

Review of: "An Ontological Turn for Psychology in the age of the Machine and Global Warming"

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This is an interesting article that focuses on an area of contemporary academic knowledge that is definitely in need of a decolonizing perspective (positivist psychology). Showing how indigenous perspectives intersect with the study of ontology (especially in the work of Heidegger, Arendt and Han) is also a very worthwhile goal, and I applaud the sketch of how this might be achieved here.

That said – as an active researcher in the field of social ontology and having published extensively on the insights of Arendt and others encountered in this article – I think there are some problems with the essay. First, I think the contrast between indigenous knowledge and ‘science’ is presented in excessively sharp and generalizing terms. The image of science as dealing only with an ontology of objects is that of positivism. But positivism is no longer the dominant background to contemporary science, or at least strong voices within the philosophy of science have long pointed out its inadequacies. (This is not to say that ‘natural’ science departments in the service of capital and colonialism do not perpetuate a positivist image in their curricula and the vision they present to (undergraduate) students and audiences. But to change this requires a vehicle other than the humble scholarly article). Critical realism is one important philosophical perspective that contests the positivist vision of science. Gregg Henriques’ coherentist psychology is an example of an approach that does so from within psychology. Second, setting up the ontology of subjects (IP) so sharply against ontology of objects (MP) ignores the possibility that there may be a perspective that does justice to both, and in so doing advances knowledge. Conceptualizing a tree purely in terms of its market value or material meaning (as ‘lumber’) is problematic not just because it distorts the value-orientation that we should bring to the natural world, but also because it misrecognizes the actual features of the ‘being’ of the tree. But substituting the image of the spirit of the tree also seems to me as likely to distort its being. Similarly, there is no contradiction between understanding the causes of climate change and the experiences to which it is giving rise. Ecological grief needs to be understood as *part of the explanation*, not an alternative. More generally, ‘objective’ scientific knowledge, it seems to me, delivers a picture of the world of objects that cannot simply be dispensed with; if we picture human knowledge as a dynamic system of representation with no ‘end-state’, then it’s possible to see how the grounds for some kind of rapprochement between (non-positivist) science and indigenous knowledge might come on to the horizon. I don’t think such a project is out of line with the author’s sympathies and intentions in the article, but the either/or ontological discussion makes it hard to discern these. Third, I think several of the theoretical insights mentioned could be expanded upon, including the distinction between thinking and cognition (Arendt), cultural evolution (Lindenfors’ is not the only perspective here) and Agamben’s notion of bare life. To be clear, I think these are important and useful diagnostic vehicles for the author’s goals, but they would benefit from more

elaboration and nuance. In general, I am very sympathetic to the author's perspective and especially the point that ontology marks the way to overcoming our limited and limiting ways of living and understanding.