The Virtue of Multiculturalism

Personal Transformation, Character, and Openness to the Other

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The social, intellectual, and moral movement known as multiculturalism has been enormously influential in psychology. Its ability to reshape psychology has been due to its ethical force, which derives from the attractiveness of its aims of inclusion, social justice, and mutual respect. The cultivation of cultural competence, presented as a developmental process of acquiring self-awareness, cultural knowledge, and skills, is an important emphasis in the multicultural literature. The authors place the cultural competence literature in dialogue with virtue ethics (a contemporary ethical theory derived from Aristotle) to develop a rich and illuminating way for psychologists to understand and embody the personal self-examination, commitment, and transformation required for learning and practicing in a culturally competent manner. According to virtue ethics, multiculturalism can be seen as the pursuit of worthwhile goals that require personal strengths or virtues, knowledge, consistent actions, proper motivation, and practical wisdom. The authors term the virtue of multiculturalism openness to the other *and conclude by describing how attention to cultural matters also transforms virtue ethics in important and necessary ways.*

Keywords: multicultural, cultural competence, character, virtue

The social, intellectual, and moral movement known as multiculturalism has had a tremendous impact in psychology. Psychologists continue to revise training models, service delivery, and research endeavors to address the concerns raised by this movement (American Psychological Association [APA], 2002, 2003). Multiculturalism is, appropriately, a multivocal movement, and it is impossible to capture the full range of perspectives in a single article. For this reason, we focus on multicultural counseling and therapy. Although there are many viewpoints in this area as well, a significant center of gravity has emerged around the three-component developmental model of cultural competence comprising awareness, knowledge, and skills. Multicultural experts first articulated this model over 20 years ago (APA, 1993; Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue et al., 1982), and it evolved into the APA's (2003) "Guidelines on Multicultural Education, Training, Research, Practice, and Organizational Change for Psychologists" (henceforth referred to as the Multicultural Guidelines).

Discussions of the multicultural movement in general, and of cultural competence in particular, frequently emphasize the ways that unreconstructed therapeutic theory and practice are harmful to ethnic minorities by contributing to their oppression and marginalization. For example, Sue and Sue (2003) stated,

Counseling and psychotherapy have done great harm to culturally diverse groups by invalidating their life experiences, by defining their cultural values or differences as deviant and pathological, by denying them culturally appropriate care, and by imposing the values of the dominant culture upon them. (p. 8)

This emphasis on reducing harm exemplifies the deeply ethical intent of multicultural perspectives. This ethical core is also clear in the positive aims that this movement promotes: social understanding, inclusion, affirmation, and harmony in a pluralistic world. The core of this movement is a principled ethical argument that a monocultural psychology is not simply less accurate or generalizable, but positively distortive and oppressive. Multiculturalists stress that failure to appreciate the importance of cultural identity and to combat oppression do not merely render psychology's promotion of human welfare less effective. Rather, multiculturalists argue persuasively that such ethical failings undermine the very legitimacy of psychology (Arredondo, 1999; Comas-Díaz, 2000; Pedersen & Ivey, 1993; Sue & Sue, 2003). Therefore, understanding the ethical bases of the multicultural outlook is crucial to comprehending both its power and its limitations (Fowers & Richardson, 1996).

The Multicultural Guidelines (APA, 2003, p. 379) strongly state the ethical argument for cultural competence by reference to the principles of the APA Ethics Code: Psychologists are called on "to be competent to work with a variety of populations (Principle A), to respect others' rights (Principle D), to be concerned to not harm others (Principle E), and to contribute to social justice (Principle F . . .)." Although multicultural authors frequently make reference to the Ethical Principles of Psychologists in this way, there is no systematic, well-articulated theory of eth-

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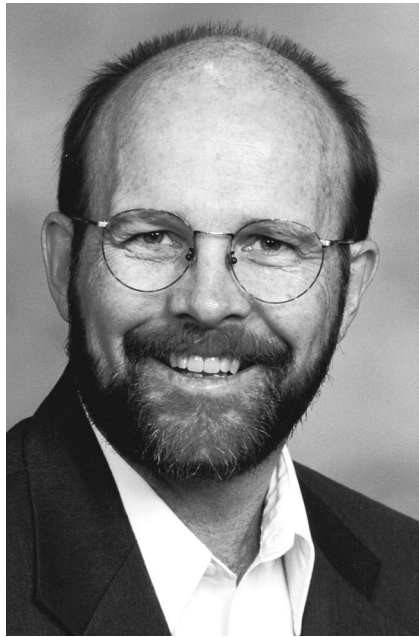
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ics for the multicultural movement. These writers generally state the ethical underpinnings of this movement simply in terms of avoiding harm and injustices or as a matter of providing effective service.

One of the purposes of this article is to explore the resources of a systematic and well-articulated ethical theory for enriching and enhancing psychology's responsiveness to cultural concerns. As we have noted above, multiculturalism is a deeply ethical movement. Psychologists' ability to work toward the ethical aims of multiculturalism and to teach their students to do so will be significantly strengthened by the development of an explicit and systematic ethical theory for multiculturalism.

Although there are many ethical theories that could be fruitfully engaged for this purpose, we see virtue ethics as particularly illuminating for cultivating cultural competence because of its emphasis on personal transformation and developing the personal strengths that allow one to pursue multiculturalism's worthwhile aims. No doubt, others could make a good case for the benefits of Kantian, utilitarian, Buddhist, or other perspectives, and we would welcome such endeavors. We focus on virtue ethics in this article to allow us to explore, in some depth, how its rich conception of social and moral relations can provide a deep and nuanced ethical theory for multiculturalism. We are not proposing virtue ethics as a substitute for multicultural viewpoints. Rather, we suggest that viewing multiculturalism through the lens of virtue ethics, and virtue ethics through the lens of multicultural thought, can illuminate and enrich both perspectives.

There has been a strong revival of interest in virtue ethics in moral philosophy (Hursthouse, 1999; Sherman, 1989), and character has garnered increasing interest

among psychologists (Fowers, 2005; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & McCullough, 2001). Virtue ethics is a theory of ethics that centers on the concept of human flourishing, which is the full expression of our humanity. Virtues are the character strengths that are necessary for flourishing, and a primary emphasis of virtue ethics is the cultivation of these character strengths as the pathway for ethical action. In virtue ethics, acting rightly grows out of good character, which contrasts with principle-based ethics, in which acting rightly amounts to following principles or rules. Contrasts of the two ethical theories tend to be lengthy and can be found elsewhere (Hursthouse, 1999; Meara, Schmidt, & Day, 1996; Slote, 1995). Although Aristotle's (ca 330 BCE/1998) *The Nicomachean Ethics* is the primary source for virtue ethicists, his thought has been modified and supplemented in important ways to render it consistent with contemporary sensibilities (Fowers, 2005; Hursthouse, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981; McDowell, 1996; Sherman, 1989; Wiggins, 1980).

We also show how the virtue framework highlights other crucial aspects of multiculturalism that have not received sufficient attention. For example, we suggest that personal transformation is central to multicultural training. Virtue ethics provides a deep and illuminating account of this personal transformation and places this individual experience within the context of the collective effort to achieve the goods associated with a greater appreciation of diversity in our profession and society.

Another potential contribution of virtue ethics to multiculturalism is that the virtue perspective emphasizes the powerful connection between what a profession sees as worthwhile (e.g., psychological well-being) and the personal strengths that professionals need to pursue that good. There is an intrinsic relationship between the aims we seek and the personal characteristics necessary for this pursuit. In broad terms, psychotherapy clients come to therapists seeking relief from their psychological pain. They reveal their pain to therapists, making themselves vulnerable. Good psychotherapists respond to this suffering and vulnerability with skill and knowledge, but the value of their interventions is strongly dependent on the care and concern they demonstrate. This caring response is characteristic and habitual for good therapists. In other words, such therapists have the character strength of compassion (cf. Drane, 1994; Meara et al., 1996). Within normal human limits, if a therapist is not reliably compassionate, one would have questions about how well that therapist is suited to the profession.

Similarly, in order to pursue the aims of multiculturalism (e.g., inclusion), a psychologist has to be characteristically open-minded toward and interested in various dimensions of diversity. Thus, a culturally competent therapist is one who acts knowledgeably and consistently with openness to the other. We argue that openness to the other is a character strength for two reasons. First, it is necessary for pursuing multicultural aims successfully. Second, to be culturally competent, one must be able to interact consistently with sensitivity to cultural differences.

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Because this openness is often hard-won, we focus particularly on the personal transformation and growth that multiculturalism calls on us to undertake. Multicultural training and practice are thus oriented toward bringing out the best in psychologists and their students rather than settling for rule following or the possession of a set of skills that may or may not be used. We have no doubt that many multiculturalists agree with this emphasis on becoming a better human being through multiculturalism. The virtue framework crystallizes and concentrates on the elevating aspects of multiculturalism, whereas the language of cultural competency refers to this elevation obliquely.

Multiculturalism also challenges virtue ethics in a very productive manner. Conceptions of virtue are invariably culture bound to some degree, in spite of commonalities among various accounts of good character. One of the important questions in contemporary virtue ethics is its capacity to accommodate pluralism. Systematically integrating multiculturalism into modern virtue ethics requires significant alterations in virtue ethics to accommodate openness to cultural differences and pluralism. We conclude the article by outlining the intriguing and significant possibilities afforded by such a transformation of virtue ethics.

Modern Qualms About Virtue

There are many differences between multiculturalism and virtue ethics. One apparent, but deceptive, difference is that virtue ethics is sometimes seen as belonging to the political right and multiculturalism to the political left (Bernstein, 1994; Wolfe, 2001). If we accept such polarizing political simplifications, we severely constrain the contributions of both perspectives. At their best, multiculturalism and virtue ethics have much to say to people across the political spectrum about how to enrich and deepen their personal and professional lives.

Virtue is often misconstrued as a religious concept or frequently seen as a Christian framework. We present virtue ethics from a secular viewpoint, relying on classical sources (primarily Aristotle's [ca 330 BCE/1998] *The Nicomachean Ethics*) rather than contemporary political or religious doctrines. Virtue concepts have been articulated and practiced in many cultures and times, including in historical warrior societies such as that of the Lakota (Sioux) and the Homeric Greeks, in Eastern traditions such as Buddhism and Confucianism, and in more recent Jewish, Christian, and Victorian traditions (Aquinas, 1273/1952; MacIntyre, 1981; Woodruff, 2001). Each of these traditions can provide helpful perspectives on virtue, but we have chosen to focus on Aristotle for several reasons. The most important is that Aristotle (ca 330 BCE/1998) presented a systematic, wide-ranging, subtle, and powerful account of virtue. He was the originator of virtue theory in Western civilization, and all subsequent Western theorists of virtue owe a large debt to his views. A flood of recent scholarly attention to Aristotelian virtue ethics has made it more accessible and applicable to contemporary concerns. It is, however, clear to us that Aristotle does not have the last word, and one of our aims is to examine virtue ethics critically to ascertain which alterations are necessary to more fully incorporate a multicultural perspective.

One way to see the necessity of amending Aristotle's ethics is in the importance of acknowledging, but disavowing, Aristotle's views on men and women and on slavery. He saw men as morally superior to women by nature and accepted slavery. Ancient authors saw the inequality between men and women and a nonracial form of slavery as part of the natural social order, and they rarely questioned these notions. In the contemporary world, we rightly repudiate the ancient world's views on these injustices, but it is anachronistic to expect Aristotle to have done so. Although his views on women and slavery are unacceptable, they do not disqualify his work as a whole, because these views are not integral to his account of the virtues. Contemporary discussions of virtue (including ours) unequivocally assume the equality of men and women and the unacceptability of slavery or exploitation. In this way, contemporary sensibilities about diversity have already helped to reformulate virtue ethics.

Indeed, this is one of the ways in which we see that Aristotle did not have the last word on ethical questions. We can fruitfully reinterpret and reappropriate his ethical views—while repudiating his views on inequality—and pursue a dialogue between virtue ethics and multiculturalism. We are presenting an Aristotelian ethical framework as a *beginning* point to explore how virtue ethics might be helpful in multicultural theory, practice, and training. If the intersection of these viewpoints seems fruitful, then further exploration of multiple virtue perspectives will enrich this conversation.

A Virtue Ethics Framework for Multiculturalism

We describe six central features of virtue and show how these features encompass and illuminate important aspects of multiculturalism and deepen our understanding of them. According to virtue ethics, living well is (a) animated by the pursuit of worthwhile goods (or goals) that (b) require personal strengths or virtues that are (c) informed by knowledge of virtues, (d) expressed through consistent actions, (e) motivated by a wholehearted desire to seek the goods, and (f) pursued wisely. In the best kind of actions, these elements combine seamlessly to promote human flourishing. Each of these six elements of virtue is essential in Aristotle's views on human flourishing and virtue.

Promoting multiculturalism undoubtedly engages us in the pursuit of worthwhile goods. Embracing cultural differences surely requires strength of character, which we term *openness to the other*, knowledge about openness to the other (including the general and specific aspects of culture that inform openness and make it possible), and consistent action along the lines of this knowledge, action that is motivated by an unconflicted respect and interest in those who are culturally different from oneself and that is guided by wise choices. In what follows, we examine how these six features of virtue ethics provide an illuminating framework for enhancing our engagement with cultural differences and fostering excellence in multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism's Pursuit of Worthwhile Goods

Aristotle (ca 330 BCE/1998) began his primary ethical work *The Nicomachean Ethics* as follows: "Every art and every simple inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good" (p. 1). Virtue ethics emphasizes that our actions are aimed at bringing some good or goal into being. One of the key aspects of developing good character is to adopt worthwhile goals (e.g., psychological well-being, inclusion) as one's own. The goals that individuals espouse and pursue help to define them as one kind of person or another. Persons of good character are naturally attracted to aims that are seen as worthwhile within a profession or community. (Later we discuss the possibility that individuals, communities, and professions can be misguided regarding their aims.) Because they have taken on these aims, these individuals spontaneously act to bring their goals into being. Virtue ethics underlines the connection between attraction to worthwhile aims and spontaneous and consistent action on behalf of those goals. This connection can enhance our multicultural teaching by focusing it on the goods we want to bring about and reminding us to present multicultural aims in ways that *inspire* students to embrace them.

Advocates of multiculturalism propose a number of goods toward which the movement aims. Our success in training for and maintaining culturally competent practice in psychology is dependent on our clarity about these goals. In particular, as virtue ethicists frequently emphasize, the better we understand what is good, the more we will be inspired to pursue that good in a wholehearted or unconflicted manner.

The Multicultural Guidelines (APA, 2003) nicely summarize the goals of multicultural training as promoting "respect and inclusiveness for the national heritage of all cultural groups" (p. 382) and the development of a culturally informed psychology in which psychologists

assume the responsibility for contributing to the advancement of cultural knowledge, sensitivity, and understanding. In other words, psychologists are in a position to provide leadership as agents of prosocial change, advocacy, and social justice, thereby promoting societal understanding, affirmation, and appreciation of multiculturalism against the damaging effects of individual, institutional, and societal racism, prejudice, and all forms of oppression based on stereotyping and discrimination. . . . Psychologists are uniquely able to promote racial equity and social justice. (p. 382)

Clearly, multiculturalism has a deeply ethical agenda, promoting social goods including mutual understanding, mutual affirmation, cooperation, inclusion, equity, and social justice (Sue et al., 1998). It is easy to see how such attractive goals have inspired arduous and heartfelt efforts in reforming psychology and society, particularly if one contrasts these goals with their opposites (prejudice, discrimination, oppression, and injustice). Virtue ethics highlights the way in which the worthiness of these multicultural goods inspires devotion to them. Understanding the capacity of the multicultural movement to transform the power structure of psychology and society requires a recognition of the attractiveness of these goods to individuals from the majority culture (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). It is also important to recognize that there is a plurality of goods, which are sometimes consistent and sometimes conflicting both within particular communities and across communities, which we discuss in the final section.

The Character Strength Necessary for Seeking Multicultural Ends

Pursuing worthy goals such as mutual affirmation, inclusion, and equity requires the capacity to recognize and appreciate differences in cultural beliefs and practices. Psychologists can promote these goals only if we develop the capacity to be open to those who differ from us culturally. This openness to the other is a character strength or virtue because it is intrinsically tied to the ability to promote the aims of multiculturalism, and psychologists have to be open to the other consistently to pursue these goals. We believe that the cultivation of this openness is a key aspect of multicultural training.

Multiculturalists understand that the virtue of openness to the other is generally not naturally present in individuals and is often at variance with previous socialization. Racism, ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and other ingroup biases are commonly internalized as individuals are enculturated into cultural, racial, religious, and other well-established groups (Fiske, 1998; Hewstone, Rubin, & Wil-

lis, 2002; Triandis, 1994). The alteration of the psychological and social bases of this in-group bias that is necessary for multicultural training and practice requires sustained and strenuous efforts. Training in multicultural therapy aims to replace these biases with *cultural competence*, which many authors conceive of in a three-part model comprising self-awareness, knowledge, and skills. Multicultural training is, in part, the process of transforming internalized ethnocentrism by accepting the cultural relativity of one's worldview.

Sue and Sue (2003) defined the first component of cultural competence, personal awareness, by saying that "a culturally competent helping professional is one who is active in the process of becoming aware of his or her own assumptions about human behavior, values, biases, preconceived notions, personal limitations, and so forth" (pp. 17–18). This means that good multicultural practice begins with active self-exploration, which leads to self-awareness of one's personal and culturally inherited understandings (APA, 2003; Comas-Díaz, 2000; Pope-Davis & Dings, 1995). Pedersen and Ivey (1993) believe that cultural awareness is essential because it "helps people become aware of the intentional priority they give to selected attitudes, opinions, and values. They are able to compare and contrast their own viewpoint with alternative points of view accurately" (p. 20). This awareness allows an individual to recognize that his or her worldview is an internalization of a particular cultural perspective rather than universal truth.

The process of becoming aware of one's values, biases, and limitations is no mere cataloging of sources of error but the starting point for self-exploration and personal transformation through which psychologists learn to recognize the way that their own experiences, heritage, and standpoints influence how they see themselves and others. Cultural self-exploration teaches us that our perspectives are limited, partial, and relative to our own backgrounds. We learn the distressing fact that all of the taken-for-granted, obviously true presumptions and practices that we absorbed in our enculturation are part of one worldview among many and open to question from many different standpoints. During this prolonged and unsettling process of recognizing the cultural relativity of our cherished convictions, we must give up the comforting ethnocentrism, sense of cultural superiority, and unrecognized privilege that is often part of our untutored cultural outlook (APA, 2003; Cushman, 2001; Kiselica, 1998). The goal of multiculturalism is not to undermine allegiance to one's own social group but to clarify that others have similarly legitimate commitments to their own ways of life that are worthy of respect. Nevertheless, surrendering ethnocentrism involves the loss of a sense of cultural superiority and centrality that might engender genuine grief and dislocation. It also entails "owning up to painful realities about oneself, our group, and our society" (Sue et al., 1998, p. 61). Therefore, this process requires "an unusual level of openness and sensitivity toward personal and professional change" (Daniels & D'Andrea, 1996, p. 169).

This personal transformation involves confronting "the emotional impact of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings associated with cultural differences" particularly the responsibility we might have for a "racist, oppressive, and discriminating manner" of "deal[ing] with persons of color . . . . Culturally competent therapists accept responsibility for their own racism, sexism, and so forth and attempt to deal with them in a nondefensive, guilt-free manner" (Sue & Sue, 2003, pp. 18–19). The psychological processes of categorization and a favorable bias toward members of one's own group are relatively automatic and tend to operate below conscious awareness (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Fiske, 1998; Hewstone et al., 2002). This means that it requires significant effort to come to recognize those biases, some discomfort in setting them aside, and ongoing exertion and practice to change one's perceptions and actions (APA, 2003). In describing his personal experience as a White psychologist working toward cultural competence, Kiselica (1998) noted that even "deciding whether to engage in multicultural training can be unsettling and anxiety provoking" (p. 6). He found that the actual experience of "cross-cultural education and counseling can spark serious introspection . . . [and] painful self-discovery" and that "achieving a nonracist, White identity typically involves a long and painful process" on the way to "significantly positive personal and professional growth" (pp. 6–8). Sue et al. (1992) added that cultural competence requires individuals to engage in an ongoing process of "*constantly* seeking to understand themselves as racial and cultural beings and . . . actively seeking a nonracist *identity*" (p. 482, italics added). In other words, cultural competence involves profound changes in our self-understanding and sense of who we are.

The Multicultural Guidelines suggest many strategies for personal transformation, including "increased contact with other groups"; cultivating empathy for culturally different others; "actively seeing individuals as individuals rather than as members of a group"; changing "the perception of us versus them to we or . . . [recategorizing] the out-group as members of the in-group"; and actively working toward "increasing . . . [one's] tolerance" (APA, 2003, p. 384). All of these strategies are effortful, continuous activities that require psychologists to counteract deeply entrenched socialization experiences and relatively automatic psychological processes over a significant period and adopt a more inclusive standpoint.

The authors of the Multicultural Guidelines acknowledged that culture-centered training "moves into what is viewed as more personal domains" and introduces "material many students have never thought about, may not care about, and may have reluctance to engage in" (APA, 2003, p. 387). Given the arduousness of this process and the demands of questioning one's lifelong loyalty to and the presumed universality of one's cultural worldview, trainees and psychologists frequently fear making these difficult changes and resist them (Jackson, 1999; Kiselica, 1998; Mio & Awakuni, 2000; Sue et al., 1998). For this reason,

Arredondo (1999) clarified that it takes "courage to change and to work cross-culturally" (p. 104).

The process of developing cultural competence does not have an end point (Pedersen & Ivey, 1993; Sue et al., 1982). Sue and Sue (2003) asserted that it is necessary to continue "to explore and learn about issues related to various minority groups throughout [one's] professional career" (p. 21). In discussing the prevalence of covert, unintentional racism, Mio (Mio & Awakuni, 2000) disclosed an incident in which he expressed this form of racism. He then related, "I have to be continually vigilant, or my covert, unintentional racism will . . . become insidiously ingrained in me . . . if something that I think or do is pointed out as unintentionally racist, I will *immediately* attempt to eliminate it from my repertoire of responses" (p. 22, italics added). This disclosure suggests that even someone as well-versed as Mio has to be vigilant and active in eliminating racist thoughts or actions. His willingness to do so immediately and wholeheartedly exemplifies the character excellence we are discussing in this article.

This extensive and ongoing self-transformation process involves the trainee in very personally significant ways, and it clearly parallels the cultivation of character strengths. Aristotle (ca 330 BCE/1998) described the process of learning character strengths such as honesty, courage, or justice in very similar terms: "Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and [they] are made perfect by habit" (p. 28). This learning requires teaching, feedback, modeling, and guidance from those who already exhibit the character strength. One acquires character strengths intentionally, through gradual efforts, by practicing them, by identifying and counteracting contrary desires, by altering one's cognitions in line with one's knowledge about the virtue, and by becoming the kind of person who habitually engages in these cognitions and actions.

One begins by acting and thinking in the ways that persons of good character do. These thoughts and actions become habitual through doing them again and again, which results in all of this becoming second nature. As a result, individuals of character *identify* with these traits, rather than merely acting as if they were honest, courageous, or open to the other. Virtues are known as character strengths because acquiring a virtue means making it *characteristic* of oneself. The spontaneous enactment of generosity, honesty, courage, or openness to the other is a hallmark of virtue that grows out of making these traits second nature (i.e., internalizing them). We suggest that cultural competence, or openness to the other, is a character strength, because developing it so closely matches the character development process. Becoming a person who is characteristically open to the other requires us to elevate, intentionally and substantially, the kind of persons that we are through self-transformation. Significant character development can occur in a relatively brief period of time, but developing character strength and cultural competence require ongoing attention and effort throughout one's life.

Experts in cultural competence have always described it as a long-term, aspirational aim. Seeing cultural competence as a character strength is quite consistent with the conceptualization of cultural competence "as a developmental life-long process" that does not have an end point (Sue et al., 1998, p. 31).

Knowledge Informing Openness to the Other

One of the key ways to change oneself as a cultural being is to learn to understand culture and cultural interaction in new ways. Sue and Sue (2003) discussed the second component of cultural competence in terms of psychologists' knowledge about clients' cultural worldviews, cultural politics, and institutional barriers to good services. Although multiculturalists have debated which types of knowledge are most important, there is wide agreement that cultural competence is dependent on having some knowledge of cultural questions and practices. We cannot do justice to the robust literature on the knowledge base for culturally competent professionals, so we will have to be content simply to mention some of the key topics and refer interested readers to the extensive literatures on these issues. We touch on two forms of knowledge: general knowledge relating to cultural variation, interaction, and politics and specific knowledge about the cultural groups with which one is professionally engaged.

Some of the key aspects of general knowledge involve understanding the workings of discrimination, prejudice, and oppression and the ways that cultural bias has permeated society and the mental health professions (Comas-Díaz, 2000; Ivey, 1995; Sue & Sue, 2003). For example, Sue and Sue (2003) asserted that culturally competent therapists "should understand the value assumptions (normality and abnormality) inherent in the major schools of therapy and how they may interact with values of the culturally different" (p. 21).

Sue et al. (1992) emphasized that this knowledge is not simply informational but is also highly personalized:

Culturally skilled counselors possess knowledge and understanding about how oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping affect them personally and in their work. This allows them to acknowledge their own racist attitudes, beliefs, and feelings. Although this standard applies to all groups, for White counselors it may mean that they understand how they may have directly or indirectly benefited from individual, institutional, and cultural racism. (p. 482)

Other relevant topics that cultural competence requires a knowledge of include a general definition of culture, socialization processes, racial identity formation, the importance of within-culture variation, the intersection of multiple ethnic identities, the stigmatizing aspects of membership in a minority group, immigration, and acculturation (APA, 2003; Axelson, 1999; Pedersen & Ivey, 1993).

Many authors emphasize the importance of having specific knowledge about frequently encountered cultural groups. Commentators frequently caution psychologists to be careful of exaggerating within-group similarities or be-

tween-groups differences (Axelson, 1999; Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2003) as they gain and use this understanding of cultural particularity. Nevertheless, obtaining specific knowledge of the history, experience, cultural values, and family organizations of cultural groups is widely seen as essential to cultural competence (Axelson, 1999; Falicov, 1998; Herring, 1999; Hong & Ham, 2001; Parham, 2002). This knowledge "provides the documentation and factual information necessary to understand another culture" (Pedersen & Ivey, 1993, p. 20). This emphasis is apparent in the many chapters and books devoted to working with particular ethnic, racial, and cultural groups (Falicov, 1998; Hong & Ham, 2001; Mio & Awakuni, 2000; Parham, 2002; Sue, Ivey, & Pedersen, 1996; Sue & Sue, 2003).

It is clear from this extensive literature that culturally competent practice is crucially dependent on general and specific knowledge about culture. If we do not have some grasp of the general workings of culture and of how an individual's culture is relevant to his or her behavior, we are less likely to know what counts as cultural openness. This knowledge requirement is crucial for any virtue. For example, courageous or just actions are based, in part, on an understanding of what counts as courage or justice. If an individual lacks the relevant knowledge, then attempts to act courageously, generously, or openly with the other are likely to be misguided or incomplete (Aristotle, ca 330 BCE/1998). Knowledge about cultural matters helps to elevate naive goodwill to a solid capacity to reach out to others across cultural differences. The more one understands about cultural matters, the more likely one will be able to act with openness toward others in a consistent and well-founded manner.

In most respects and in a similar fashion, the cultural competence model and virtue ethics recognize the importance of knowledge to acting in the best ways. The contribution that a virtue perspective can make to an understanding of the role that knowledge plays in good practice is to highlight the transformative aspect of knowledge. The transformative power of knowledge is mentioned in many writings on cultural competence, but authors often understate it somewhat, describing knowledge more as a possession or a resource at the disposal of the practitioner. Virtue ethics zeroes in on the ways that knowledge transforms psychologists and encourages us to gain and teach the kind of knowledge that makes us better professionals. For example, knowledge as a possession allows a psychologist to *recognize* racial inequity in a detached way, whereas transformative knowledge also *motivates* a psychologist to act to redress the inequity in service of the individual's deep commitment to racial equity. Transformative knowledge elevates one's character in such a way that redressing injustice is seen as the sensible action to take when individuals or organizations perpetuate inequity. We suggest that transformative knowledge captures and underscores what is best in multiculturalism, and the virtue ethics emphasis on cultivating good character through transfor-

mative knowledge helps to highlight this crucial idea in multicultural practice.

From a virtue ethics perspective, the best kind of knowledge transforms individuals through shaping their characters. This knowledge provides psychologists with an understanding of what is significant about cultural matters and helps us gain the maturity to recognize that our heritages do not provide final or universal truth. Through the internalization of transformative knowledge, psychologists can become the kind of persons who consistently and knowledgeably act with openness to the other.

Openness to the Other in Consistent Action

This consistency in action is highlighted in the third (skills) component of cultural competence, which describes the psychologist as "actively developing and practicing appropriate, relevant, and sensitive intervention strategies and skills in working with his or her culturally different client" (Sue & Sue, 2003, p. 18). No amount of knowledge by itself is sufficient for cultural competence without action. Sue and Sue emphasized this in their description of all three key characteristics (self-awareness, knowledge, and skills) of culturally competent professionals, because each of the three elements prominently features the term *actively*. They clearly wanted to call attention to the personal involvement and behavioral enactment of this capacity. Arredondo (1999) clarified the centrality of action succinctly: "It is at the intervention level that the true test of competency lies" (p. 104). The Multicultural Guidelines (APA, 2003) similarly emphasize actively learning, teaching, practicing, and researching the cultural dimension of psychology.

The necessity of action shows another parallel with virtue in that there is no such thing as a virtuous thought or feeling that is unaccompanied by behavior. It would be laughable to claim that one had courageous feelings in the absences of behavioral bravery or that one had generous thoughts without following through with generous actions. In the same way, openness to the other is only real when one enacts it.

Experts on multiculturalism devote significant attention to the development of skills. This emphasis is a way to bring the self-awareness and cultural knowledge into effective professional activity. This raises important questions. What do we mean by skills? Can we adequately describe and teach cultural competence in terms of behavioral capacities, or do we need to conceptualize cultural competence in terms that involve the person of the psychologist in a more thorough way? Virtue ethics suggests the latter and provides a rich language for description, exploration, and teaching of the virtue of openness to the other.

Multicultural specialists have a variety of views on the nature of skills, ranging from recommending very general capacities (Sue & Sue, 2003), to suggesting that the generic practical skills psychologists learn may require "culture-centered adaptations" (APA, 2003, p. 390), to outlining rather specific capabilities (Arredondo et al., 1996; Pedersen & Ivey, 1993). These authors generally see skills as

being integrated with personal awareness and cultural knowledge, but their discussions of culturally competent actions tend to focus on intervention skills and strategies, and these terms do not do justice to the depth of personal involvement required for cultural competence. One of the ways that a virtue ethics framework can contribute to the aims of multicultural thought is by providing a richer description of how awareness, knowledge, and action are intertwined in the practice of excellences such as openness to the other.

On the one hand, there are advantages to limiting cultural competence to observable behaviors or skills. American professional psychology is comfortable with the concept of behavioral skills because behaviors appear to be specifiable, which confers on them a sense of objectivity that is favored in this psychology tradition. Behaviors are relatively easy to describe, teach, and measure in a systematic manner, and one can identify competence criteria for them.

On the other hand, despite the advantages of seeing cultural competence in terms of behavioral skills that one possesses, this description may be too thin and superficial to capture fully the richness and depth involved in cultivating cultural competence. As we described above, cultural competence frequently requires significant personal transformation, shifts in self-understanding, and changes in motivation and affect regarding cultural issues. We suggest that a character development approach captures the richness and personally transformative aspects of cultural competence more fully than a straightforward skills perspective. At its best, cultural competence involves becoming a particular kind of person or developing one's character toward excellence in responding to cultural matters. In other words, cultural competence is not simply the possession of self-knowledge, information about culture, and behavioral capacities that may or may not alter the psychologist as a person. Rather, one must internalize and embody this knowledge in a profound way, making it part of one's character, not just an addition to one's behavioral repertoire. This transformation of character makes it possible for psychologists to extend respect and affirmation to people with various heritages spontaneously and reliably and to do so in an informed and appropriate manner. Multiculturalists are calling on us not just to improve our therapeutic technique but to elevate our humanity. We believe that multicultural specialists are advocating significant personal transformation and involvement in becoming and acting in a culturally competent manner and that the language of skills and strategy does not do justice to these aims.

One way to see that cultural competence involves more than the possession of knowledge and behavioral capacity is to focus on Sue et al.'s (1992) suggestion that culturally competent professionals "are comfortable with differences that exist between themselves and clients in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, and beliefs" (p. 482). These authors were not suggesting mere tolerance of or skilled forbearance with others but rather an unconstrained

involvement with those who are culturally different and an awareness of those differences. This comfort goes beyond the cognitive and behavioral elements of skills and directly involves an affective/motivational set that grows out of a heartfelt appreciation of and interest in cultural differences.

Being comfortable with people from various cultural heritages does not involve a repudiation or disregard for one's own background. Rather, it is the ability to value one's own cultural commitments and to be comfortable with those who do not share those convictions and practices. This ease with cultural difference is a mark of the profound maturity that allows one to be fully committed to a way of life without insisting on its ultimate superiority or universal truth value. This maturity and depth of internalization goes well beyond what is required for learning behavioral strategies and involves the entire person of the psychologist in a way that is described much better from a character development perspective than a behavioral skills perspective. This deep internalization of cultural relativity replaces the individual's natural ethnocentricity (Fiske, 1998; Triandis, 1994) and the naturally powerful loyalty toward the individual's own culture (Fowers, 2001), which is why personal transformation is so essential to openness to the other. Of course, navigating the tensions and ambiguities of cultural differences with particular clients is very complex. Our general statements here about maturity in matters of culture are only gestures pointing at how therapists can maintain their own cultural identities and intervene within other cultural systems in a respectful and knowledgeable way.

Perhaps most important to note is that if behavioral skills were independent of the goals to which they were applied and of the kind of person who used them, then any technique, including culture-centered skills, could be used for any end, not just to benefit clients and not necessarily in a culturally respectful way. In other words, if skills and motives are separable, therapists who are not genuinely committed to multiculturalism could use their cultural skills to manipulate clients, to induce them to conform to the therapist's views more effectively, or simply to appear culturally sensitive. To give a related example, many of the listening skills (e.g., reflecting feelings, validation) that were developed to assist in psychotherapy have become standard methods used by customer service personnel to calm and mollify unhappy customers whether the objectives of the customer service personnel are consistent with the customer's best interests or not.

We are not suggesting that any multicultural authors would condone the manipulative or exploitive use of cultural competence. In fact, they take great pains to emphasize that the proper motivation is a crucial element of cultural competence, as we show below. The central point here is that unless we explicitly address cultural competence at the level of character, we encourage the separation of behavioral strategies from multicultural goals that opens the door to such manipulation. Advocates of cultural competence do not want to equip just anyone with techniques for working effectively with those who are culturally dif-

ferent from themselves, regardless of the trainee's motives and goals. Rather, multicultural trainers want to facilitate the kind of personal change that leads to a genuine and consistent openness to those who are culturally different from oneself and to respectful, beneficial, and mutually enlightening involvement. If we fail to see that cultural competence is *inseparable* from the goals of cultural respect, affirmation, and social justice, we are just as likely to train culturally competent manipulators as culturally sensitive psychologists.

Virtue ethics highlights the essential connections between person, goal, and action. The character development model emphasizes that the individual's goals and motives are central to acting well (Aristotle, ca 330 BCE/1998). The pursuit of goals such as cultural respect, affirmation, and social justice require us to be or become respectful, affirming, and just individuals, not simply to possess respect, affirmation, and justice skills. These kinds of goals are inseparable from acting habitually in ways that embody the aims. The language of skills and strategies understates these essential connections. We are suggesting that the character model provides a better fit to cultural competence than a purely behavioral skills account can. Of course, learning and practicing behaviors plays an integral role in the cultivation of character, but it makes a great deal of difference whether mastering particular behaviors is the end point or just part of becoming the kind of person who spontaneously exhibits cultural competence. A character-based approach emphasizes that the only way to be culturally competent in the way multicultural authors intend is for psychologists to employ cultural knowledge and behavioral capacity with the appropriate motives and to act wholeheartedly in pursuit of the goods of multiculturalism.

Virtue theorists describe character as a *settled disposition* to act well—those who act well reliably have character strengths, but those who do so intermittently do not. For example, we would not consider someone who gives money or time episodically, because of an ulterior motive or under duress, to be generous, whereas an individual who gives consistently enacts generosity as a character trait. Although even occasional acts of generosity, loyalty, and openness to the other are beneficial, we would only consider them evidence of character when they are part of a reliable pattern of action that indicates a settled disposition to pursue what is good. Therefore, at best, culturally competent actions are more than behavioral capacities drawn from a repertoire possessed by a psychologist; they are actions that grow out of a settled disposition to act consistently with openness to the other. Clearly, our discipline needs professionals who are genuinely and reliably open to those who are culturally different from themselves rather than individuals who have the ability to appear open when it suits their purposes. For these reasons, culturally competent actions are more an expression of one's identity and deepest commitments than strategies or techniques that one deploys.

The Motivational/Affective Dimension of Openness to the Other

Multiculturalists place a great deal of explicit emphasis on the cognitive and behavioral aspects of culturally competent practice. Virtue ethics can help us to make the affective domain, an essential element of character, a more explicit and informative part of what it means to be open to the other. As we saw above, wholehearted openness to the other requires more than having knowledge and acting on that knowledge. Psychologists can act knowledgeably but do so out of a grudging compliance. We can also act in a culturally informed manner but for manipulative purposes. For this reason, one's motivation is a crucial element of professional activity.

Aristotle (ca 330 BCE/1998) and contemporary virtue ethicists have noted three ways in which being well-motivated is essential to the best kind of actions. First, character shows in how well our emotions are aligned with our actions, and persons of character act well gladly and spontaneously rather than reluctantly because they have internalized the goods they are pursuing. Character strength is evident in this wholehearted way of acting well, because one acts resolutely, without regret or internal conflict. The full development of the virtue of openness to the other would involve being able to engage with culturally different others with genuine interest and without experiencing distaste, culturally based distrust, or defensiveness. This harmony of emotion and action is a necessary component of the best kind of activity, because our motives for action and our emotional experience of the activity can either resonate with and enhance what we are doing or create disharmony and thereby undermine our actions. The person of character acts with a clear concordance of emotion, thought, and action. There may be times when that concordance is something of an achievement, but this concordance is what differentiates the person of character from those who struggle with conflicting motivations and reluctant compliance.

Second, one of the ways that our emotions reveal the kind of person we are shows up in the types of things that elicit feelings of delight or pleasure in us and by the sorts of things that pain us. To take a simple example, we can experience fascination and pleasure at learning about the mores of another culture or we can be put off by the differences that contrast with our own way of life. Persons who find pleasure in learning about the worldview and practices of those who are culturally different from themselves have made openness to the other a part of their characters.

Successful persistence in the difficult and prolonged self-transformation of becoming culturally competent requires substantial motivation, the source of which highlights the third way our affective experience is crucial for character. This motivation grows out of our emotional attachment to the goods we pursue through our actions. When we come to recognize a goal as truly worthwhile for us, we are drawn to it and we naturally desire its achieve-

ment. For example, good scientists act honestly out of love for truth; good therapists persevere with difficult clients because they value human flourishing. Thus, when we have cultivated a love for what is good, we do not have to struggle with inner conflicts about whether or not to pursue that good. We *want* to do what is best wholeheartedly.

Herman (1996) described an architecture of desire in which our desires and emotions are responsive to reason and to being shaped by intentional habituation. She suggested that we can learn to want what our reason tells us is best. This architecture of desire indicates how we can learn to respond well to the difficulties of combating racism and other forms of oppression in ourselves and our profession, how majority individuals can recognize and relinquish their privilege, and how we can become genuinely interested in cultural matters rather than grudgingly responding to those different from ourselves. The evolution of desire points to a pathway for acting ethically without oppressing one's affective life.

From a virtue ethics standpoint, this desire to act well grows out of the attractive vision of a world that features cultural sensitivity, mutual understanding and affirmation, inclusion, social justice, and the reduction of prejudice and oppression. Mio and Awakuni (2000) suggested that majority individuals who become committed to multiculturalism do so partly from "a sense of moral outrage when they viewed prejudice and discrimination against others" and a desire to "help work toward creating a more just world" (p. 67), and some people were taught by their parents "the importance of fighting prejudice and discrimination" (p. 68). Pursuing these aims requires us to become the kind of professionals who value these ideals and make them our own. Promoting multicultural aims becomes, for many, "simply a part of who they are and they cannot imagine not engaging in allied behavior"; they "[describe] it as essential to how they see themselves" (p. 75).

The attention that virtue ethics devotes to emotional concordance helps us to see how psychologists and trainees can best be motivated to undergo self-examination and self-transformation willingly because they are attracted to worthwhile ideals. From a virtue ethics perspective, teaching these goals and focusing on the positive goods that we can attain is crucial to effective training in cultural competence. We believe that the ultimate goal of this training is to help trainees become the kind of persons who genuinely want to embody cultural competence because they see value in the social aims this competence can enable. Multicultural authors consistently allude to the harmony of emotion, motivation, and behavior that virtue ethics highlights.

Practical Wisdom in Openness to the Other

According to Sue and Sue (2003), "Multicultural counseling and therapy can be defined as both a helping role and process that uses modalities and defines goals consistent with the life experiences and cultural values of clients, recognizes [the] . . . individual, group, and universal dimensions" of client identities, uses "universal and culture-specific strategies and roles . . . , and balances the importance of individualism and collectivism in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of client and client systems" (p. 16). This vision is admirably broad and encompasses many important issues and concerns involved in working with those who are culturally different from oneself. Yet its very breadth and scope highlight the complexity and ambiguity of cultural intercourse. The question is, how do we accomplish these goals? How do we decide which modality to use, which goals are consistent with our clients' cultural values, whether to focus on the individual, group, or universal dimensions of clients' identities, or how to balance individualism and collectivism?

Pedersen and Ivey (1993) raised similar questions when they defined skill as "being able to do the right thing. Adequately trained people will have the skills to match the right method to the right situation in the right way" (p. 18). Parenthetically, although these authors did not acknowledge the fact, they were using Aristotle's standard formulation to convey that proper action is a matter of getting one's motives and actions right for the particular circumstances. Compare their wording with Aristotle's (ca 330 BCE/1998) description of the generous individual as one who "will give to the right people, the right amounts, and at the right time . . . and that too with pleasure or without pain; for that which is virtuous is pleasant or free from pain" (p. 80).

How do we get it right in cultural matters? One of the most challenging aspects of learning cultural competence is that it is an open-ended process, with virtually no hard and fast rules about how to relate well to those who differ from one culturally. The answers that we must painstakingly work out to these important but difficult questions do not provide generally valid formulations, because there is so much variability across and within cultures and between specific situations. We can become more capable of addressing cultural questions, but we will never have universally applicable rules for doing so because there are always many considerations and nuances associated with each situation.

Of course, there are general injunctions to respect others' viewpoints and to promote intergroup justice, but the proverbial devil is in the details. Even when we have relatively clear principles, we must decide how to apply them in highly specific contexts and with the particular individuals or concerns with which we are engaged. In each instance, we must decide what counts as respect with those whose social practices differ from our own. Even more problematically, we must work out the meaning of justice at the confluence of different traditions of fairness or at the intersection of majority and minority groups.

This complexity is not really new, nor is it particular to cultural intercourse. Aristotle called attention to the impossibility of formulating universal rules for acting well over two millennia ago. Virtue ethics devotes considerable attention to discerning how to make wise choices and to act well given the various situations we encounter in the absence of an algorithm for the ethical life. Aristotle used the

term *practical wisdom* to refer to the capacity to recognize what is important in a situation and to respond well and fittingly to it. Practical wisdom provides flexibility and sensitivity in responding to culture. Accordingly, acting well is not so much a matter of following rules, but of cultivating excellence in character, from which appropriate action will naturally ensue. We cannot do justice to the complex topic of practical wisdom in this article, but we provide an outline and refer interested readers to more extensive accounts published elsewhere (Fowers, 2001, 2003, 2005; Sherman, 1989; Wiggins, 1980).

For simplicity's sake, we describe practical wisdom in terms of three components even though these elements are inseparable in practice. The first component is the ability to see what is important about the particular circumstance we face, to sort out what is central and what is peripheral so that we can respond to what is vital rather than being distracted by less important concerns. Encounters with the culturally different do not come prelabeled as a particular sort of occasion, so we must discern what is at stake through a clear-sighted reading of the circumstances (Sherman, 1989). In other words, we have to recognize that a particular occasion represents an example of culturally based miscommunication or offers an opportunity to dialogue about matters such as acculturation, oppression, identity development, and so forth.

According to virtue ethics, wisdom grows out of affective as well as cognitive engagement with our circumstances, because adequate interpretations of situations are often only possible when we have certain feelings, whether those emotions are compassion, anger, love, or revulsion. Our emotional reactions help to mark out and define the ethically salient features of the situation. For example, indignation in the presence of egregious injustice is a hallmark of recognizing that injustice. The absence of indignation would suggest an insufficient recognition of the injustice or an indifference to it. Indeed, we might miss some of what is truly relevant if we see dispassionately, without engaging our emotions. Sherman (1989) underlined the importance of proper emotional engagement by saying that "without emotions, we do not fully register the facts or record them with the sort of resonance and importance that only emotional involvement can sustain" (p. 47).

The second component of practical wisdom is recognizing how to pursue one's overall aims in a particular situation. For example, consider a client who is a recent immigrant and struggling to obtain a job commensurate with the training and experience she had in her country of origin. She presents in a particular session feeling dysphoric and incompetent following an unsuccessful job interview. A therapist could attend to intrapsychic aspects of the dysphoria, to normalizing the frequent demoralization of a job search, or to cultural factors. Good therapy would likely involve all three foci, but the trick is to recognize which of these three foci are appropriate at a particular time. A therapist who is open to the other will recognize opportunities for exploring how her job seeking involves cultural facts (e.g., acculturation, worldviews, or discrimination) so

that she does not attribute her difficulties entirely to her abilities. When appropriate, helping her to learn bicultural competencies and to deal with the politics of discrimination can go a long way toward assisting her in her job search.

The third component is the ability to choose the appropriate action given the specific situation and the goals that are relevant to it. Aristotle highlights the fact that when we choose a course of action, we deliberate about what is better and worse and select what we think is the best of the available options (Sherman, 1989).

Wise choices also involve an effort to harmonize our several ends with what is currently possible. Of course, the professional objectives we seek are irreducibly heterogeneous to some extent, and at times, these ends may not be entirely harmonious. In such cases, we have to assess the relative importance of our goals and choose the course of action that best serves the most important ends or that best incorporates the largest share of our aims. We cannot make such choices in advance or in the abstract. Rather, we must engage in careful deliberation about the specific circumstances we face and about how our goals come into play on a particular occasion. The more successful we are in fashioning our professional activities in a pattern of coherent, mutually supportive endeavors, the less frequently we will have to choose between them in this way. Some conflict and tension are inevitable, however, unless we sacrifice large portions of our professional activities for the sake of simplicity and freedom from such tension. Good judgment involves choosing a course of action that best addresses our most important concerns and best harmonizes our multiple aims.

The Virtue of Multiculturalism

We can now summarize *openness to the other* as a character strength that highlights the essential components of cultural competence and provides a unifying framework for training and practice. Psychologists who have cultivated the character strength of openness to the other recognize and embody the ethical importance of multiculturalism and internalize its aims of social justice, cultural respect, and mutual affirmation. The desirability of these goals motivates these psychologists to engage in the extensive self-exploration, self-critique, and personal transformation required to cultivate openness to the other. These psychologists act in reliably culturally sensitive ways, and their professional activities have been transformed by their cultural self-awareness, knowledge about other cultural groups, and understanding of general features of culture. This educational process is ongoing as psychologists continue to seek knowledge and cultivate habits of action and affect toward making cultural competence second nature.

As psychologists' ability to understand and enact culturally sensitive practices grows, their actions go beyond simply putting knowledge and behavioral skill into action, because they engage in respectful, inclusive, and just actions wholeheartedly, out of a genuine, abiding interest in cultural matters. In short, successful training would lead psychologists to become the kind of persons who engage in

culturally competent behavior spontaneously, with heartfelt desire, and for the best reasons.

Successful multicultural training also helps psychologists address the complex issues of culture with good judgment. The wisdom to do so grows out of being able to understand one's overall goals, identify what is most important in a given situation, and choose a response that fits the circumstances and helps to advance multicultural aims.

We suggest that this construal of the virtue of openness to the other captures the essential features of multiculturalism in a systematic, unifying, and enriching way, one that can contribute to our efforts to train psychologists to offer the best kinds of services. At the same time, the virtue of openness to the other also challenges standard accounts of virtue in interesting and provocative ways that we now outline.

The Challenge of Pluralism for Virtue Ethics

Although virtue ethics can be discussed in an abstract manner, with general statements about formal relationships among virtues, goods, practical wisdom, and character education, as we have done in this article, actual virtues and the good that they serve are always embedded within and expressions of a historical culture. The catalog of virtues and goods differs across cultures, as does the specific meaning of a given virtue. For example, honor held a prominent position among ancient Greek and Victorian virtue systems, but contemporary writers do not accord such importance to honor. As modern readers, we recognize that Aristotle tied his original account of the virtues to the limited democracy of the Athenian city state and the privilege he and his students enjoyed. In this appropriation of Aristotle's thought, we have significantly modified his account to make its application appropriate to contemporary American society. Accounts of virtue inevitably change over time along with the evolution of the traditions in which they are situated.

There is a paradoxical quality to the cultural particularity of virtue conceptions that is common to all well-established worldviews. Because specific virtue perspectives represent a particular cultural standpoint, there is some danger of conservative ethnocentrism (Kitchener, 1996; Vasquez, 1996). At the same time, various versions of virtue ethics and of cultural understandings of what is best for humans in general often do claim to be valid for all humans, not just for those who participate in these particular traditions.

Just as members of cultural groups take their perspectives to be self-evidently true, most descriptions of virtue ethics, as expressions of culture, do not include a self-critical dimension that would promote an ongoing evaluation of the goods, practices, and character ideals that comprise the tradition. Philosophers and others debate the validity, shape, and catalog of virtue ethics, but the notion of ongoing internal self-revision or self-examination at a cultural level has not been incorporated fully by virtue ethicists. This absence of an explicit form of self-revision is a serious shortcoming of virtue ethics that we may be able to remedy, in part, by integrating a virtue of openness to the other.

Openness to the other begins with the necessity of taking seriously the truth claims that cultural groups make in order to understand culture and its expressions fully (MacIntyre, 1998). Participants in historical cultures typically do not see their worldview as one among many but as *the* viewpoint. Culture prescribes an understanding of human nature, of what is good for humans, and of the practices, customs, and beliefs that are conducive to its concepts of human being and human good. The vast number of cultural perspectives are famously inconsistent with each other, so their truth claims obviously cannot all be valid and universal. The now generally accepted multicultural view takes a clear position that it is both inconceivable and undesirable that any one cultural viewpoint can be accorded overall superiority. This suggests that values, virtues, and ethics are culturally relative.

How can we simultaneously take multiple perspectives on truth and goodness seriously? The starting point for this is the same as for all considerations of culture—we must begin with our own standpoint. We must engage in the cultural self-reflection so widely advocated by multiculturalists so that we can gain an initial understanding of our own standpoint and the powerful ways that it shapes our identities and grounds the convictions and commitments that help to constitute our lives and our profession. Prior to such self-reflection, we automatically and unreflectively take our inherited worldviews for granted and accord them authority regarding our choices and the merit of our actions.

In our multicultural society, we have many opportunities to see that our ways of life are not universally held and to see that culturally different others are equally attached to their worldviews. As we engage with individuals and groups who are culturally different from us, openness to their otherness presents many opportunities to seek to understand their points of view, to share our perspectives with them, and to explore what each culture esteems. This process can be seen as a cultural dialogue (Cushman, 2001; Fowers & Richardson, 1996; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999).

The richest form of dialogue is not merely an exchange of interesting information but a process in which the interlocutors actively question their own perspectives and include the other as a partner in their cultural self-exploration and learning (MacIntyre, 1998; Richardson, 2003; Richardson et al., 1999). Dialogue involves self-exploration as much as learning about the other, the articulation of one's own previously implicit values and assumptions as much as learning what is valued by the other. This kind of exchange can lead to greater self-understanding as well as appreciation for the other. It can also help one to recognize and begin to address inconsistencies, tensions, and blind spots in one's heritage. Every worldview has such shortcomings, and cultural standards and

values sometimes become seriously misguided (e.g., Nazism, McCarthyism). This kind of dialogue can be a very productive way to question the values and standards of one's cultural community in light of another point of view. At its best, dialogue is challenging and enriching, and it results in greater clarity about and often alterations in one's own worldview. Cultural dialogue introduces profound possibilities for self-examination and self-transformation in the ways that members of any culture understand what is good for them, what is praiseworthy, and how to bring that goodness into being.

Therefore, if we see openness to the other as a virtue, it is not merely another virtue alongside justice, courage, and generosity. Rather, it constitutes a transformative addition to almost any catalog of the virtues. It is transformative because a genuine openness to the other requires the willingness to allow the other to call one's own deepest beliefs and commitments into question. This openness constitutes an invitation to dialogue with culturally different others in which both points of view are compared, contrasted, and questioned.

Cultural dialogue occurs continually between cultural groups in consistent contact at an implicit level at the intersection of customs, self-understandings, economic exchanges, and so forth. It can also become an explicit conversation in therapeutic and scholarly endeavors when culture is a significant element in these pursuits. Dialogue provides a way both to take cultural truth claims seriously and yet avoid the tendency to claim universal truth. No one can predict the directions that this kind of dialogue will take. It is an open-ended endeavor that requires courage and a steadfast commitment to learning. The aims of this kind of conversation are to better appreciate the truths in each perspective, to better articulate and live up to the truths in one's own cultural standpoint, and to address the tensions and shortcomings in one's worldview.

Considered theoretically, virtue ethics is amenable to critical examination and questioning. One saving grace of Aristotle's conception of virtue ethics is the recognition that no one has the last word on the best kind of life. He repeatedly denied that the ethical truth could be stated in a definitive, once-and-for-all formulation (McDowell, 1996). Nor did he give any kind of foundational argument for the superiority of ancient Athenian mores. Rather, he began philosophical reflection on how best to live within his own cultural milieu. The stress on a universal ethic or a general account of the good life is distinctly modern, and it would be unwise to read such claims back onto Aristotle.

In fact, Aristotle taught that part of what constitutes the best kind of life is the ongoing exploration of what is highest and finest for us as humans. Some of that exploration will take place within the limited range of views and practices in a given historical culture. It is clear, however, that a cultural group can greatly multiply its resources and possibilities for cultural and personal self-reflection if the group can compare and contrast its way of life with other forms of life. In this way, openness to the other and the dialogue it promotes provide an invaluable resource for this ongoing exploration of what is good.

At a practical level, it is incumbent on therapists to prepare themselves for this kind of dialogue prior to engaging in it with clients. Therapists must become comfortable with the questions and issues that other cultural perspectives raise about their own worldviews so that when these questions arise in a therapeutic encounter, they are able to respond with openness to dialogue rather than self-assertion or defensiveness. Moreover, given the power differential inherent in the therapeutic relationship, therapists must be particularly sensitive to how their position of power can make it possible to wield inappropriate influence on a client's cultural commitments. In the give and take of cultural questioning that occurs implicitly and explicitly in every therapeutic encounter, both the therapist's and the client's ordinary understandings about how best to act and live are called into question. It is in this dialogue that the hard-won maturity and the character strength of openness to the other allow a therapist to guide the discussion in a manner that allows clients to question and examine their own worldviews without presuming that superior answers are available within the therapist's cultural perspective. Given the complexity and scope of such discussions, there is no general, step-by-step algorithm that can automatically direct cultural dialogue in beneficial directions. For this reason, cultural dialogue is dependent on the therapist's character strength and practical wisdom rather than on a set of rules.

We have argued that reconceptualizing cultural competence as the virtue of openness to the other provides an illuminating perspective on this vital capacity. The virtue perspective provides a systematic way to recognize and integrate the goals of multiculturalism with the dispositional, cognitive, emotional, motivational, behavioral, and wisdom capacities necessary for practicing cultural competence. Above all, virtue ethics clarifies that openness to the other is much more than learning information and acquiring behavioral skills. It requires being or becoming the kind of person who seeks intercultural contact and is committed to the goods of multiculturalism. The virtue of openness to the other also enhances virtue ethics by incorporating the importance of engaging in dialogue with other cultural traditions. This dialogue opens promising avenues for cultural self-reflection, self-critique, learning, and engagement. The virtue of openness to the other is a transformative capacity that can help existing cultural and virtue traditions to remain vibrant, self-reflective, and open-ended.

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