The Road to Actualized Democracy

A Psychological Exploration

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CHAPTER 14

PSYCHOLOGY AS THE SCIENCE OF HUMAN PLASTICITY

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> I hold well with Plato and do nothing marvel that he would make no laws for them that refused those laws whereby all men should have and enjoy equal portions of wealths and commodities. For the wise man did easily foresee this to be the one and only way to the wealth of a commonality, if equality of all things should be brought in and established, which I think is not possible to be observed where every man's goods be proper and peculiar to himself. For where every man under certain titles and pretences draweth and plucketh to himself as much as he can, be there never so much abundance and store, there to the redisue is left lack and poverty.
>
> —More (1516/2005, pp. 54–55)

It is apt that in discussing utopia, a term he coined, Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) refers back to Plato's (1967) conceptions of the ideal society as outlined in *The Republic*: Both men saw private ownership and wealth concentration as an obstacle to the ideal society; a judgment reached well before Marx (Marx & Engels, 1967/1848) set forth his ideal of the classless

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society. At least since the age of classical Greek scholarship, thinkers have put forward utopian ideals as a way to motivate and guide human thinking and action. Of course, the major religions have also attempted to use images of the ideal world, both during and after life, to motivate and guide believers. The bible, the Koran and the Torah all put forward images of utopia. Fundamentalist Muslims in Iran became inspired to revolution in part by the utopian image of the "Islamic Republic" articulated by Khomeini (1960/1979).

It is striking that psychologists have made few explicit attempts to put forward ideals, although ideals implicitly underlie much of psychological research. For example, B. F. Skinner explicitly articulated an ideal society in *Walden Two* (1948/1962), and idealized goals underlie the moral development model of Lawrence Kohlberg, the hierarchy of needs theorized by Abraham Maslow, the lifespan development model of Erik Erikson, among many others. Although ideals are implicit in much of psychological theorizing and empirical research, for the most part psychological researchers have stayed aloof from discussions about ideal citizens and ideal societies. Psychology has mainly attempted to understand human behavior, and sometimes the cultural context of behavior, *as it is* rather than *as it should be* in the ideal.

I believe the neglect of the ideal is a shortcoming in mainstream psychology; we can gain new opportunities to influence human society for the better by exploring ideal behaviors and ideal societies from a psychological perspective. Such explorations allow us to examine assumptions about societal goals, and to influence such goals. The political and applied potency of psychological science is increased in this way.

My first goal in putting forward ideas about "actualized democracy" has been to stimulate debate among research and practicing psychologists on the question of, "What kind of a psychological citizen should we be helping to develop as a means to achieving more democratic societies?" Toward this goal, as part of a program of research I first examined the concept of the "psychological citizen" (Moghaddam, 2008a), and then citizenship in the context of the dictatorship-democracy continuum (Moghaddam, 2013, 2016). My goal has been to put forward an integrated "package" of characteristics that the psychological citizen needs to have in order to actively participate in and constructively support an actualized society. The elements of this package make sense as a whole; it is only when an individual has all of the required characteristics that the psychological foundation for democratic citizenship has been fully established.

Discussions of utopian futures are of two main types, predicting utopias: (1) that will happen, or (2) that should happen. In the first category are Marxist predictions about the historic development, from feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism, and the classless society. Also in this category are

right-wing predictions about "the end of history" inevitably being capitalist democracies. I do not subscribe to this first school of thought, because I do not believe the direction or nature of societal change is inevitably in one direction or another. The future direction of human societies is influenced by human activities, and could change depending on technological and other forms of development. For example, we could move to become far less democratic, with dictatorship rather than democracy dominating trends in national development around the world. The rise of dictatorship as the dominant form of government around the world is a real possibility in the 21st century.

I have set out the basic outline of a utopia that "should" happen, in the sense that I see it as a desired goal. A danger in putting forward utopian goals is that discussions about real world conditions in real places could reveal wide gaps, between where we are and where one proposes we should try to go. Excellent discussions by Power (this volume) in the context of the Republic of Ireland, Sammut (this volume) in the context of Malta, and Carre (this volume) in the context of Chile all could lead to the conclusion that my utopian goals are in some respects too far away from the pragmatics of actual contexts and how things actually get done in the real world. Underlying these discussions is the ageless question about elite rule, and "who will guard the guards themselves" ("quis custodiet ipsos custodes"). Again and again, at crucial times in the history of nations such as Ireland, Malta, and Chile, elites have acted in favor of their own narrow interests rather than in support of democracy and the interests of the wider society.

The respondents to my paper have put forward some highly constructive criticisms and alternative ideas, and in particular they have highlighted major assumptions underlying my proposal—assumptions that are culturally biased. Discussions by Tejerina (this volume) and Tileaga (this volume) both suggest that I have perhaps been too simplistic in my assumptions, seeing the public as gullible, easily manipulated, and too far away from the ideal I have set out. No doubt my perspective is influenced by my experiences of living in Iran, Canada, England, and the United States. However, my contention is that in all cultures' psychological citizens and societies need to have certain common characteristics to move toward actualized democracy. I agree with de Saint-Laurent and Glaveanu (this volume) that taking bits of the characteristics of the actualized citizen in isolation can lead to paradoxical outcomes. This is a case of "the whole being more than the sum of its parts"; the 10 characteristics of the actualized citizen make an integral whole that is more than the sum of its parts.

Louis, Chonou, Achia, Chapman, and Rhee (this volume) highlight the role of group norms through their highly innovative FLINT model, rightly implying that group norms should have been given more attention

in my discussion. Louis et al., insightfully suggest that there are cultural biases underlying my discussion of actualized democracy. Obradovic (this volume) also identifies implicit biases in my discussion, particularly associated with meritocracy. I have to agree that, in some respects at least, I am "guilty as charged."

The democratic citizen and actualized democracy I have in mind are associated with certain cultural conditions. For example, the psychological citizen in an actualized democracy will have the ability to think independently and critically about even the sacred beliefs of her/his society. Some may see this as reflecting an "individualistic bias," and they are probably correct. However, there is some room for cross-cultural variations in actualized democracy, as suggested by my discussion of "contextualized democracy" (Moghaddam, 2016). That is, democracies will develop to be in some ways different from one another (British democracy is in some respects different from French democracy, which is different in some ways from American democracy, and so on), depending on the cultural context in which they developed.

Discussions by Ernø (this volume), Rosa and Gonzales (this volume), Carretero (this volume), and Mazur and Neset (this volume) explore ways in which change can be achieved toward the kind of utopia I have outlined. These are highly timely discussions, particularly because they draw attention to a neglected topic: processes of psychological and social change. Considered together, these lively and critical discussions clearly indicate that psychologists have highly valuable contributions to make on the topic of citizenship and societal ideals.

The underlying theme in our discussions is that in order to move toward actualized democracy, there must also be changes in the psychological characteristics of citizens. It is through the active participation and support of psychological citizens with the appropriate characteristic that progress toward actualized democracy can be achieved. But can human beings change in their thinking and actions in the necessary ways to become such psychological citizens? This question is relevant to all utopian ideas in psychology. For example, can the necessary changes be made, in order to achieve the ideals underlying Maslow's self-actualization model? This question of the feasibility of achieving sufficient behavioral change in order to achieve certain psychological ideals puts the issue of plasticity at the center of psychological science.

PLASTICITY, FROM SOCIETIES TO CELLS

The exploration of plasticity has so far concentrated on the brain, on neuroplasticity and so-called neural "rewiring" (Constandi, 2016; Cunningham, 2016). The discussions have particularly been focused on plasticity

in the early stages (Griebel, Pepperberg, & Oller, 2016; Johnson & de Haan, 2015) and the later stages (Green & Bavelier, 2010) of life. There have also been attempts to directly apply lessons from brain plasticity research to improve health and life experiences (Merzenich, 2013; Mrazek, Mooneyham, Mrazek, & Schooler, 2016). However, very little attention has been given to plasticity and change in behavior more broadly (for related discussions, see Moghaddam, 2002; Taylor & de la Sablonniére, 2014; Watzlawick & Weakland, 1974).

In addition to brain or neural plasticity, it is important to explore plasticity in other domains, including: developmental plasticity (malleability in the behavioral timing and sequences of human development), plasticity in social behavior (malleability in how individuals behave in social contexts), collective plasticity (malleability in group and intergroup dynamics), organizational plasticity (malleability of behavior in organizations), political plasticity (malleability in political behavior), and cultural plasticity (malleability in cultural patterns). In all these domains, the underlying question concerns how much and how fast change can come about in human thinking and action, at both individual and collective levels. From this perspective, psychology can be reconceptualized as the science of plasticity.

A major challenge is to develop an integrative model of psychological plasticity, one that encompasses malleability from societies to cells. Such a model conceptualizes change in styles of thinking and action as being constrained by malleability at both higher (more macro) and lower (more micro) levels. At the same time, certain patterns would characterize malleability at all levels. For example, malleability at all levels would be constrained by the degree of embeddedness and the number of connections between units. These features would constrain the malleability of single cells and cell assemblies in the brain, as well as individuals and groups in societies.

My proposal is that in exploring plasticity we move *from societies to cells*, from the macro to the micro. This is because the macrosocietal level has greater power to establish certain limitations on both the nature and impact of change at the micro levels. Of course, microlevel changes can also have an influence on macrolevel changes, and such complex change processes cannot be understood by isolating factors, because in this context "more is different" (Anderson, 1972). However, as a general rule the impact of macrolevel changes is broader. As an illustrative example of the macro–micro relationship, I discuss Jane Austen's (1775–1817) novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811/1977), which provides both an opportunity to demonstrate limits to plasticity set by macrolevel and microlevel factors, and also the usefulness of looking across from psychology to literature.

LIMITS TO PLASTICITY: LESSONS FROM JANE AUSTEN

A central feature of traditional psychology since the 19th century has been the rejection of links with literature and the humanities, and the attempt to position psychology close to physics, chemistry, and other sciences (Harré & Moghaddam, 2012). Even theoretical and cultural psychologists have given little attention to literature, despite novels, plays, poetry and other forms of literature playing such a foundational role in culture, influencing people in how they think and act. In an earlier discussion (Moghaddam, 2004), I argued that in some cases novelists have developed psychological ideas that can be useful to contemporary research psychologists. In the present discussion, I focus on Austen's analysis of two sets of limitations to change: first, macrolevel societal values and, second, microlevel scripts for interpersonal interactions.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen provides detailed analysis of how individual behavior is structured and confined by, first, societal values and, second, scripts that function to regulate interpersonal relations. In essence, Austen is highlighting ways in which change is prevented and stability is maintained in individual and collective behavior.

MACROLEVEL VALUES AS LIMITS TO CHANGE

Austen begins *Sense and Sensibility* by providing the reader with an in-depth assessment of the normative system of the collective culture of the time; she unravels the context and makes clear the nature of the social climate that severely limits change in the behavior of her characters. Her method for doing this is subtle and indirect, and does not involve explicit assessment of political, economic, and social systems. Rather, she explores values that explicitly and implicitly pervade collective life and limit change, sentiments that float in the air and wrap individuals like a fog – rather like the "threat in the air" posed by the stereotypes examined in Steele's research (2010). Steele found that even very subtle references to stereotypes, implying that "women are weak in math," can negatively impact the actual performance of individual minority members, resulting for example in a drop in math test scores for women. Values, stereotypes, and other aspects of the normative system "hang in the air," serving as integral features of collective culture. It is extremely difficult for individuals to evade and resist them; they provide structure and limits to behavioral change.

Austen demonstrates how behaviors deemed "incorrect" according to societal values are punished, using the example of Marianne, the younger of two sisters who are the central characters in *Sense and Sensibility*. On the

surface, Marianne's fate is not a bad one: she eventually marries an affluent and very understanding older man (she is about half his age), and lives her life within the comfortable and supportive network of her family and friends. But at a deeper level, Marianne's fate is tragic and the ultimate cost of her conformity is serious and disfiguring. She becomes a different, tamed, less spontaneous person. She is no longer the authentic, passionate, inspired Marianne we first meet at the start of the novel.

Sense and Sensibility begins by introducing the reader to the dominant normative system that regulates behavior in society, particularly its values and rules, through the Dashwood family. What we learn in the second sentence of the novel is that the Dashwood family estate is large, and in the first two paragraphs the words "residence," "property," "respectable," "owner," "estate," "legal inheritor," "interest," "fortune," "wealth," and "inheriting," take central place, embellished by phrases such as "amply provided for." In case any reader is completely insensitive and somehow fails to recognize that the society being described in the opening paragraphs is materialistic and crass, in the next few pages the same theme is loudly trumpeted through reference, yet again, to "estate," "fortune," "considerable sum," "interest" and other such terms referring to finance in general, as well as to more specific measures of the "worth" of each individual according to the market of the day, "seven thousand pounds in his own disposal," "a thousand pounds a piece," "ten thousand pounds," "four thousand a year," "three thousand pounds," and so forth. Thus, the introductory chapter of only four pages gives the strong impression that the Dashwoods live in a society that values money above everything else, and that assesses the worth of each person by their material wealth. Indeed, each person is assigned a specific monetary value.

The highlighting of materialism continues in chapter two, as we become more familiar with other members of the Dashwood family. After the death of Mr. Henry Dashwood, the family estate has passed on to his son by a first marriage, Mr. John Dashwood, leaving his second wife and their three daughters, Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret, with a meager income. But on his father's deathbed, Mr. John Dashwood promised that he would do everything in his power to ensure that his stepmother and stepsisters live comfortably. At the start of chapter two, we learn that Mr. John Dashwood intended to give his stepmother and stepsisters 3,000 pounds—but that was before Mrs. John Dashwood set to work to change his mind. Indeed, we quickly learn that Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood always end up with the same opinions, and that their final shared opinions always originate from Mrs. Dashwood. The 3,000 pounds that was going to be given to the stepmother and stepsisters gets cut to 1,500 pounds, then to 100 pounds a year, then "A present of fifty pounds now and then" (p. 28), and then nothing, so that Mr. John Dashwood "finally

resolved that it would be absolutely unnecessary, if not highly indecorous, to do more for the widow and children of his father than such kind of neighborly acts as his own wife pointed out" (p. 29). However, this is not the end of it, because Mrs. John Dashwood tells her husband that, since his stepmother and stepsisters will be living in isolation, with no social life or luxuries, "They will be much more able to give *you* something" (p. 28).

It is revealing that the path taken by Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood to reach this conclusion is even more reflective of crass materialism than the conclusion itself. When Mr. John Dashwood proposes that, rather than give money to all three, it might be better to provide an annuity of a hundred pounds a year for his stepmother, and in this way "My sisters would feel the good effects of it as well as herself" (p. 27), his wife points out that his stepmother could live longer *because* there is an annuity, "people always live forever when there is an annuity to be paid them" (p. 27). Rather than seeing a longer life for his stepmother as a good outcome, Mr. John Dashwood shudders at the thought of having to "be tied down to the regular payment of such a sum on every rent day" (p. 27). No, much better that his stepmother and stepsisters give *him* something.

Having established the values and norms of society that regulate behavior in the first two chapters, Austen unfolds the rest of the story in such a way as to make clear that, except for a few notable exceptions, the decisions, sentiments, and fate of each character is shaped in large part, in the case of some, or completely, in the case of others, by material factors and monetary considerations. The individual characters feel and express emotions, and interpret the emotions of others, in ways that, to varying degrees, are ultimately determined by how much money each of them has. Some individuals, such as Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood, are already completely overpowered by materialistic values when we meet them, while others, such as Marianne, succumb to the power of money over time. Only a small number, such as Elinor and her eventual husband Edward Ferrars, meet a fate that allows genuine emotions to be expressed and shared, but this is more by strange coincidence and sheer chance than by design.

Within this materialistic culture Austen sets 17-year-old Marianne and her sister Elinor, older by 2 years. The two sisters are forced to enter the marriage market empty handed, because the death of their father has put them in a precarious financial situation. Of course, as in all circumstances in which youth and potential marriage are coupled, emotions immediately take center stage. Even in a materialistic culture, where for most people money is the major concern in making matrimonial matches, emotions are still an important part of youthful experiences. What emotions will Elinor and Marianne personally experience as they meet potential marriage partners? How will they express their emotions to others?

These questions take on greater importance because of Austen's detailed work to establish the materialistic context: we are made aware that in such a society, being "moved by emotions" rather than by material values can become a perilous experience.

CHANGE AND MICROLEVEL SCRIPTS

Behavioral plasticity is also limited by scripts that regulate thinking and action at the micro, interpersonal level. An example of this from *Sense and Sensibility* is the first meeting of Marianne and Willoughby, which conforms to traditional ideas about the distressed maiden being rescued by the valiant hero. The scene is a violent storm, during which Marianne falls and hurts her ankle. Willoughby comes galloping out of the storm to rescue the distressed maiden.

> He put down his gun and ran to her assistance. She had raised herself from the ground, but her foot had been twisted in the fall, and she was scarcely able to stand. The gentleman offered his services, and perceiving that her modesty declined what her situation rendered necessary, took her up in his arms without further delay and carried her down the hill. (p. 52)

And so Willoughby carried Marianne in his strong arms, down the hill, straight through the garden, into the cottage, and onto a chair in the parlor, while at the same time apologizing for the intrusion to Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor. Of course Marianne's mother and sister are astonished by the sudden appearance of this tall, dark, handsome stranger carrying Marianne in his arms, but their wonder is mingled with a "secret admiration." After all, the stranger carrying Marianne is "uncommonly handsome," and his "youth, beauty, and elegance" overwhelms them.

The first meeting between Marianne and Willoughby raises the thrilling possibility of a "love at first sight" outcome, and this expectation is amply fulfilled. All outward appearances suggest that Marianne and Willoughby have fallen head over heels in love. This is the style of romantic relations that psychologists have labeled *eros*, love that is passionate and moved along by intense emotions (for typologies of love, see Hendrick & Hendrick, 1995; Lee, 1973). Marianne and Willoughby both seem to be struck by the same lightening, both are starry eyed and joyous when in each other's company. Their initial encounter in the thunderstorm involved danger and excitement, and no doubt each experienced a "high" from a rush of the chemicals dopamine, norepinephrine and phenylethlamine, in particular. The fact that their encounter took place in an isolated place, with no parents as witnesses, adds to the thrill. The personalities of both Marianne and Willoughby led them to mutually

interpret their physiological changes through the narrative of love at first sight.

The behavior of both Marianne and Willoughby seem so transparently moved by emotions, that soon family and friends assume that they are secretly engaged, for

> Nothing could be more expressive of attachment to them all than Willoughby's behavior. To Marianne it had all the distinguishing tenderness which a lover's heart could give, and to the rest of the family it was the affectionate attention of a son and a brother. The cottage seemed to be considered and loved by him as his home. (p. 75)

But this imagined engagement comes to an abrupt end when Willoughby, instead of taking the opportunity of a private meeting with Marianne to ask for her hand in marriage, unexpectedly and cruelly announces that he has to immediately leave and does not know when he might return to that part of England. The reason he gives for his departure is in keeping with the cultural values Austen has highlighted; it is because his aunt "has this morning exercised the privilege of riches upon a poor dependent cousin by sending me on business to London" (p. 78).

We had been prepared by Austen to expect that the likes of Mr and Mrs. John Dashwood would be moved by material rather than emotional considerations, but it comes as a jolt when the "tall, dark, handsome" lover abandons his beloved because a rich relative tells him to go "on business to London." Of course, if a poor relative had told him the same, he would have ignored the suggestion and continued to woo Marianne. Willoughby reveals that his emotions are all too quickly controlled by the materialistic values of the larger society. But Marianne is not able to turn her feelings and emotional ties on and off so quickly in order to conform, and she suffers gravely as she continues to attempt to win Willoughby back. An invitation from Mrs. Jennings, Sir John Middleton's mother-in-law, takes the two sisters to London and provides Marianne the opportunity to try to reconnect with Willoughby. After arrival in London, her first letter to him reads:

> How surprised you will be, Willoughby, on receiving this; and I think you will feel something more than surprise when you know that I am in town. An opportunity of coming hither, though with Mrs. Jennings, was a temptation we could not resist. I wish you may receive this in time to come here tonight, but I will not depend on it. At any rate I shall expect you tomorrow. For the present, adieu. (p. 163)

Marianne waits impatiently and in vain; Willoughby neither visits nor makes any effort to contact her. Over the following days we witness Marianne's spirits fail, so that she becomes "wholly dispirited, careless of her appearance" (p. 153). A meeting with Willoughby does come about, but unexpectedly and with consequences that further depress Marianne. The two sisters attend a party, and find Willoughby there accompanying a "very fashionable-looking young woman" (p. 154). His behavior toward Marianne is cold and formal, prompting an impassioned public outburst from Marianne, "Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters?" (p. 155). When Willoughby refuses to go beyond formalities in greeting her, Marianne demands of her sister,

> Go to him, Elinor ... and force him to come to me. Tell him I must see him again—must speak to him instantly. I cannot rest—I shall not have a moment's peace till this is explained—some dreadful misapprehension or other. Oh, go to him this moment. (p. 155)

When Marianne's entreaties are of no avail, she retreats, psychologically and physically. Having expressed her emotions openly, and dedicated herself to the idea that love will provide her and Willoughby with a true path to overcome the materialistic prejudices of society, she finds that her lover has conformed to the materialism of the age. Willoughby rejects her and opts for a far more profitable marriage. The free and open expression of emotions has been crushed.

THE MACRO SYSTEM REIMPOSES ORDER IN INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIOR

Marianne's attempt to break out of the rigid materialist structure imposed by society ends in tragedy, and her journey to settle on an existence centered on a kind of "sense" is deeply painful and transformative. She comes out of this experience as a changed person. Having been abandoned by her lover, Marianne is now at the mercy of a materialistic value system according to which she has fallen even lower in worth. In addition to having little money, she has also suffered public humiliation. She could continue to hold on to her "true" values and espouse the open and free expression of emotions, or she could change direction and behave more in accordance with the values of society.

The psychological experience of anxiously hovering at a crossroad, of expressing one set of opinions and being pushed to act another way, has been explored by psychologists in research on cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957; for a 50-year review, see Cooper, 2007). According to cognitive dissonance theory, people feel discomfort when their actions and expressed attitudes are incongruent. In such situations we make changes

in our actions and/or attitudes so that our actions and expressed attitudes become congruent.

Marianne faces a highly stressful situation: she is being pushed to conform to societal norms and "marry for money." If she changes her behavior, then her expressed attitudes should also fall in line. But this change will come at a cost, because it involves deep internal struggles. Reflecting these struggles, Marianne falls gravely ill and is fortunate to be able to takes refuge in the estate of a rich family, the Palmers. By the time she recovers from her illness, she has also changed her attitudes. She finds herself attracted to Colonel Brandon, a rich suitor she formerly dismissed as too old, and neglected in favor of the dashing, young Willoughby. This change in Marianne comes at a fortuitous time because, according to the value system of society, her "market price" has dropped, as she has lost some of her youthful glow, due to her illness. Marianne's fall in market value is precisely measured in monetary terms. We are informed of this through a conversation her stepbrother, John Dashwood, has about Marianne with Elinor,

> She was as handsome a girl last September as any I ever saw—and as likely to attract the men. There was something in her style of beauty to please them particularly. I remember Fanny used to say that she would marry sooner and better than you did; not but what she is exceedingly fond of you, but so it happened to strike her. She will be mistaken, however. I question whether Marianne *now* will marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a year, at the utmost, and I am very much deceived if *you* do not do better. (p. 195)

Thus, in a marketplace where her worth has dropped to no more than "five or six hundred a year," Marianne quickly makes a choice to boost her value: She marries an older, rich man, and becomes the mistress of a large estate.

LINKING MICROLEVEL EXPERIENCES WITH MACRO POWER RELATIONS

> system justification theory unambiguously addresses the possibilities that ... there is an ideological motive to justify the existing social order ... the motive ... is observed most readily at an implicit, unconscious level of awareness ... paradoxically it is sometimes strongest among those who are most disadvantaged by the social order. (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004, p. 912)

Since the 1970s there has been a growth of theories and empirical research on intergroup relations, focusing on disadvantaged and advantaged groups (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994). This increased interest was initiated by European researchers and the social identity tradition (Moghaddam, 1987). But the increased influence of social identity theory was soon followed by the emergence of North American-based theories, including system justification theory (see Moghaddam, 2008b, for a critical review of the major intergroup theories). System justification theory highlighted and further developed an aspect of minority-majority relations indirectly addressed in some other major theories: the question of how a societal system characterized by group-based inequalities continues to survive, and through what processes disadvantaged group members continue to support a system that keeps them in relatively powerless. A strength of system justification theory is that it gives emphasis to an ideological motivate to justify the system, thus linking individual level psychological experiences with macro social structure.

The ideological motivation posited by system justification theory can help to connect research on intergroup and power relations with research on culture and emotions. Following system justification theory, in some instances emotional experiences are shaped by the larger ideology, toward enabling the individual to function within the existing value system. This links directly with some current development in cultural research. In their 23 nation study, Matsumoto et al. (2008) found evidence for the proposition that "one of the functions of culture is to create and maintain social order by creating value systems that facilitate norms for regulating emotions" (p. 932). These researchers found that suppression of emotions was higher in societies that give more value to status and power differences. Thus, theories of intergroup relations and cultural theories have both highlighted relationships between internal states and the macro social order. One of Jane Austen's contributions is in exploring how individual level adaptations take place in a way that allows individuals to change and adapt to the requirements of the larger social order. This is illustrated by Marianne's conforming to the materialistic values of the age.

Marianne's illness, and the changes she is forced to make, tell us of some of the costs she suffered, but she does not remain broken. Austen's master stroke is how she deftly portrays adaptation and conformity in individual human behavior; Marianne suffers gravely as she bends with the demands of society. If we judge harshly, we might refer to Marianne's conformity as self-deception, surely Marianne is just fooling herself? But Austen does not encourage us to adopt this attitude,

> Instead of falling a sacrifice to an irresistible passion, as once she had fondly flattered herself with expecting, instead of remaining even forever with her mother and finding her only pleasures in retirement and study, as afterwards in her more calm and sober judgment she had determined on, she

> found herself at 19 submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (p. 314)

Willoughby also conforms to societal expectations. Having abandoned Marianne and married for money, we might romantically imagine that he lived afterwards as an unhappy recluse, pining for his lost love. Austen tells us to dismiss this illusion,

> But that he was forever inconsolable, that he fled from society, or contracted an habitual gloom of temper, or died of a broken heart, must not be depended on; for he did neither. He lived to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself. His wife was not always out of humor, nor his home always uncomfortable; and in his breed of horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind, he found no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity. (p. 315)

Thus, Austen has presented us with an intricate picture of how societal values provide an iron frame for individual behavior, forcing conformity. Her analysis is multidirectional, both top-down and bottom-up. She begins by describing in detail the materialistic value system that dominates her society, one in which the place of every individual in the status and power hierarchy is well known and determined by their financial situation, with a specific monetary value attached to each person. When a family or individual experience a change in their financial fortunes, their positions in the hierarchy change. This materialistic system provides the framework within which individual experiences take on meaning, and change is strictly regulated.

The exciting episode in the thunderstorm that threw Marianne and Willoughby together gave rise to intense emotional arousal in both of them, involving biological changes that they both interpreted as love at first sight. For a short period of time, Marianne and Willoughby acted independently from the materialistic value system of the larger society, allowing their romantic interpretations to guide them; microlevel emotional experiences briefly shaped behavior. But the power of the macro value system proved too much; first Willoughby, and then Marianne, conformed to societal values. Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* provides a forceful illustration of the mechanisms through which individual styles of thinking and action are regulated by the macrolevel normative system.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

The ideals of actualized democracy and democratic citizen have been critically and insightfully assessed in previous chapters. One set of criticisms have focused particularly on the merits of the utopia itself, on actualized democracy as a goal; a second set of criticisms have focused more on the processes through which such a utopia could be reached, for example on the groups norms and the education necessary to achieved actualized democracy. An underlying theme in all our discussions has been plasticity—how much and how fast changes in thinking and action can come about. This highlights a need to better understand obstacles to change: what factors prevent people from changing their behavior? As a way to address this question, I have examined an important novel by Jane Austen.

The examination of *Sense and Sensibility* has enabled us to explore plasticity at two different levels: societal values and interpersonal interactions. Austen maps out how the macrolevel materialist values and normative system of her society structure and regulate individual social behavior. Marianne and Willoughby experienced love at first sight according to the traditional script of "hero rescues maiden in distress," but their interpretation of this intense emotional experience was quickly challenged and reshaped by the far more powerful materialistic value system of their society. They were forced to conform by the sheer power of the macro system.

However, we could have moved to an even more microlevel and considered the physiological changes associated with "falling in love" (for research on processes associated with romantic love at the physiological level, see Baroncelli et al., 2010; Emanuele, Brondini, Presenti, Re, & Geroldi, 2007; Emanuele et al., 2006; Walsh, 1991). Just as societal values and scripts regulate interpersonal behavior and limit change, biological processes also influence how much and in what ways we can change in a given time period. The study of these limitations helps us to better understand behavioral stability and the lack of certain types of change more broadly, including in political behavior. The rigidity and stability witnessed in domains such as movement from dictatorship to democracy, are part of this larger pattern of behavioral constancy.

An implication of this discussion is that we should reconceptualize psychology as the "science of plasticity," with the goal of understanding the changes that are possible in human thinking and action in given time periods. For example, how much change, within given time periods, can therapy bring about in the behavior of an individual experiencing depression? What kinds of changes can be brought about in leader-follower relations in an organization or a society, in a given time period? In what ways can conformity and obedience behavior be changed in a population? How much time is needed to change individual and collective citizen behavior from a style of thinking and action supportive of dictatorship, to one supportive of democracy? The focus in neuroscience and much of cognitive science is already on plasticity. This chapter has argued that it would be fruitful to extend this trend to the rest of psychology.

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