

Psychological Inquiry and the Pragmatic and Hermeneutic Traditions

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ABSTRACT. Psychological practitioner inquiry differs in kind from psychological researcher inquiry. From the perspective of researcher inquiry, practice should consist of applying research-generated knowledge. Because practitioners consistently report that this is not how they approach their clients, and because the epistemological foundations of psychology research inquiry have been questioned, it is necessary to study how practitioners actually engage in practice. The hermeneutic tradition of Heidegger and Gadamer and the pragmatic tradition of Dewey provide a philosophical groundwork for the study of practitioner inquiry. Gadamer and Dewey propose that in everyday functioning people primarily act out of their internalized, culturally provided knowledge, which primarily functions outside of awareness. However, they also hold that people are not locked into their socially transmitted backgrounds. People can advance the effectiveness of their received practical knowledge through reflective inquiry and trial-and-error activity. People learn from the effect of these trials and thereby expand their background understandings. For ordinary everyday functioning, psychological practitioners are assumed to engage in a process similar to the one outlined by Dewey and Gadamer.

KEY WORDS: everydayness, hermeneutics, inquiry, practical knowledge, pragmatism

The study of psychological inquiry has traditionally focused on the manner and means of developing valid and reliable general knowledge about the human realm. The discipline has concerned itself with working out a step-by-step method that, if followed properly, would assure the correctness of its findings. The method includes using a statistical analysis method that infers the general characteristics of a population by examining only a limited number of its members. Implicit in this kind of psychological inquiry is that the practice of psychology should consist of applying its generalized knowledge in particular situations.

In addition to the researcher-engaged inquiry, which is directed at producing valid and reliable general knowledge, there is a different kind of inquiry used

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by psychological practitioners. The process and purpose of practice inquiry differ significantly from research inquiry. The aim of practitioner inquiry is to inform practitioners about what to say and do in their work with clients. The purpose of this article is to lay a philosophical foundation for the study of practitioner inquiry.

While the study of research inquiry produces a prescription of how to generate generalized knowledge, the study of practitioner inquiry aims at producing a description of how practitioners actually inquire about what to do. In its study about how to undertake research inquiry so that valid knowledge resulted, psychology turned to philosophy and its epistemological studies. In the study of the way in which practitioners inquire, philosophical investigations are also of help, particularly the non-foundationalist (Rorty, 1979) studies of Heidegger, Dewey and Gadamer.

Application and Practitioner Inquiry

The study of practice inquiry is especially relevant at this time because the view of application implied by the discipline's strong move to empirically supported manualized therapies is based on a distorted understanding of practice inquiry. The logic of practice inquiry assumed in this move is that inquiry consists of determining which set of therapeutic techniques works with the kind of client being treated. As will be developed in this article, practitioner inquiry is based not on a general to specific logic, but on a contextualized dialogic between a particular practitioner and a particular client.

In the main, psychology has held that psychological practice should consist of applying the knowledge that is generated by research inquiries. Psychological research, following models of research developed for the physical and biological sciences, aims at discovering the consistent and regular relations that hold across human behaviors, thoughts and feelings. It produces generalized knowledge claims in a logical form: 'If a person is a member of a category [e.g. phobic], then he/she will likely respond in a specific manner to an environmental event [e.g. cognitive restructuring].' This understanding of application simply involves determining the category of which the client is an instance (diagnosis) and then utilizing those research-established techniques that have been found to produce the desired outcome for this kind of client.

This traditional model of practice—the application of research-developed general knowledge to specific situations—misdescribes the way practitioners actually work with clients. Practitioners work in particular situations with particular clients. Practice inquiry is, for the most part, carried out without conscious deliberation about what should be said or done. It has the character of an ongoing conversation. When practitioners' non-deliberative

activities appear not to advance clients toward their goals, practitioners engage in practical problem-solving. Practitioners' performances are informed by their practical knowledge rather than by research-generated generalized knowledge.

Practitioners consistently report (e.g. Goldfried & Newman, 1986; Marten & Heimberg, 1995; Morrow-Bradley & Elliott, 1986; Stiles, 1992) that they rarely look to generalized research findings in determining what they do with clients. Instead, their actions draw on their own experiences, their discussions with other practitioners, and clinically based literature. The gap between the traditional model of application and psychological practice has been problematic, if not embarrassing, for the discipline. The discipline's call that practitioners limit their therapeutic actions to empirically validated sets of techniques (Nathan & Goran, 1998) continues the traditional model of application. An alternate direction for psychology is inquiry that actually guides practitioners' activity.

Philosophy and Practitioner Inquiry

Much postmodern writing focuses on destroying the notion that a method can determine truth. Implicit in postmodern writings (especially in French postmodernists) is the belief that because there is no epistemological foundation, there can be no knowledge. All knowledge claims are relative to a viewpoint, and no viewpoint is privileged. With the illusion of certainty shattered, what is left is an awareness that our knowledge is not a true reflection of an independent reality, but is simply a social production of one's historically situated culture (Dews, 1987). The effect of the end of epistemology seemed to lead to the conclusion that 'if there is no center, no foundation, or stable presence, the "alternative" seems to be chaos, formlessness, even madness' (Bernstein, 1992, p. 177).

Two basic philosophical responses were proposed to the notion that there can be no certain knowledge. French postmodernists such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Foucault (1979) and Derrida (1978) proposed the first. They counseled that people resist the constriction of possibilities that inheres in the belief in certain knowledge. The awareness that knowledge is uncertain provides a release from the restraining power of culturally imposed norms clothed as necessary, natural or universal knowledge (Bernstein, 1992; Hoy, 1999). The end of epistemology makes it possible for people to destabilize and subvert culturally dominant forces and thereby gain power over their own self-formation. The concern of this first response was a prescription of how to live in a world without certainties (McGowan, 1991). The second response involved a shift from instruction about how to live without certainty to a study of how people do live without certainty. That is, how

people practically deal with the world and others to accomplish everyday tasks and achieve their goals, even though their knowledge is not certain.

This article's thesis is that the second philosophic response to the end of epistemology can provide the groundwork for understanding psychological practitioner inquiry. Because of the postmodern rejection of the notion that true knowledge can be methodologically generated, the study of practitioner inquiry becomes essential. If research inquiry does not produce trustworthy knowledge, the notion that practice should consist of application of this knowledge to particular situations is undercut. The philosophical study of how people inquire about what to do focuses on the everyday activities in which people are engaged and not specifically on inquiry in psychological practice. My position, however, is that inquiry in psychological practice does not differ in kind from everyday inquiry.

The three most important philosophers to study people's everyday inquiry are Heidegger, Gadamer and Dewey. Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962) was pivotal in bringing Continental philosophy's attention to everyday inquiry. Gadamer, who was a student of Heidegger, extended Heidegger's position to include the study of how everyday understanding takes place. The Continental study of everyday inquiry has prompted a return to the writings of Dewey, an American pragmatist. Dewey, whose scholarly output began before and continued after the original appearance of *Being and Time* in 1927, appears to have developed his philosophy independently from the Continental work of Heidegger and Gadamer. (Hegel's notion of dynamic changes in cultural understandings played an early role in both Continental philosophy and American pragmatism; however, his notion of a final, *Absolute* synthesis into a unified cultural system was rejected by both.)

I am interested in what Gadamer's hermeneutics and Dewey's pragmatism contribute to understanding how psychological practitioners determine what to say and do. Gadamer and Dewey differ in many important ways and the context in which they wrote and the questions to which they were responding differed significantly. (Gadamer wrote in Germany in the 1960s and 1970s and was responding to the question of non-methodical avenues to truth. Dewey wrote in the United States in the first part of the century and was concerned with how people might function more productively.) Gadamer mistrusted experimental science, as he understood it. Weinsheimer (1985) points out that Gadamer's view of science is of the pre-1960s variety, and that 'some of his characterizations of the method of natural science are now no longer tenable' (p. 20). Dewey honored science, but it was the essence of science, in particular the essence of social science, that he honored. He rejected the foundationist and rigid algorithmic methods that characterized the science of his day. Gadamer's heritage was the Continental hermeneutic tradition that reached back to Schleiermacher. Dewey's heritage was Darwin's evolutionary theory and functionalism. Gadamer advanced from a hermeneutic of text interpretation to a philosophical hermeneutics,

that is, a general theory of how people understand and how this understanding informs action. Dewey's philosophy had a major role for the body and its interaction with others and the world. Both were led to advocate democratic values as prerequisites for advancing understanding. For Gadamer, this meant the values of 'tolerance, reasonableness, [and] the attempt to work out mutual agreements by means of discourse rather than means of force' (Madison, 1999, p. 711). For Dewey, a democratic society fostered varied points of view and a 'continuous readjustment through meeting new situations produced by varied intercourse' (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 100). Both situate themselves between the bipolar positions of subjectivism/objectivism and relativism/universal truth.

The purpose of this article is not to compare and contrast the full thought of Gadamer and Dewey. Rather, it is to draw from both aspects of their work that relate to how people can increase their understanding of others and the world in order to accomplish their goals. Both hold that in ordinary human activity most inquiry leading to which action to perform takes place outside of awareness in a kind of cognitive unconscious. This inquiry draws on people's background knowledge, that is, on their internalized culturally given understanding and on their personal experiences. When these actions are not successful in accomplishing their assigned tasks, people reflect and deliberate on how to proceed. Heidegger and postmodernist writers have emphasized the power of culturally imposed background knowledge and values to limit and contain people's understanding and actions. Both Gadamer and Dewey propose ways in which people can advance beyond what culture has given them and expand their understanding of themselves, the world and others.

The next section explores the notion of everyday functioning and the role of background knowledge in forming actions. The following section investigates Gadamer and Dewey's idea of expanding and correcting one's background knowledge to act more effectively in the world.

Everydayness and Background Knowledge

Human beings get around in the world successfully completing tasks and accomplishing goals. We perform most of life's tasks without reflecting on how to do them (i.e. we already understand how to do most things without having to figure them out). We know how and have the competence to cope in most situations without having to consciously think about what to do. We have a skilled, everyday mastery of worldly equipment and of ourselves. For example, we know what a door handle is for and how to grasp and turn it as part of the process of leaving a room. This non-deliberative knowledge needs to be differentiated from theoretical knowledge, which is a kind of knowledge that explains why turning a handle causes the door to open.

Dewey employed the distinction between the everyday, practical *knowing-how* and theoretical *knowing-that* or *knowing-why* in his *Human Nature and Conduct*, published in 1922:

We may . . . be said to know-how by means of our habits. . . . We walk and read aloud, we get off and on streetcars, we dress and undress, and do a thousand useful acts without thinking of them. We know something, namely, how to do them. . . . If we choose to call [this] knowledge . . . then other things also called knowledge, knowledge of and *about* things, knowledge *that* things are thus and so, knowledge that involves reflection and conscious depreciation, remains of the different sort. (pp. 177–178)

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger also distinguished between ordinary, everyday understanding and theoretical understanding. He focused his phenomenological inquiry on the everyday coping skills that are part of the background knowledge out of which humans function. He presupposes a background of everyday practices into which we are socialized but that we do not represent in our minds (Dreyfus, 1991). Heidegger holds that these non-deliberative coping skills are the most fundamental way humans make sense of things.

In recent decades, other scholars have taken up the study of the kind of background knowledge that guides people's everyday getting about in the world. Polanyi (1962) has termed this kind of knowledge *tacit knowing*. Analytic philosopher Grice (1975) has proposed that it is because of a shared background or tacit knowledge that people can adequately interpret one another's actions and understand the intended meaning of one another's speech. Sternberg and Wagner's (1986) edited *Practical Intelligence* is devoted to the study of practical knowing or wisdom. In the opening chapter, Scribner (1986) writes:

In constituting practical thinking as a kind [of thinking], some set it up as a contrast class to a form of thinking considered instrumental for performance with intellectual tasks such as those encountered in school, on IQ tests, and certain psychological experiments. This contrasting mode of thought is variously characterized as 'academic,' 'formal,' or, in my own usage 'theoretical.' (p. 13)

American anthropologist Lave (Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Lave, 1988) is included among the scholars who have investigated human practical knowing as the source of functioning in the everyday world. And French anthropologist Bourdieu (1977) has attempted to construct a general theory of practice. Bourdieu employs the term *habitus* to refer to the idea that people dwell in their background and everyday knowledge. In addition, American philosopher and psychotherapist Gendlin (1962) has investigated the implicit and intricate notion of 'felt meaning', which has kinship with the idea of background knowledge. Instead of seeing application as applying theoretical knowledge about generalities to particular cases, these scholars say application occurs through a non-deliberative doing and acting that is an

expression of one's background understanding. Only when actions formed without deliberation are unsuccessful in accomplishing their intended tasks do people reflect on why the action didn't succeed in a particular situation.

Background Knowledge and Pragmatic Know-How

Rejection of the Traditional Approach to Understanding

Along with the historicists and the philosophers of science, Dewey's pragmatic philosophy and Heidegger and Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy attacked the philosophic tradition's project to find an epistemological foundation. Dewey was critical of the tradition because it considered human experience as primarily a knowledge affair. Dewey (1960b) held that there is more to experience than knowing: 'In the orthodox view experience is regarded as a knowledge-affair. But to the eyes not looking through ancient spectacles, it assuredly appears as an affair of the intercourse of a living being with its physical and social environment' (p. 23). Traditional philosophy approached the person as a spectator rather than an interacting worldly creature. Dewey felt an 'inward laceration' and 'unnatural wound' when he first recognized that traditional empirical philosophy had no place for the human spirit (Digging, 1994, p. 410). He wanted to reconstruct traditional philosophy by changing its question from how to gain true knowledge to what is the nature of experience. He wanted to move 'forward the emancipation of philosophy from too intimate and exclusive attachment to traditional problems' (Dewey, 1960b, p. 69).

Heidegger (1982), too, called for the deconstruction of traditional foundationalist philosophy:

We understand this basic task [deconstruction] as one in which by taking the question of being as our clue, we are to destroy the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of being—the ways which have guided us ever since. (p. 22)

With their radical critique and destruction of philosophy's quest for an epistemological foundation, Dewey and Heidegger proposed that philosophy take up a different task—describing everyday experience. They held that there is no way of knowing truth and reality as traditionally conceived, that is, as an isolated subject confronting a world of objects and forming representations of them. They both employed a type of phenomenological reflection (Parodi, 1989) to display the characteristics (or, for Heidegger, the existential structures) of human experience. They noted that the concepts and words, such as 'substance', 'mind', 'subject' and 'object', which had been developed in traditional philosophy for its epistemological task were inadequate for describing human experience and action. Heidegger called his

investigation of everyday experience *phenomenological-hermeneutics*, and Dewey, borrowing from James, termed his inquiries into everyday problem-solving *radical empiricism*.

One cannot create a point outside the background from which it can be viewed and investigated. Thus, inquiry into its characteristics has to be an immanent inquiry. Its study is a reflection of the background on itself. Such an inquiry is circular (Heidegger's hermeneutic circle), in which parts are viewed in light of the whole, and the whole viewed in light of the parts. One always remains within the background circle itself, but reflects on it to bring to light what had previously been only dimly known. Heidegger identified this kind of inquiry as a phenomenological-hermeneutic inquiry and held that it is the only kind of inquiry that can show off the characteristics of the background. (Heidegger used the term *hermeneutics* in two senses: (a) as the basic characteristic of human beings as interpretative beings, interacting with the world through a background which configures and makes sense of the world; and (b) as a mode of inquiry to uncover and display the sense of situations delineated by the background's meanings.) Although Dewey does not name his method of inquiry into the background, Parodi (1989), as mentioned above, identified it as a type of phenomenological exploration.

The Characteristics of Background Knowledge

What Dewey and Heidegger found when they 'returned to experience in itself' was that humans were ordinarily engaged in practical, non-cognitive tasks, not consciously thinking about things. In the main, in their everydayness people were successful in accomplishing their tasks and achieving their purposes. What Dewey's and Heidegger's investigations revealed about experience is that it consists not of isolated mental objects with properties, but instead a holistic web of functional relations organized around life-projects. Characterizing Dewey's position, Bernstein (1967) wrote: 'Most of our lives consist of experiences that are not primarily cognitive. We are creatures who are continually involved in doing, enjoying, suffering' (p. 63). Thus, we ordinarily act based on our practical or know-how knowledge, and this knowledge usually functions tacitly in the background and out of conscious awareness. It is this non-cognitive practical or background understanding that provides us with the sense we have of others, the world and ourselves. It provides our immediate understanding of what is to be done and how to do it. We function through its fore-structuring (Heidegger) and understand texts and others through its pre-judgments.

Borrowing from the later Husserl, Gadamer termed people's practical or background understanding a person's *horizon* or *field*. Schrag (1986) suggested that the metaphors of 'horizon' and 'field' are too visually weighted and emphasized those experiential phenomena that are known through sight (see also Jay, 1994; Levin, 1993). Schrag proposed a shift to the metaphor

'texture' to characterize the 'structure' of background knowledge. The 'texture' metaphor points to understanding background knowledge as a tightly woven fabric of interlaced and transversing understandings. In this picture, the background is not structured according to rules of logic or the grammar of language. Gendlin (1997) describes the texture of the background as 'more than conceptual patterns (distinctions, differences, comparisons, similarities, generalities, schemes, figures, categories, cognitions, cultural and social forms)' (p. 3). Following from Eco and Deleuze and Guattari, Cunningham (1998) employs rhizome as a metaphor for the organization of people's background understandings. The rhizome is the intricate, interconnected root-like network that mosses use to attach themselves and through which they absorb nourishment. Cunningham explains:

The tangle of roots and tubers characteristic of rhizomes is meant to suggest a semiotic space where (1) every point can and must have the possibility of being connected with every other point, raising the possibility of an infinite juxtaposition; (2) there are no fixed points or positions, only connections and relationships; (3) the space is dynamic and growing, such that if a portion of the rhizome is broken off at any point it could be reconnected at another point without changing the original potential for juxtaposition; (4) there is no hierarchy or genealogy contained as where some points are inevitably superordinate or prior to others; and (5) the rhizome is a whole with no outside or inside, beginning or end, border or periphery, but is rather an open network in all of its dimensions. (p. 829)

Languaged explication of the background texture divides it up into patterns and distinctions, but the background texture always exceeds these distinctions. This means not that the background has no order, but that its order is more complex than the traditional notions of structural or logical order. It can only be characterized metaphorically. Thus, the background can only be described metaphorically and studied indirectly through its functions. One's background understanding functions by noting what needs to be accomplished and identifying useful equipment that can serve to achieve one's purposes. The background serves to make the world and ourselves meaningful.

Dewey believed that background knowledge functions below the level of consciousness and language and beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will. He held that 'reality in its dynamic flow cannot be adequately grasped by concepts' (Bernstein, 1967, p. 90). Lakoff and Johnson (1999), reporting on the views of the second generation of cognitive science, state:

It [the cognitive science of the embodied mind] has discovered, first of all, that most of our thought is unconscious, not in the Freudian sense of being repressed, but in the sense that it operates beneath the level of cognitive awareness, inaccessible to cognitive awareness, inaccessible to consciousness and operating too quickly to be focused on. (p. 10)

Because the background in which we live is implicit, non-thematic and partially hidden, it is not open to complete description; it is, however, available to an increased, though not complete, understanding of how it functions in our lives. We have no access to our selves and the world except through a background. Our background enables us to make sense of worldly objects and to make meaningful use of them. One cannot know what exists without a sense-making background. The world is not known directly, but only as it appears through the background's interpretations. Some philosophers have held that the world in itself has no order. For example, Heidegger depicted what is, without its background-interpreted appearance, as 'the abyss', Nietzsche characterized it as 'chaos', and Derrida as 'flux'. Dewey and Gadamer suggest there is enough structure to the world for human learning to take place.

Dewey's and Heidegger's investigations show that experience is never of the world as a whole. Humans are always in the world by being in some specific circumstances or situation. The background shows up in the here-and-now situation in which one is acting to accomplish a task. Situations call up a textured, interrelated understanding of the significant aspects of a situation. Dewey (1896) pointed out that the significance of happenings depends on their context. He used the example of noise to emphasize the importance of context:

If one is reading a book, if one is hunting, if one is watching in a dark place on a lonely night, if one is performing a chemical experiment, in each case, [a] noise has a very different psychical value; it is a different experience. (p. 361)

Heidegger made the same point in his discussion of a hammer. If one's project is nailing two boards together, the hammer shows up as a tool appropriate to the task; if one's project is to keep the wind from blowing closed a door, the hammer shows up as a doorstop. The background that informs the hammering situation draws out from the whole that knowledge that is related to the particular task. It calls forth the knowledge of, for example, what possible tools are available for the task; what is the normal way in which this tool, in particular, and tools in general are used; how this task contributes to a more general purpose (such as building a table); and all the other background links that give breadth and depth to understanding the situation. Because background understanding focuses itself on accomplishing a particular task in a particular situation, its manifestation differs depending on the place and time in which tasks are to be carried out. Background knowledge configures itself according to specific contextual or situational needs; it does not make available to reflection the totality of all that it knows.

Background understandings manifest themselves in people's lives as something felt, not thought. For example, one 'feels' the background

understanding of what is the appropriate distance one should stand from others. Dewey (1922, p. 347) said: '[Background] knowledge . . . lives in the muscles, not in consciousness', and Gendlin (1962) uses the term 'felt meaning' to refer to the kind of non-conscious awareness people have of their practical and background understanding.

The Source of Practical Knowledge

The primary source from which people gain their background knowledge is their culture. One is born or 'thrown' into a culture that has already developed and is maintaining its understanding of how its members can cope with the world. It is a basic function of culture to transmit to its members its accumulated understanding and wisdom about how to function successfully. People internalize and incorporate the transmitted cultural wisdom so that it becomes the base of their ordinary functioning. Cultures transmit their knowledge to their new members through the process of socialization. Heidegger proposed that organisms of the *Homo sapiens* species are transformed into human beings when they begin the process of internalizing their culture's practical knowledge. Thus, the self of a person is not an autonomous substance nor the result of innate internal propulsion, but a postulate of the background knowledge transmitted by one's culture. Classical pragmatists James (1890) and Mead (1934) also emphasized the social source of the notion of self in their idea of a 'me-self' whose source is a person's social environment. It is an essential characteristic of humans to accept or be initiated into their culture's interpretations of self, others and the world. Thus, people take in and make an integral part of their practical and background knowledge what is presented to them by their culture. The internalized cultural background functions to bring situational figures into focus. It displays what tasks a person is expected to accomplish, ways of getting these things done, and the equipment which can bring about their accomplishment.

Dewey and Heidegger both agree with the position that one's background or practical knowledge is transmitted through one's culture. Dewey (1960a) wrote:

[The practical know-how or background] denotes the cumulative information of the past, not merely the individual's own past but the social past, transmitted through language and even more through apprenticeship in various crafts, so far as this information was condensed in matter-of-fact generalizations about how do certain things like building a house, making a statute, leading an army, or knowing what to expect under given circumstances. (pp. 71–72)

The cultural background through which one interacts with the world is not a personally chosen background, but a socially shared understanding of how to be in the world. Its transmission occurs not only through language but

also through the movements, gestures and actions of others. Bourdieu (1977) offered a description of how people are socialized into a common background knowledge:

The essential part of the *modus operandi* which defines practical mastery is transmitted in practice, in this practical state, without attaining the level of discourse. The child imitates not 'models' but other people's actions. Body hexis speaks directly to the motor function, in the form of a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, being bound up with a whole system of objects, and charged with a host of special meanings and values. But the fact that schemes are able to pass directly from practice to practice without moving through discourse and consciousness does not mean that the acquisition of habitus is no more than a mechanical learning through trial and error. . . . The material that the . . . child has to learn is the product of the systematic application of a small number of principles: coherent in practice. (pp. 73–74)

While traditional philosophy sought methods by which one could step out of the background, contemporary investigators of experience hold that we always operate within the background, and that there is no way to step out of it. Heidegger (1962), in *Being and Time*, expressing the idea that there is no exit from the background in which we are immersed, wrote:

[The] everyday way in which things have been interpreted is one into which Dasein has grown in the first instance, with never a possibility of extrication. In it, out of it, against it, all genuine understanding, interpreting and communicating, all re-discovering and appropriating anew, are performed. In no case is a Dasein untouched and unseduced by this way in which things have been interpreted. . . . The dominance of the public way in which things have been interpreted has already been decisive even for the possibilities of having a mood—that is, for the basic way in which Dasein lets the world 'matter' to it. (p. 213)

Living within the Background

For Heidegger, the background is a culturally constructed way of being that serves to make humans feel at home in the world by providing an interpretation of who they are and what they are to do. The background makes itself present in 'the one'. That is, we are to understand as *one* should and to act in situations as *one* normally does. The realization that who we have become is a function of the ungrounded background understandings in which we have been acculturated produces in us an unsettled or uncanny feeling (*angst*). The background provides a misunderstanding of who we are by giving us the notion that we are some sort of object with a fixed nature. Nevertheless, one cannot rise above or step out of one's given background. 'Interpretation goes all the way down' (Heidegger) and 'all is interpretation' (Nietzsche). Heidegger, unlike Dewey and Gadamer, believed that a culture's background understandings function to cover over and protect us from

the unsettled experience of *angst*. For him, authentic living involves an awareness that we have been thrown arbitrarily into an ungrounded background from which we cannot extricate ourselves. Given our situation, Heidegger recommended that we be resolute. Being resolute is not a willed choice, but a receptive openness to possible meanings of phenomena. Heidegger (1959) wrote: 'The essence of resoluteness lies in the opening of human Dasein into the clearing of Being, and not at all in storing up energy for "action" ' (p. 17). (In his later writings, Heidegger proposed that we wait for the appearance of a new cultural background, one that might more fully display Reality or Being.)

Heidegger was pessimistic about advancing one's culturally given understandings of the self, others and the world. As will be shown in a later section of this paper, the pragmatic and hermeneutic traditions are more optimistic about expanding one's own and one's society's background understanding. Both individuals and institutions, through their own experiential learning and through pragmatic and hermeneutic inquiry, can affect changes in background knowledge so that it is more effective in coping with the world.

Breakdowns in the Background's Effectiveness

Although the background usually functions smoothly and without deliberation to complete our everyday tasks, there are times when it is unsuccessful. When a breakdown occurs in the functioning of the background, people move from their ordinary, practical mode of engagement with the world to a mode of deliberation or reflection. Dewey (1922) wrote: 'It is a commonplace that the more efficient a habit the more unconsciously it operates. Only a hitch in its workings occasions emotion and provokes thought' (p. 178). Giddens (1979) describes the everyday activity of the background as routine. However, when events disrupt and challenge one's background understanding, one's actions become 'de-routinized': 'By "de-routinisation" I refer to any influence that acts to counter the grip of the taken-for-granted character of day-to-day interaction' (p. 220). With the malfunctioning of the equipment and action whose use the background anticipates will achieve a particular goal, one's attention is specifically directed to the equipment. The equipment is examined to understand why it isn't working as expected. One can try again, look for alternatives or ask for help. Being deprived of the smooth functioning of the background, one changes to a deliberate paying attention to what one is doing and begins to plan reflectively how the task can still be accomplished. The deliberately derived plan may solve the problem and, if it does, its solution is incorporated into the background knowledge. Describing reflection-in-action, Schön (1983) notes:

[Reflection occurs] when there is some puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal. As he tries

to make sense of it, he also reflects on the understandings which have been implicit in his action, understandings which he surfaces, criticizes, re-structures, and embodies in further action. (p. 50)

When the alterations in action derived from reflection still do not lead to the completion of the task, we shift into a third mode of understanding, theoretical reflection. Scientific inquiry takes place in the mode of theoretical reflection and is a mere looking at the equipment. The equipment is decontextualized and objectified. It loses its significance as situated equipment and becomes an isolated object with properties. Dreyfus (1991) described Heidegger's understanding of how the theoretical process produces scientific knowledge:

Once characteristics are no longer related to one another in a concrete, everyday, meaningful way, as aspects of a thing in a particular context, the isolated properties that remain can be quantified and related by scientific covering laws and thus taken as evidence for theoretical entities. (p. 81)

Heidegger viewed scientific inquiry as an abstraction from everyday experience and, thus, a reduced mode of being in the world. For Heidegger, the theoretical mode is not instrumental; that is, it is not aimed at solving problems so much as it is independent of practical engagement. In this, he differs from Dewey, who understood scientific inquiry as an aspect of everyday problem-solving.

Ovecoming the Limits of Background Knowledge: Dewey and Gadamer

Unlike Heidegger in *Being and Time*, Dewey and Gadamer held that one could enlarge or deepen one's practical know-how and background knowledge. The purpose of this development is to allow people to be more effective in achieving their desired purposes. Both accept, in general outline, the notion that our actions are primarily guided by a socially transmitted background. Neither one, however, held that the background is completely determinative of our understandings and actions. There is a looseness or play within the texture of the background that allows for innovative solutions and enlargement of understanding. The situations that are most significant for producing background changes are those where the background knowledge is ineffective for accomplishing a task or one is not able to clearly understand a text.

Drawing on Hegel's idea of process, Dewey saw experience as active and changing, and he often used the term *experiencing* to denote that experience is not static. People are not only formed by the background, but they can also effect changes in it. We are not only given a background, but we also give back new interpretative meanings to it. The creation of new meanings and tactics, which are incorporated into the background, are provided to

make possible more effective ways of coping and accomplishing goals. These innovations have to pass the test of application, and, if they are successful in solving the problem or increasing understanding, they are added to the background and over time become the habitual ways of doing things.

Dewey

In everyday functioning, people implement their background knowledge to accomplish their short- and long-term goals. Burke (1994) lays out Dewey's view of everyday human functioning:

The basic picture, generally speaking, is that of the given organism/environment system performing a wide range of operations as a normal matter of course—scanning, probing, ingesting, discharging, adapting to, approaching, avoiding, or otherwise moving about and altering things in routine ways, in order to maintain itself. This applies not just to simple biological systems but also characterizes an individual human being's normal activities—from simple things like moving the cup to one's lips to drink from it without dribbling liquid all over the place, or walking down a hallway without careening into the walls, to long-range activities like being in love, pursuing her career, owning a home, managing the budget. . . . Such ongoing activities just *are* interactions which constitute some manner of organism/environment integration. (p. 23)

There are times, however, when this ongoing dynamic organism/environment interaction breaks down. There is an interruption or disturbance of ongoing action. Dewey terms these instances of breakdown *indeterminate situations*. The problematic of an indeterminate situation initiates inquiry. Inquiry is reflective problem-solving which changes the indeterminate situation into a determinate one; that is, inquiry is the process by which problems are solved.

One's background is not static. It is not a fixed prison-house in which people are locked up. It is formed in interaction with the world and its understanding evolves concerning what activities with what equipment are successful in coping with the environment. It 'learns' through directed trial and error. In this sense, the background is self-correcting. Activities that fail to solve the problem of an indeterminate situation drop out of the background. Those that work are retained and those that are improvements are incorporated. Thus, the background has within it an inquiry process that, over time, makes it more efficient and more able to provide guidance for successful interaction with the world.

Dewey identified the activity of 'science' as the most recent exemplar in the background's evolution of problem-solving strategies. The kind of science Dewey had in mind was that of the craftsman—the practical problem-solver (e.g. the science of carpentry)—not a disengaged laboratory

experiment removed from the everyday engagement with worldly problems. The sciences with which Dewey was most acquainted were biology and the social sciences (Bernstein, 1971). These sciences focus on the organism/environment interaction and the means whereby needs are met and purposes fulfilled. Dewey's notion of science is that it is a process for effective problem-solving, not merely a tool to show how the world is. Nor is the process of science defined by an adherence to an algorithmic method. Dewey views science as a more inclusive notion than research techniques.

Dewey calls this evolved capacity to learn *intelligence*. The background itself has practical intelligence. Bernstein (1967) described Dewey's idea of intelligence:

[Intelligence] consists of keen observation, the ability to discount private practices in favor of a bias of objectivity, the ability to envision ideals by which we can satisfactorily resolve situations in which conflicts arise, the ability to formulate relevant hypotheses, and a willingness to revise them in light of new experiences. The intelligent person is sensitive to the practical demands of situations and knows how far to carry his deliberations. In those situations in which immediate action is demanded, the funded experience of the intelligent person guides his actions. (pp. 125–126)

The background's intelligence is rational, if rationality is conceived in broader and richer terms than mathematico-logic reasoning. The background is involved in intelligent reasoning when it is engaged in inquiry or problem-solving. Dewey's incorporation of reason into the background's everyday problem-solving is at odds with the philosophical tradition, which has held that reason is distinct and separate from experience. The model for reason was mathematics. Mathematics was thought to yield a kind of universal and necessary knowledge that is not found in experience. For Dewey (1960a), the background or 'experience is capable of incorporating rational control within itself' (p. 78).

Inquiry is a progressive determination of a problem and its solution. It does not simply try any solution in a hit-and-miss way. It can be understood as a progression through four steps: (a) experience of an indeterminate situation, (b) identification of the problem, (c) determination of a solution, and (d) acting out the determined solution. One begins inquiry by examining the situation and sorting out the facts of the situation. This careful examination produces suggestions (hypotheses and expectations) about which actions might solve the problem. These expectations are conceived 'on the basis of current facts and assumptions, or by virtue of established habits, or otherwise in an ongoing trial-and-error manner, . . . [to settle] on a course of action or mode of being which effectively solves the problem' (Burke, 1994, p. 145). From an initial suggested action, the inquiry proceeds to refine the suggestion in order that it can be tested in the situation.

A hypothesis, once suggested and entertained, is developed in relation to other conceptual structures until it receives a form in which it can instigate

and direct an experiment that will disclose precisely those conditions which have the maximum possible force in determining whether the hypothesis should be accepted or rejected. (Dewey, 1938, p. 112)

If the application (experimentation) of the determined solution does not solve the problem, the inquiry process continues until a solution is found, or, as Dewey termed it, a positive *judgment* is made about the proposed solution and it has 'warranted assertability'. Judgments are validated or invalidated by their capacity to bring about the desired state of affairs.

The inquiry process requires creative and imaginative thought to develop possible solutions. The development of proposed solutions or hypotheses (Peirce's abduction) is not rule-governed. It requires the insights of practical reason (*phronesis*) to see possibilities in situations of uncertainty. (Gadamer also emphasizes *phronetic* insight as an essential component of understanding.) Dewey believed the use of the process of inquiry was not limited to mundane getting about in the world, but could also be used to inquire about morality, beauty and political life. His aim was to make human action more reasonable and intelligent (as he understood these terms) so as to produce more effective engagements with others, one's self and the world. Dewey believed that the background skill of problem-solving could be developed and nurtured through education. Education offered the opportunity for the inquiry process to become internalized into children's backgrounds as a disposition of habit so that they are able to fulfill more effectively their life desires and purposes.

Gadamer

Although a concern of Gadamer's hermeneutic theory was the interpretation of texts, this was not his principal concern. His primary purpose was to develop a philosophical hermeneutics, that is, to develop a general theory of human understanding and action. Like Dewey, Gadamer held that our understanding or interpretation (Gadamer's terms) or experiencing (Dewey's term) of the world always occurs through a tradition that functions as a textured background. 'Interpretation is not an occasional, post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding' (Gadamer, 1994, p. 307). It is through the background's texture that one makes sense (i.e. interprets the events and happenings in the world). One never experiences phenomena in a direct or 'brute' fashion but always in the context of an interpretative framework of the background. The background furnishes a stock of answers about how to cope with everyday worldly problems and sets the framework (or horizon) in which the world is displayed. Gadamer links understanding with interpretation. 'When our pre-thematic, pre-predictative or tacit [background] understanding is developed, it becomes interpretation' (Madison, 1994, p. 300). Interpretation is the explication or

laying out of the background understanding. Gadamer's intention in interpreting or elucidating the background is to improve our understanding of the people and things we encounter so that we might function better with them in the world. Thus, Dewey and Gadamer share a common purpose: to improve on the received background understanding of the world so that people can more fully realize their goals and relate to others. Dewey sought to achieve this purpose through a hypothesis-testing logic, and Gadamer through a dialogic logic.

For Gadamer, a tradition's horizon is part of each person's cultural heritage. It is transmitted by a culture to its members and, thereby, provides a common social understanding of the world. 'On the hermeneutic account this interpretive framework is not primarily of our own making but is taken over by us from the tradition of which we are part' (Healy, 1996, p. 160). Gadamer took from Heidegger the notion that one encounters the world (including one's self and others) through the fore-structures of one's culturally derived framework. Gadamer saw his task as reappropriating the wisdom of other cultural backgrounds. This task was at odds with Heidegger's, which was the destruction of traditions. Gadamer's task was to interact with and rehabilitate the wisdom contained in the various traditions. Habermas (1983) wrote about Gadamer:

Gadamer promises to rehabilitate the substance of the philosophies of Plato and Hegel. He wants thereby to bridge (as he supposes) the false opposition between the metaphysical and the modern apprehension of the world. . . . This conception contrasts . . . with Heidegger's lordly destruction of Western thought, with the project that devalues the history of philosophy from Plato through Thomas to Descartes and Hegel as the drama of a mounting forgetfulness of being. (p. 190)

Gadamer also held that the background understanding does not consist of general knowledge about universals, but, instead, it consists of a repertoire of responses to particular situations. He held that backgrounds vary historically; that is, in different historical periods, the world shows up differently. He believed that background knowledge of these past periods contained understandings and wisdom that could be recovered in the present and, thereby, serve in overcoming the limits of one's present understandings of the world. Gadamer viewed one's background as dynamic and changing. It changes and develops over time because of its successful and unsuccessful experiences with the world. Gadamer (1994) wrote:

The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, the something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. The surrounding horizon is

not set in motion by historical consciousness. But in it motion becomes aware of itself. (p. 304)

Gadamer also held that the background understanding does not consist of general knowledge. The wisdom in past traditions is primarily available through those texts that have been handed down. However, searching for the wisdom in past traditions presents the challenge of how one can understand a text written in a historical period different from one's own. Gadamer's position regarding the possibility of gaining access to the understandings and wisdom of other backgrounds differs from those, such as Winch (1958) and Kuhn (1970), who hold that people are locked into their own backgrounds, which are incommensurable with other backgrounds. In opposition to the view that one's background prevents one from understanding other backgrounds, Gadamer celebrated the plurality and mutual openness of traditions. He emphasized that it is the meeting and dialogue among traditions (the fusion of horizons) that yield a larger horizon of understanding.

Gadamer's position on how one's background is enlarged is similar in structure to Dewey's four-step logic of inquiry: (a) experience of lack of knowledge in a situation; (b) openness to alternate background understandings; (c) dialogical engagement with the world or other traditions to produce a fuller understanding of the situation; and (d) acting from out of the broadened understanding.

A problematic. A dialogic inquiry is initiated only when people admit that they lack knowledge or when they experience the need to go beyond their present understanding of a situation or subject matter. Gadamer (1994) cited the Socratic notion that 'he knows that he does not know (*docta ignorantia*)' as the impetus to investigation:

Recognizing that an object is different, and not as we first thought, obviously presupposes the question whether it was this or that. From a logical point of view, the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being either this or that. It has the structure of a question. . . . [This is] the knowledge of not knowing. This is the famous Socratic *docta ignorantia* which, amid the most extreme negativity, opens up the way to true superiority of understanding. (p. 362)

Through encounters with other traditions and other people, we are challenged to enlarge our background understanding to achieve an improved understanding of a topic or subject.

Posing questions. Once people experience the inadequacy or intrinsic limitations of their pre-reflective background understanding of a situation, improvement in understanding depends on the readiness to question their backgrounds' ways of engaging the world. They need to take a radically open stance in which questions can be raised about any part of the

background. Inquirers, however, cannot remove themselves from their own tradition or step outside of their situatedness. Inquirers always already have a background understanding of the subject. In order to be able to reflect on one's already functioning background interpretations (i.e. one's pre-judgments or prejudices) and to be open to improved interpretations, it is necessary to be aware that one's pre-reflective understanding of the world is not simply a mirrored reflection of the world, but rather is an interpretation. Gadamer terms the awareness that we stand in a tradition and are affected by it its 'effective-historical consciousness'. Thus, inquiry occurs within the texture of one's background, not outside it. It occurs as the background 'folds into itself' to question the adequacy of its own interpretations.

By asking for answers, knowledge of effective operations in the world is incorporated into the background. The world teaches only through responses to questions asked of it. Therefore, improvement in background understanding is primarily dependent on asking the right questions. The formation of questions, from which one can learn, progresses through stages from an unfocused 'feel' that questions the adequacy of the received interpretation to a more explicit questioning intended to solicit answers through a worldly response. As answers are received to initial questions, these questions are often modified and sharpened to produce a 'new series of questions better attuned to the particularities of the subject matter' (Healy, 1996, p. 165). The questioning process is an iterative and dialectic one whereby answers to initial questions produce further questions that need to be submitted for testing.

Gadamer's emphasis on the need to pose the right questions is similar to Dewey's emphasis on posing the right hypotheses. 'The ability to ask the right questions about the topic under investigation is something of an art, an art which above all requires insight and good judgment (or better, *phronesis*) as a condition of its possibility' (Healy, 1996, pp. 166–167). Forming questions that lead to an enlarged understanding is a creative process and cannot be reduced to a set of rules. Gadamer and Dewey propose that individuals experienced with the subject of the inquiry are more likely, because of their experientially developed enlarged understanding, to formulate questions that are attuned to the phenomena. An appropriate question or hypothesis is not produced by simply a method made up of a set of algorithmic steps. (Gadamer reserved the term *method* to refer to regular and systematic procedures designed to produce a correct result.) Gadamer (1994) said:

The priority of the question in knowledge shows how fundamentally the idea of method is limited for knowledge, which has been the starting point for our argument as a whole. There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what is questionable. On the contrary,

the example of Socrates teaches that the important thing is the knowledge that one does not know. (p. 365)

Testing. Questions lead to answers when they are submitted to the test of experience. In addition to a willingness to question the background's pre-understanding, inquirers need to be open to the responses of the world to their questions. Inquiry requires a question-focused encounter with a recalcitrant experience. If the shift in the texture's interpretation does not produce a more adequate appreciation of the object or topic of concern, it is revised and submitted to further tests. Experience becomes the arbiter between competing understandings. Gadamer's dialogic process of questioning and testing resembles Dewey's process of the hypothesis-testing model of scientific inquiry. The process of questioning-testing-questioning again is an inherent tool embedded in the texture of backgrounds. Thus, a background includes processes of self-correction. Gadamer, like Dewey, wanted to bring this process to awareness so that it might be more effectively used to increase the understanding of the world and, consequently, enable a more successful interaction with it.

Testing of posed questions, like the formation of questions, is not rule-governed. The traditional idea of inquiry proposes that answers to questions require exact adherence to the rules of a research method. For Gadamer, an enlarged truth about an object or topic is not a function of using a method correctly. Rather, inquiry needs to be open to being taught how to investigate an object by the object itself. *Truth and Method*, the title of Gadamer's major publication, refers to his position that uncovering of truth about a topic is a more open and creative process than simply following the algorithmic steps laid out in a method. An increased understanding of the topic is more likely to be covered over or distorted than be enlarged by strictly following the requirements of a predetermined method. Gadamer again emphasizes that openness is essential to all aspects of hermeneutic inquiry: (a) openness to the problematic of a background interpretation; (b) openness to a reappraisal of all aspects of the initial background understanding; (c) openness to framing questions that show up different aspects of the topic; and (d) openness to how the testing of questions is to be carried out.

Gadamer also objected to the notion that the inquirer must assume a disinterested, spectator role that is emphasized in the received understanding of testing. Many elements of the traditional method are designed to lift inquirers out of their biases and subjective beliefs, so that the object is seen in its pure objectivity. Gadamer, as did Dewey, believed that it is neither possible nor desirable to seek to view the object from 'nowhere' (Nagel, 1986). Hermeneutic inquiry always takes place within one's textured background and the object always appears embedded in a particular situation.

Understanding derives from the active participation of inquirers with the situated subject matter into which they are inquiring.

My presentation of Gadamer's view of the process of increasing the adequacy of understanding has focused, thus far, on the work of a single inquirer. The single inquirer proceeds through a dialogue with an object or situation. The dialogue consists of the inquirer posing enlarged possible interpretations and the object responding through displaying itself in a more or less full way. The dialogue continues through iterations until the object displays itself to the inquirer in a more enhanced manner. The single-inquirer dialogue takes place *in foro interno* (in the court of consciousness). Gadamer, however, extended the notion of a single-inquirer dialogic process to a dialogic process among participants in a conversation. The conversation can be between the inquirer and present fellow-inquirers or between the inquirer and a text (especially texts written from within a different background texture). Conversation extends a personal, single subject's inquiry to an inter-subjective, multiple-horizoned inquiry. Gadamer (1994) describes the conversational inquiry in the following terms:

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. But the art of testing is the art of questioning. For we have seen that to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid. . . . Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter). (p. 367)

The dialogic conversation requires that the participants be committed to coming to an enlarged understanding beyond that maintained in their present backgrounds. The participants need to respect the understandings of others and to be open to questioning their own textured interpretations. Through dialogic conversation, whether among persons or between a person with a text, the fusion of the participants' horizons or backgrounds leads to a more 'truthful' or enlarged understanding of the topic. However, the development of understanding of a situation or text never reaches complete fullness. Instead, the attainment of each new level of understanding opens new possibilities that must be further investigated.

Application. Historically, hermeneutics had focused on two elements—understanding the grammar and words of a text and interpreting the meaning of what the grammar and words express. Gadamer held that there is a third element—application. He writes about a fusion of these three elements into a unity.

In the course of our reflections we have come to see that understanding always involves something like applying the text [or topic] to be understood to the interpreter's present situation. . . . [We need to regard] not only understanding and interpretation, but also application as comprising one unified process. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 308)

Gadamer used the notion of legal interpretation as an illustration of a process whereby understanding and interpreting a law is not completed until it is apparent how the law applies in the particular situation under consideration. Hermeneutic inquiry leads to a display of the essential features of a situation and, thereby, shows what is the appropriate response to the situation; that is, an enlarged understanding informs what action is required (Schrag, 1986). Gadamer's meaning of application derives from his notion that as changes occur in one's background understandings, they imply changes in how one acts in situations.

Hermeneutic inquiry produces neither universal nor ahistorical knowledge. Rather, it produces increased understanding and sensitivity to particular situations. Application to particular situations does not consist of identifying the situation as an instance of a general type and using an 'if . . . , then . . . ' logic to determine which action is required. For example, in some approaches to psychotherapy, determining which techniques are to be applied to a particular client is decided by classifying the client as an instance of a diagnostic category. In opposition to this 'if . . . , then . . . ' notion of application, Gadamer relied on Aristotle's idea of *phronesis* to clarify the conception of application that he held to be appropriate to hermeneutic inquiry. To draw out the features of *phronesis*, Aristotle compared it with *techné*. A *technic* is a response to a situation on the basis of a blueprint which lays out in advance what needs to be done in situations of a particular sort. A phronetic response takes into account the unique properties of a situation that differentiates it from apparently similar situations. Although Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis* takes place in the context of determining the appropriate moral action in particular situations, Gadamer expands the idea of *phronesis* to cover decision-making in general. *Phronesis* requires a hermeneutic-like dialectic encounter with a particular situation to take into account its unique and general aspects. Thus, hermeneutic application is a function of the dialectic interaction with a situation. Because which responses apply is a function of the dynamic understanding of a situation, the actor needs to be sensitive to the effect of his or her actions on it. As one acts, the situation itself changes. The response of the situation to an action produces an enlarged understanding of it by the actor. The actor then acts again, but now the action is based on the enlarged understanding. The dialectic does not terminate in a final, correct action; rather, it leads to progressively more adequate responses without a final closure.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to provide the philosophical groundwork for the study of the inquiry process undergone by psychological practitioners. I have assumed that practitioner inquiry is not different in kind from the inquiry process that takes place in people's everyday living. Thus, what practitioners do and say to clients arises out of their intricately structured background understandings. When these actions are unsuccessful in helping a client accomplish his or her goals, practitioners reflect on their actions and devise new actions whose success is determined by their effectiveness. Practitioners' backgrounds undergo constant change and the experiences of the results of newly conceived actions become part of their background understandings.

The traditional scientific approach to inquiry led to the development of a technologically understood world that excluded values and limited the understanding of situations to general propositions. The traditional model of knowledge development required inquirers to assume a position outside of their background and to follow an algorithmically structured method. This traditional notion of inquiry was severely critiqued by most post-positivist philosophers and by Dewey, Heidegger and Gadamer. For postmodern philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida, the destruction of the traditional model of inquiry led to the conclusion that the search for knowledge should be abandoned and we should accept that what we take as knowledge is always relative to our background. They believed that the traditional approach to knowledge generation was the only way to produce truth. Thus, because the traditional approach had been destroyed through its internal contradictions and incoherence, there was no way left of producing knowledge. All that was left was to give up the attempt to know, and, instead, one should merely engage in talk that is disconnected from the real; that is, one should simply keep the conversation going (Rorty, 1979).

Dewey's pragmatism and Gadamer's hermeneutics provide alternative responses to the postmodern demise of the tradition's idea of inquiry. Although Dewey and Gadamer approached everyday inquiry from different backgrounds, they produced a similar outline of an alternate form of inquiry. The source of their alternative view is derived from the study of people's everyday, practical interactions with the world. From this study, they noted that inquiry begins as a response to an inadequate understanding of a situation and moves through an iterative process of addressing questions to the situation. On the basis of the answers to these questions, the pragmatic response to a situation becomes more adequate. Practical knowledge does not remain constant: one's responses change the situation, and the changed situation affects the texture of one's understanding of it. It was Dewey's and Gadamer's purpose to make explicit a process of inquiry that deepens and broadens the understanding of the world, and, thereby, increases people's

effectiveness in functioning in it. They pointed out that the traditional scientific approach was less than successful in providing solutions to the everyday problems of living, and offered, in its place, an approach reflecting an understanding of how people cope and operate effectively in the world. Psychology can adopt their insights for understanding how practitioners carry out a therapeutic process with clients.

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