society common-sense is born from "science" but in traditional societies the inverse process is observable. My research, for example, set out to understand how psychoanalysis has become an everyday psychology for everyone.
- Rightly or wrongly, we thought we could more easily grasp the mental life of social groups by starting with articulated material. Enquiries, interviews, on-the-spot observation, etc. have permitted us to gather a mass of first-hand information about spontaneous "psychologies", "sociologies" or "physiologies". Certainly, similar research on movements of the EST type, encounter groups, and primal therapy would provide a better grasp of the ways in which our own indigenous psychologies are produced.

By its very nature this book defies any attempt to condense it into a few pages. Each of the theses set out in it would require a full commentary. At least I shall have fulfilled my task if I have succeeded in showing the importance of the work as a whole, and indicating some of the perspectives which it opens to us.

Paris, April 1981

SERGE MOSCOVICI

## Preface

Psychologists generally study man as he "really" is; anthropologists, at least in Britain, tend to bypass man, to study his social and cultural creations. Between these two paths lies a subject of some importance. The subject is man as he conceives himself in terms of his collective representations.

Various images of self and of ways of functioning have been explored in a number of disciplines. Religious studies, cultural history, English literature and anthropology all provide evidence. Religions always require models of man, cultural traditions show changing views of human nature, novelists articulate indigenous notions, and, from a cross-cultural perspective, no one indigenous psychology is the same as another. In addition, philosophers of the linguistic persuasion examine everyday psychological concepts, and social psychologists have not entirely ignored the role of implicit folk theory in, for example, the attribution of personality characteristics. While this collection owes a great deal to investigations as diverse as the study of Buddhist psychology, the history of the self in the West, and to the work of some American culture and personality theorists, it is the first systematic, interdisciplinary investigation of the nature of what people take themselves to be. To mark this we prefer the term "indigenous psychology" to those—ethno-psychology, implicit, common-sense and folk psychology—which have been used in the past.

What do the indigenous psychologies of peoples as diverse as fifth-century (B.C.) Athenians, Renaissance Englishmen, the modern West, and the Maori look like? Even at the descriptive level they are not easy to study; with respect to analysis, recognition must be given to difficulties consequent on the fact that as collective "systems" they belong to the realm of common-sense. Common-sense is peculiar in that it is something which is at once both obvious and obscure. It has this status because it is a form of knowledge that flits in and out of the twilight zones of our reflective and unreflective modes of perception. At one moment it constitutes the active organizing framework by which we view the world and hence is a part of our viewing and not part of the view. It is in this sense obscure. At another moment it is an attribute of a judgement, a

quality of a statement, a mode of action. It is in this sense obvious. Yet, when we ask someone to amplify an assertion he claims is common-sense, we find that such obvious aspects of common-sense are merely the tips of the icebergs of an underlying, unreflected system, a system which is obscure yet strangely compelling. Common-sense may have some explicit connections with reality, but by and large it seems to be a law unto its own internal implicational structure.

Because indigenous psychologies have generally only potential existence as systems of implication, what is implicit in them has to be made as explicit as possible. Anthropologists of the structuralist persuasion have shown how this can be done in other domains (myth, cosmology, kinship). Without claiming that indigenous psychologies present systematic wholes, the contributions show that sense can be sought in underlying rationales; that what goes with what is not entirely arbitrary.

Another theme concerns the functions of indigenous psychologies, sustaining the self both with respect to itself (as when we use various strategies to handle our emotions) and with respect to relationships between the self and institutions (as when Buddhist religious life is facilitated by psychological techniques for escaping from suffering). In our own society there is today a popular debate as to the functioning and nature of psychological processes, which, whilst often stimulated by academic publications, is affected by indigenous assumptions. There is an airing of views of the psychological effect of the new religions (brain-washing?), of the relevance of sociobiology (inherent drives?), of the impact of football and pornography (cathartic?), of the role of personality types (causing lung cancer, criminality?), of psychoanalytic therapies (doing more harm than good?), and of liberal child-rearing methods (resulting in selfishness?).

The debates of our "psychological age" indicate a fundamental issue: the efficacy or truth-value of indigenous psychologies. Have we perhaps encumbered ourselves with unfruitful notions, such as "catharsis"? Almost all the domains in terms of which we live, including nature and the social and religious worlds, have been placed under scrutiny. As modern medicine has developed out of ethnomedicine, or as astronomy has made astrology marginal, so life has changed. But there has been no comparable scientific advance in the everyday psychological domain, the debates still owing much to indigenous "prejudices". Suspicion is heightened that at least some features of our folk psychology give inadequate, misleading or perhaps erroneous impressions of psychological life. Suspicion is further enhanced by reflecting that, given the cross-cultural variety of the indigenous, it is unlikely that we alone have got it right.

By analogy with what has happened through increased understanding of the natural world, there appears to be every reason for our indigenous psychology to have been revised by enlightened opinion. That it has remained relatively impervious to psychological developments suggests that instead of being like accounts of the external, physical world, which can be improved upon by scientific experimentation, its "truth" is to be sought with respect to its function in sustaining a particular meaningful complex of self, society and culture. On this view our classification and ways of handling emotions, for example, are no more true or false than those found in other cultures—the notions and strategies simply have different jobs to do. Catharsis, the purgation of distressful emotions, might not really occur. However, this does not prevent those who want to justify violence on the screen appealing to a useful "myth".

Examining the truth-value of indigenous notions is a complicated matter. Whether indigenous notions describe actual psychological states and processes (in which case classifications of emotions can be judged against something), whether they organize, indeed constitute what is psychologically existent (in which case different classifications are equally true), or whether they operate as "mythological" items within broader institutions (in which case they are not really to do with generic psychological nature) are alternatives which have not yet been fully investigated. Most of the present contributors, however, suggest the view which is currently gaining acceptance, namely that man can be seen as self-defining and self-constituting. Hence the fundamental importance of cultural "expressions" of the self and hence the reason why we should carefully examine the responses of other cultures to the ever-pressing issue of how to conceive and handle the self.

At the same time, however, we would be ill-advised to be content with cultural relativism, with the view that what we are and how successfully we handle and conceive of ourselves is basically a consequence or measure of our own particular indigenous psychology and society. Many psychological processes operate independently of culture, which means that we can look to experimental evidence or to other cultures to establish what is amiss with our notions and to establish that better understanding which could result in an improvement of our self-knowledge and self-potential. Are we justified in assuming, for example, that our indigenous notions concerning catharsis have anything to do with our generic psychological nature, or should they be understood simply as culturally appropriate, fashionable, ways of talking about and justifying emotions? It would be good to know whether catharsis really occurs during football matches, or whether crowds are stimulated to feel more aggressive. Quite possibly our indigenous psychology is condoning institutions—from violence in the sports arena to violent films and pornography—which

actually do the opposite of what catharsis "theorists" believe: in which case we should perhaps rid ourselves of an unfruitful notion. Or again, we might actually do the wrong things to relax or sober up (recent evidence suggests that a cup of coffee after a party does not help in driving home).

Our culture is striving to develop new psychological techniques and language to aid in the development of what we want to be. Consider child development and education, the new organizations such as EST and the psychologically minded new religions, treatments of mental illness, and the self-improvement literature. Our traditional ways of handling the emotions, of gaining peace, of judging others, of thinking about the self in general, might well not be the best. To the extent that we are self-defining and self-constituting, what is best is a matter of what is conceived of as such in terms of our sociocultural assumptions and values. Thus our indigenous psychology works to maintain and fulfil what our social world defines as that which we should be. But perhaps this counts against what our basic psychological nature demands of us: in other words, that sociocultural views of the self do not necessarily fulfil the "needs" of the self as a natural psychological entity. For example, it appears that a natural response to dying—involving all concerned—is anger, which is scarcely catered for in our society.

The *conservatism* of regarding ourselves as social and cultural products—whilst part of the story—must face the *challenge* that new formulations and other indigenous psychologies might provide more accurate and useful ways of managing the self. Hence the optimism of our psychological age, an optimism seen in those who are searching, turning to other cultures, developing Freudian ideas, and in general working for new insights and techniques.

The starting point of this book was a series of informal meetings at the University of Lancaster. We would like to thank all those who took part. The contributors to the book must also be thanked for their efforts in applying themselves to a subject whose nature was only revealed as work went on.

Lancaster, December 1980

Paul Heelas  
Andrew Lock

achieving harmony between the opposing energies or elements. The world in its natural state conforms to the *Tao* which represents an orderedness, harmony, integration and cooperation within all things and which is the pre-established pattern into which all things ought to fall if they are functioning in an ideal way. Jung is, to a great extent, sympathetic to this attitude towards nature—in particular with regard to the functioning of the psyche. He too has a theory of energy (libido), the fundamental principle of which is that psychic life is governed by a necessary opposition.

Jung also argues that psychic energy operates according to antithesis and moves both progressively and regressively. Progression is associated with consciousness and adaption of the outside world, while regression is a movement more in the direction of the unconscious and springs from the need to adapt to an inner law. Both are essential functions, therefore, of the normal psychic experience. Two other instances of opposing psychic functions are: (a) the inward and outward movement which manifests itself as introversion and extraversion, and (b) the "anima" and "animus" (comparable to yin and yang) which influence an individual by unconscious promptings and thereby achieve a balance of male and female characteristics in the psyche.

Observing, like the Taoists, that our predicament is typically one of a struggle to maintain an equilibrium between the opposing forces in the psyche, Jung indicates that the goal towards which we should strive is one of harmony between the opposites. Again in agreement with Taoism, Jung argues that because the psyche's natural state is one of balance the unconscious almost always compensates for that which is overdeveloped in our conscious life by making us aware of the neglected area. Both the Taoists and Jung agree that by achieving harmony in life one also learns to recognize the principle of the Whole which undergirds all nature. Both would admit that duality cannot be destroyed as such, since everything in nature has or is defined by its opposite. This does not mean, however, that a potential reconciliation of opposites, a tension between them and a state of wholeness, is not intuited. Just as the Taoist's ambition is to achieve a state of wholeness so too was this Jung's lifelong goal. Through analysis the patient faces his psyche in all its aspects, the unconscious and the conscious, the bad as well as the good, so that the "individuated" person arrives at a balance between the opposing forces in his nature thereby enjoying psychic equilibrium. The centre of gravity of the total personality shifts its position, being no longer in the ego (which is merely the centre of consciousness), to the "self" which is at the hypothetical point between conscious and unconscious.

There is a more than superficial resemblance between Eastern religious

practice and the path of Jungian "individuation"—the process of shifting the centre of gravity from the ego to the self, the maturing of the individual. In the process of individuation a newly created focussing-point emerges as a new component of the psyche. Clinging to the ego is a symptom of conflict between the opposites, whereas allowing the self to assume responsibility results in an inner balance of wholeness. The opposites still remain, since that is the nature of things, but instead of the one-sidedness of the ego's domination there is a shift in orientation towards the self which has an integrating influence. Although the ego still functions as the centre of consciousness alone it now finds itself revolving around the self very much as the earth rotates around the sun.

It is not by chance that the development of psychology has occurred so recently in Western history. A spiritual need has produced, in our time, psychological discoveries that are a response to this need. Jung suggests that the spiritual wants are being answered, in part, by the medical tradition, because he sees modern psychotherapeutic methods as coming close to yogic techniques. This may, or may not be a valid assumption but it seems possible that our particular "yoga", relevant and natural to our Western psyches may proceed from historical patterns unknown to the East. While acknowledging the vital role that Eastern thought has played in drawing our attention to our spiritual and psychic life that had hitherto been dangerously neglected, Jung maintained that only by standing firmly on our (indigenous) soil can we assimilate the spirit of the East.

## NOTES

1. The first section of this chapter was written by Adrian Cunningham, the second by Deborah Tickner.
2. I wish to acknowledge the substantial assistance of Jennifer Shaw in the final version of this section.

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