

# Comment

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## Values, Politics, and Psychology

M. Brewster Smith  
*University of California, Santa Cruz*

Kendler's (October 1999) traditionally positivist critique, "The Role of Value in the World of Psychology," has consequences that call for close consideration, because it is indirectly a sermon against American Psychological Association (APA) involvement in social advocacy. Others can respond more appropriately to his use of Anne Harrington's (1996) treatment of holism in German culture, which tarred Gestalt psychology with the brush of "enchanted science." In her view, this is a romantic misconception of science that made it vulnerable to the unwarranted intrusion of Nazi values; in his, it lends itself to the equally illicit support of humanistic ones. In my reading, when Köhler (1938) wrote about the "objective requiredness of values," he was referring to their phenomenal quality of objectivity, as compared with the phenomenal subjectivity of tastes and preferences. This distinction is important for the part people's values play in

their lives, but it seems to me irrelevant to the objective or empirical justification of values, which in spite of some obscurity of exposition I think Köhler neither claimed on this basis nor achieved.

Be that as it may, I have to object to Kendler's (1999) interpretation of my justification for a socially activist psychology. He recognized that I know about the distinction between facts and values that positivists like to emphasize (Smith, 1961). He quoted me, in part, that

just as in our scientific roles we should and most do act *as if* there were truth "out there" that we only have to be clever enough to discover . . . in our personal, political, and psychologist roles we also do well to act *as if* there are objective right and wrong, better and worse choices and policies. . . . [W]e are adrift as persons and useless as citizens if we do not try to find and pursue the right and if we do not take our own convictions—and those of our opponents—seriously as attempts to advance the right and give it reality. We become literally "de-moralized." (Smith, 1991, p. 189)

He read this as showing my "fundamental error" (Kendler, 1999, p. 831) of confusing my position as a scientific psychologist with that of a democratic philosopher like Walter Lippman (1955), whom I had drawn upon—moral choice being in the domain of philosophy, not science. I am not confused.

Advocates of supposedly value-free science commonly assume that values and morals find their justification in some privileged other realm of religion, philosophy, or tradition. However, many educated participants in the contemporary world, particularly those influenced by science, are skeptical of the claims that each of these resources provide a firm basis for values and moral choice. Those who do not simply let their choices be guided by personal whim, by convention, or by one or another sort of authority have to make more or less informed judgments about what is good for people. Empirical facts cannot fully determine these judgments, but they certainly can inform and often lead these thinkers to modify them. Psychologists are

in an advantageous position to bring such facts to bear. So I have argued that psychologists, as scientists and professionals, have just as much justification as anybody else, and more than many, to enter into democratic controversy about value choices.

Here I can applaud one of Kendler's (1999) recommendations. He said that in an ethically pluralistic society, such as that found in the United States,

moral guidelines are needed . . . but they cannot be set in stone. They require constant evaluation to determine their consequences. . . . A continuous surveillance of the consequences of the guiding moral principles will be needed to elevate the acceptability and effectiveness of social policies. (Kendler, 1999, p. 832)

Evaluating consequences does not span the gap between facts and values, but it gives the empiricism of science a distinctive role in the rhetoric of value controversy.

Because psychologists have citizen and human responsibilities in their capacities as psychologists, members of organized psychology in Nazi Germany are blamed for not standing forth against Hitler's evils: They did not need a research base for such a risky but humanly desirable stand. APA policy positions on controversial matters like affirmative action, abortion, and nuclear freeze, to which Kendler objected, do not imply that "psychology and psychologists have a pipeline to moral truths" (Kendler, 1999, p. 831). They imply that the democratic political process of APA governance has led the organization to adopt the position, usually with the conviction that psychological research and professional experience have relevant contributions to make to public debate on the issues. The more fully developed the research evidence or the conceptual analysis is, the more likely APA's involvement will make a difference.

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Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to M. Brewster Smith, Department of Psychology, University of California, Santa Cruz, CA 95064. Electronic mail may be sent to [brsmith@cats.ucsc.edu](mailto:brsmith@cats.ucsc.edu).

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## Is Value-Free Science Possible?

Ken Sheldon  
*University of Missouri—Columbia*

Peter Schmuck  
*University of Greifswald and University of Goettingen*

Tim Kasser  
*Knox College*

In this comment, we criticize some of the positions taken within Howard H. Kendler's (October 1999) article "The Role of Value in the World of Psychology" that seem problematic for the future of psychology and that seem to have overlooked similar inquiries that have appeared in the *American Psychologist* in the past 30 years. We also suggest an alternative approach, which acknowledges the inevitability of values and suggests a way of treating them.

What is Kendler's (1999) message? Primarily it is this: Because particular points of view are often wrong or self-serving, values should never be promoted by research psychologists (p. 831). Further, if psychologists take a position or try to influence policy, they endanger the potential social contributions of proper psychological science (which is objective, fact-based, and agnostic with respect to values; p. 833). This is because the potential authority of science is eroded in the public eye when scientific research is aligned with particular points of view (p. 831). Moral pluralism is an inescapable result of the impossibility of determining the relative worth of competing moral systems, and

thus judgments of value can only arise from democratic dialogue, not from particular theoretical perspectives or research programs (p. 832).

But is value-free science really possible? Howard (1985) discussed in detail the problems with the standard positivist view, most pertinently the unacknowledged fact that all research is inevitably value laden (Feyerabend, 1975; Kuhn, 1977; Schwartz, 1990). Empirical "facts" can support many incompatible theoretical positions and are always theory dependent and thus value dependent. That is, one can never choose between competing theories by simply looking to the brute facts, as Kendler (1999) proposed (p. 833). Instead of trying to act as neutral truth seekers following a value-free pursuit of knowledge, psychologists should acknowledge and accept the place of values in research, according to Howard.

In a similar essay on science and values, Miller (1969) argued that by abdicating their responsibility to align their work with their role as citizens, psychologists risked leaving control of scientific practice with industrial or bureaucratic elites, who may have vested interests far more pernicious than those of psychologists (p. 1068). Bevan (1980) also addressed the relation of science and government policy, saying that science today is rarely a value-free inquiry; instead, it is often used as a tool by special interest groups for accumulating political power (p. 782). In this light, psychologists cannot afford to retreat from these realities and struggles but instead must clearly articulate their own visions of "the good" so that these visions may inform and perhaps influence the debates.

Kendler (1999) used Harrington's (1996) distinction between *enchanted* (holistic, value encompassing) and *disenchanted* (mechanistic, positivistic) science as a framing device for his article, arguing that only disenchanted science is appropriate science. What Kendler did not seem to recognize is that even mechanistic theories are suffused with values. For example, behaviorism, arguably one of the most disenchanted theories in history, certainly has influenced values and social policy. Its strong emphasis on rewards and punishments supports the existing capitalistic economic structure, vertical-hierarchical conceptions of control and reinforcement, and the heavy emphasis on grades and punitive sanctions found within many American schools.

Furthermore, we question Kendler's (1999) criticism of holism. Showing that holistic argumentation has been misused in history for justifying terror systems does

not allow the conclusion that holism or enchanted theories are inappropriate; of course, any tool can be misused. In defense of holism as a useful theoretical lens, Sperry (1988) argued that emergent or top-down properties of complex systems are just as real and causal as the mechanistic or bottom-up processes described by disenchanted theories. Thus, although holistic perspectives undoubtedly place strong challenges on existing scientific methods, they may well be worth the effort. Ironically, Kendler's willingness to rely on the product of the democratic process to determine societal values is itself an endorsement of holism: His position implies that the emergent collective will is more valid than the beliefs of any one individual and should be trusted as the best estimate of "the good" (p. 832).

Of course, Kendler (1999) was correct to insist that scientists (holists and reductionists alike) must meet the objective epistemological standards of science. How can scientists bring this requirement and the desirability of acknowledging the role that values and preferences play in scientific research under the same umbrella? One perspective is that practitioners' values are already fairly obvious, in the very questions they have chosen to study and the factual conclusions they endorse (e.g., Kendler's own values are fairly clear in his article). However, if values are to be made even more explicit, research reports could contain a conclusory note or footnote in which the researcher acknowledges the underlying purposes connected with the research, his or her own moral and ethical preferences, and the "take-home" message (if any) he or she would like to promote. By including such a note, researchers' implicit wishes and foundational beliefs can become more transparent and available for open discussion and criticism. Of course, the researcher's values and beliefs will make a larger impression, to the extent that the reader is convinced by the research methods and results.

In summary, we believe there is no avoiding the fact that scientists are people, motivated to do research in part by a desire to confirm their own values and beliefs. Because data collection is guided by theories, which lie midway between values and facts, facts will always be influenced by values. We suggest that acknowledging this will ultimately better serve Kendler's (1999) goal of enhancing democratic dialogue than will the futile effort to retain an illusory separation between facts and values, an effort which will fail for all but the most pedestrian or descriptive research. Kendler quoted At-

kinson as saying psychologists should “not disguise political efforts by cloaking them in the framework of psychological research” (p. 833). We agree, and we add that psychologists should not disguise their values by cloaking their findings as objective facts. It would be better if everyone “came out of the closet.”

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Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to Ken Sheldon, Department of Psychology, 210 McAlester Hall, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65211. Electronic mail may be sent to sheldonk@missouri.edu.

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## Beyond the Naturalistic Fallacy

James M. DuBois  
Saint Louis University

I strongly agree with Kendler (October 1999) in his warning to psychologists against committing the naturalistic fallacy. He maintained that the American Psychological Association has made unwarranted moves from neutral facts to support for morally loaded policies (e.g., regarding abortion) and cautioned that this kind of behavior could undermine public trust in psychologists as scientists. However, Kendler failed to acknowledge the extent to which his overall position rests on a denial of the possibility of ethical knowledge—not just for psychologists, but for scientists and ethicists alike. In turn, this failure con-

tributed to a distorted presentation of Köhler’s (1938) work on values and its relation to Nazism.

## Underlying Value Skepticism and the Naturalistic Fallacy

Kendler (1999) wrote, “Ethics, unlike science . . . has no extrinsic criterion, shared by all, that can be used to judge the validity of moral principles. Moral truths are restricted to the domain of the ethical system that endorses them” (p. 832). These statements amount to authoritative pronouncements, not to the effect that people disagree about ethics, but that there are no transcendent ethical truths that can be discovered. This claim extends significantly beyond the fact of pluralism. Arguably, making such a claim also extends beyond the sphere of competency of psychologists qua psychologists.

Elsewhere, Kendler (1999) committed the naturalistic fallacy as he tacitly moved from the fact that societal value beliefs change to a loaded claim about morality itself. He referred to “democratic processes that, over time, have modified what is legally and morally correct” (p. 834). However, from the fact that today’s moral judgments contradict earlier ones, nothing can be deduced about what is morally correct, not even that what is correct has been modified (Kohlberg, 1971).

## Kendler on Köhler

Kendler (1999) identified Köhler as one of those enchanted scientists who thinks that science has “a pipeline to moral truth” (p. 831) or that “science can reveal moral principles that are right for humankind” (p. 832). However, he cited no evidence that Köhler held such views. First, as Kendler himself noted, when dealing with Köhler’s work, one has to distinguish between the empirical and the philosophical claims he made. Köhler clearly stated that the purpose of his book *The Place of Value in a World of Facts* was philosophical, not scientific (1938, p. x and p. 280). Second, nowhere in that book did Köhler defend moral principles like “always love your neighbor” or “never steal,” much less allege that such principles are right for all of humankind. The book is neither overtly nor covertly a text in ethics. Third, Köhler stated that the “phenomenon of value as such remains, whether or not there is agreement about definite values” (1938, p. 53), thereby showing awareness of the fact people disagree about values (a fact Kendler often invoked against the enchanted scientists). Finally, Köhler (1938) wrote,

If we were . . . to establish a direct relation between values and something in nature, our theory would undoubtedly commit the very error that is attributed to naturalism; such a theory would be an attempt to reduce values to indifferent facts, and would thus contradict the very simplest phenomenological observations. (p. 276)

Köhler was thus in agreement with Kendler that one cannot derive values from indifferent facts.

Köhler’s (1938) project with values was never meant to be prescriptive; it was meant to be descriptive. In his writings, Köhler attempted to describe how it is that people perceive values against the background of the world. Further, his statements on values were not meant to prove that there are values (much less specific values); rather, they reflect Köhler’s assumption that values exist. Kendler (1999) actually suggested that “the whole gamut of moral behaviors . . . is fair game for scientific investigations” (p. 835), but apparently only if investigators assume at the outset that moral behaviors cannot really be known to be correct or incorrect.

## Dubious Claims About Nazism

Kendler (1999) claimed that the “same epistemological process that allows holism and humanistic psychology to generate a psychologically demanded morality has also justified Nazi and Communist ideology” (p. 828). Was the Nazi ideology justified? Nazis invoked many things in an attempt to justify the unjustifiable. Nothing follows from this. More interesting questions are, which ideologies are most amenable to the Nazi ideology, and might any moral beliefs have causally contributed to the rise of the Nazi regime? Frankl (1986), who lived through six Nazi concentration camps, attributed the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Maidanek not to work done in some ministry or other in Berlin, but rather to the work done “at the desks and in the lecture halls of nihilistic scientists and philosophers” (p. xxvii). Frankl’s logotherapy would have something to say about how a nihilistic worldview might causally contribute to hostile behaviors, but this is not the place to explore such ideas.

In any case, the nihilistic ethic of Nietzsche (1887/1999) is clearly more amenable to Nazism than is the value philosophy propounded by Köhler (1938). The nihilistic ethic actually condones a “production of values” by the strong to be imposed on the weak and the sick, among whom Jews and Christians are to be counted. It might thus be argued, contrary to Kendler, that in maintaining, as Frankl

(1986) and Köhler did, that values can be perceived as being required, one precisely opposes the nihilism that may have played both a causal and a rationalizing role in the development of 20th century totalitarian regimes. It is interesting to note that Frankl—who put values at the center of his psychological theorizing perhaps more than any other recent thinker—insisted that psychologists not attempt to prescribe specific values to patients but only encourage them to seek out what is required in their concrete life situation. Of course, he believed that if everyone did this, the world would never again witness anything like the Nazi Holocaust. He also thought this was compatible with a pluralistic democratic society and with sound science.

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Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to James M. DuBois, Saint Louis University, 3525 Caroline Mall, St. Louis, MO 63104-1099. Electronic mail may be sent to [duboisjm@slu.edu](mailto:duboisjm@slu.edu).

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## Let's Be Realistic!

Howard H. Kendler

*University of California, Santa Barbara*

My critics incorrectly read into my position an espousal of a so-called value-free science, a discipline that is free of all values. The decisions to become a psychologist, to choose a specialty, and to investigate a research problem all involve value judgments. Moreover, natural-science methodology itself possesses a value system of its own. Three obvious values are honesty, logical consistency, and the maintenance of the political freedom essential for scientific inquiry. A major thrust of my

article (Kendler, October 1999) was not that all of science is value free but instead that scientific data are value neutral; there is no logical connection between the natural *is* and the moral *ought*.

How then is it possible for the American Psychological Association to endorse pro-choice and affirmative action policies? I suggest that the justification for political action begins with Köhler's attributing a factual status to the experience of a value judgment. Although he did not propose a universal moral system (I regret not making this clear), Köhler nevertheless created a phenomenological climate that encouraged the view that psychology could serve as a moral authority. With a similar orientation, Kurt Lewin (Kendler, 1989) designed action research to make people behave better. This served as a catapult for Chein, Cook, and Harding (1948) to implement action research on a broad scale. In some manner never clearly stated but dependent on the conflation of facts with values, psychologists become capable of identifying policies, including intensely controversial ones, that are of "maximal social utility" (Chein et al., 1948, p. 44). This line of thought is carried a step further by Smith (2000, this issue), who suggested that psychologists pretend that there is an objective way to differentiate right and wrong, although he should know better. This pretension led him to encourage "psychologists, as scientists and professionals, . . . to enter into democratic controversy about value choices" (Smith, 2000, p. 1151).

Of course, psychologists have a right to enter into value debates but not by deceiving themselves and their audiences into believing that they have special moral insights or that their conclusions are supported by the science of psychology. A more productive approach for psychologists is to investigate the consequences of social policies such as preferential treatment in affirmative action programs (Kendler, 2000). Then, citizens of a democracy can make their policy decisions in light of empirical evidence without being seduced into believing that psychology can offer moral guidance. Psychologists who wish to influence political decisions can combine with their like-minded colleagues to form committees (e.g., Concerned Psychologists for Affirmative Action) to espouse their political convictions without implying that the science of psychology justifies their position or that all psychologists share their views.

The plaintive justification for Smith's (2000) position surprises me; he argued that one literally becomes demoralized if

one does not pursue the right and "give it reality" (Smith, 1991, as quoted in Smith, 2000). Must one assign a reality to one's personal view and, by implication, an unreality to an opposing opinion? Must one be forced into believing that a particular side of the abortion or affirmative action debate is evil or unreal? By stubbornly believing in the reality of one's moral beliefs, one loses one's sensitivity to one's obligations and responsibilities to science and society.

The final argument Smith (2000) offered is that organized psychology has moral responsibilities to withstand the evils of Nazism. In response, I cannot avoid referring to my own flirtation with Marxism, a flirtation that terminated in the late 1930s after historical evidence and political action convinced me that Nazism and communism were opposite sides of the coin of totalitarianism. Although the intrinsic evil of Nazism seems matchless, a body-count criterion of victims places communism ahead of Nazism in its wickedness, as demonstrated by replicated studies of Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Kim Il Sung, and minor associates (Courtois et al., 1999). I suggest that the evidence from the 20th century supports the contention that those psychologists who resisted the conflation of psychology and politics repulsed totalitarian influences more effectively than those who thought that psychology has the ability to identify the moral right.

Although agreeing with me that the American Psychological Association has no right to support "morally loaded policies," DuBois (2000, this issue, p. 1152) criticized me for believing that "there are no transcendent ethical truths that can be discovered" (p. 1152). Natural-science psychology can discover moral predispositions (e.g., parental love) but cannot validate a moral principle (Kendler, 2000). This does not mean that individuals cannot adopt, by faith, transcendent moral truths. My point is that an unbridgeable chasm separates the epistemology of science from that of religion. DuBois is mistaken in suggesting that I implied that Köhler indirectly supported Nazi values, but I forgive him.

Sheldon, Schmuck, and Kasser's (2000, this issue) equating of behaviorism with unbridled capitalism reflects a misunderstanding of behaviorism, a rejection of the fact/value dichotomy, and a conflation of the views of Watson, Skinner, and Tolman (Kendler, 1987). The idea that democracy is holistic frightens me if it means that votes for candidates will be judged to be greater than the sum of their parts.

## Smoking and Stress: Correlation, Causation, and Context

Jon D. Kassel  
University of Illinois at Chicago

Sheldon et al.'s (2000) suggestion that research reports should include the value preferences of the author makes a mockery of science. If scientific knowledge is inevitably contaminated by value commitments, how could natural-science methodology have succeeded in revealing reliable and consistent empirical laws in a broad range of disciplines? The key question is whether psychology should be interpreted as some vague combination of the humanities, postmodernism, critical theory, hermeneutics, social constructionism, and multiculturalism, with perhaps a smattering of natural-science ideas, that will have infinite appeal to those who yearn to experience an integrated and fulfilling world, or whether psychology should be conceptualized as a natural science that perceives the world as it is, not as it ought to be, and that can offer an accurate picture having great pragmatic value.

A symbiotic relationship integrates democracy, natural science, and moral pluralism. Suggesting that psychology can replace the political processes of democracy while ignoring the impact of moral pluralism will create a divisive, squabbling discipline. Psychology will forfeit professional respect, and society will lose a source of potentially useful knowledge.

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Correspondence concerning this comment should be addressed to Howard H. Kendler, 4596 Camino Molinero, Santa Barbara, CA 93110. Electronic mail may be sent to tkendler@psych.ucsb.edu.

Mounting evidence suggests, however, that predisposing individual differences in psychopathology (e.g., depression, schizophrenia), personality (e.g., neuroticism), and nicotine responsivity (e.g., initial sensitivity to nicotine) all mediate smoking heritability (Gilbert & Gilbert, 1995). Thus, one can just as easily assert that differences in affective distress between smokers and nonsmokers predate smoking onset. In fact, several longitudinal studies suggest just that (see Gilbert, 1995).

Second, similar logic can be applied to interpreting the observation that adolescents who smoke are more stressed. In addition to the well-documented relationship between disorders of affect and smoking onset, evidence points to strong associations (assessed cross-sectionally and longitudinally) between conduct disorder—which itself is likely to be a stressful condition—and both smoking initiation and nicotine dependence (Riggs, Mikulich, Whitmore, & Crowley, 1999). Moreover, it is important to remember that a significant proportion of adolescents who smoke do not progress to nicotine dependence (Kassel, 2000). Again, there is strong reason to believe that predisposing differences in emotional and behavioral characteristics selectively set the stage for who becomes a smoker.

Third, although the finding that smokers report less stress after quitting is consistent with Parrott's (1999) argument, other interpretations of these data are equally plausible. It may be that successful quitters feel a well-justified sense of pride and satisfaction over their accomplishment and that this phenomenon—rather than a pharmacological explanation—accounts for their reduced stress and overall sense of well-being. Moreover, once again there is reason to believe that individual differences, particularly in depressive symptomatology, are predictive of who actually quits smoking. Thus, analogous to the process through which some people become smokers, smokers who quit may be different from those who do not.

Fourth, it is important to note that even nondependent smokers (chippers) report that they smoke to cope with negative affect on occasion (Shiffman, Kassel, Paty, Gnyes, & Zettler-Segal, 1994). Similarly, there is reason to believe that adolescent smokers often attribute their smoking to mood regulation motives and do so, in all likelihood, before the onset of nicotine dependence (Kassel, 2000).

Finally, in line with his assertion that smoking actually causes stress, Parrott (1999) argued that “there is no empirical evidence that nicotine does alleviate stress”