

Thinkways: The Impulse to Reductionism

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ABSTRACT

I introduce a new term, *thinkways*, which is a culturally constructed pattern of thinking about the world that a culture socializes into its members, and which is reproduced within the culture through practices, actions that are repeated in the culture and become normative. In turn, this pattern comes to characterize the culture. EuroAmerican cultures, I argue, have an impulse to reductionistic thinking. The reductionistic *thinkway* is based on two concepts: atomism and representation. After analyzing these concepts, I give examples of the dysfunctional use of this *thinkway*, and I contrast the EuroAmerican *thinkway* with examples of an alternative non-EuroAmerican *thinkway*. Understanding that reductionism has been raised to the level of a *thinkway* gives us perspective on our impulse to adopt this cognitive strategy, and it allows us to consider more clearly arguments rejecting the reduction of consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

This paper does not engage in a traditional analysis of the “problem of consciousness,” arguing, for instance whether consciousness can be reduced to material processes, or even whether functionalism is adequate. Rather than discussing the details of this important issue, I want to concentrate on the broad strokes, to paint with a Jackson Pollack approach rather than the detailed approach of Bruegel. As opposed to detailing why consciousness cannot be reduced, I want to step back and ask a more basic question: Why are we so concerned to ask whether reductionism is adequate or inadequate? More to the point, why do scientists and philosophers of science so naturally think that reductionism is an appropriate methodology? I want to discuss what assumptions are involved in this desire for a reduction of consciousness, focusing on historical factors that led us to this point in our thinking. Is this a peculiarly Euro-American way of approaching consciousness, a cultural icon? More directly, I want to ask why the EuroAmerican cultures have an impulse to reductionism.

I am not suggesting that the traditional discussions of the problem of consciousness, and of the adequacy of the reduction of consciousness, are not appropriate. The EuroAmerican world contains a dominant *Weltanschauung* that has developed over the past 400 years, due to historical, scientific, political, social, and economic influences, and that includes the impulse towards reductionism. Because it is a paradigm that has been successful in numerous ways, reductionism seems natural to us, and so we are driven to examine whether reductionism is appropriate in individual cases. These arguments are obviously central to philosophy and to science.

However, to ask about the impulse to reductionism is a different question from asking about the adequacy of reductionism as an approach in specific contexts. I assume that

reductionism is a useful and powerful strategy that should be used in certain situations. Nevertheless, I want to ask why the West is driven to want to use it almost exclusively as a strategy. To support reductionism by referring to Occam's Razor is not sufficient; that heuristic says only that we should not multiply entities beyond necessity. To assume that reductionism follows from it begs the most fundamental question—what entities and processes are necessary? For instance, is an unreduced consciousness necessary for our understanding of persons? More to the point, why does Occam's Razor have such divinity in our credo in the first place? The question is not whether Occam's Razor is a reasonable heuristic, one among others. Surely it is. The question is why we have such a drive to employ it so impulsively and in its narrowest construal. What I want to do in this paper is to lay the groundwork for others to be able to argue persuasively that consciousness cannot be reduced to physical processes. I believe that such arguments are presently difficult to make and are not readily accepted because we have a cultural bias in our thinking. It is this cultural bias that I want to probe.

THINKWAYS

One way to approach the question of whether there is such a bias is to ask, using Kuhnian language (Kuhn 1966), whether the problem of consciousness is simply a puzzle to be solved within our present understandings and commitments, or whether it calls for a more radical solution, something more analogous to a paradigm shift in our thinking, a more basic way of dealing with it. I think we should take the latter approach, and this paper presents an argument for this conclusion. However, as opposed to Kuhn, who was interested purely in science and the philosophy of science, I want to deal with this issue in a broader cultural context.

I will use the strategy of stepping back from the usual and more specific approaches to the problems of consciousness by introducing a new term into the discussion, one which suggests that we ought to think about *how* we think. The term that I propose is "*thinkways*." I suggest this term, which is meant to serve similar functions as the term, "*selfways*," introduced by Markus, et al., (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama 1997), a term they created to point out that although there are alternative ways to think about and live through concepts of self, a culture adopts one of these as dominant. In turn, this particular concept of the self is subtly introduced and reproduced in culture, rather than being intentionally, publicly, and consciously proposed and adopted.

They point out that cultural systems have a profound influence on individuals by socializing them in terms behavior, of how they function in the world. The biological entity becomes a fully functioning social creature through this process. Sometimes this influence is specific to the individual, given her unique circumstances, but the more interesting case results when the influence affects the entire culture in a dynamic, collective process. In this case, all, or most, individuals are socialized into patterns of behavior and thinking; through this process, individuals embody broader cultural norms that can be viewed as characterizing that culture.

In their article, they are specifically interested in the ways that individuals come to think about themselves, and hence they use the term, “selfways.” These are the ways that individuals are socialized into thinking about themselves (and others) as selves and how these selves should function in society.

I do not want to speak directly to the argument of the article, that there is a fundamental difference between individualist EuroAmerican and more relational non-EuroAmerican selfways. I heartily agree with their conclusions, and I will make some of the same points found in their research, although I will approach them from my own perspective, and I will focus on reductionism, the point of the present article. However, for us to get a better handle on their term, and, in turn, to see how I use the term, *thinkways*, let us look more closely at their argument.

They define selfways as “culturally constructed patterns, including ways of thinking, feeling, wanting, and doing, [that] arise from living one’s life in particular sociocultural contexts—that is, contexts structured according to certain meanings, practices, and institutions and not others. Selfways include key cultural ideas and values, including understandings of what a person is, as well as senses of how to be a “good,” “appropriate,” or “moral” person.” (p. 16). In particular, Markus, et al., argue that these selfways are enculturated and reproduced through practices, actions that are repeated in the culture and carry normative expectations that go beyond the simple performance of the particular action. For instance, the practice of Americans giving their young children their own bedrooms both implies the values of independence and individualism, as well as reproduces these values within the culture. Seldom is this practice analyzed to see what values it carries within it, and seldom are these values made explicit. Rather, the practice becomes normative, and with the practice comes the enculturation of these values and views of self as independent and individual.¹

In an analogous fashion to Markus’ use of the term “selfways,” I propose to introduce the term, “*thinkways*.” Just as there are particular ways of self-functioning that are mediated by the culture through institutions and practices, so I want to argue that there are particular ways of thinking that become the norm in a culture in such a way that specific cognitive strategies becomes reified as *the* way to think; employing these strategies become so prevalent that they become the norm, reinforced both by a system of related concepts, as well as by practices within the society analogous to Americans giving each child a separate bedroom

Just as Markus, et al, argued that the practices of a selfway, such as the ideal of an independent self in EuroAmerican (and especially American) culture, create and reinforce this ideal self, along with a cluster of related practices and meanings, I propose that there are cognitive ideals and norms that are reinforced by practices and a cluster of related meanings; this is what I mean by “*thinkways*.”

The focus of this paper concerns reductionism. I believe that “reductionism” is one among a cluster of concepts that forms a EuroAmerican *thinkway*, and I propose to unpack this dominant EuroAmerican cognitive *thinkway* with the aim of questioning its

hegemony. What I have against reductionism, especially ontological reductionism, is not its power in certain situations, or its usefulness as one cognitive strategy among others. Rather, when it rises to the level of a *thinkway*, when it is not analyzed for its usefulness in situations in which it is used, when it becomes the default position in our thinking, when individual and institutional practices and accepted meanings perpetuate and reproduce the hegemony of such cognition so that alternative views are viewed as Other, then the concept becomes an impediment to progress and an obstacle to good thinking. And this condition is especially true in science, which is such a dominant force in the contemporary world, analogous to the empires of the past in their ability to reproduce their culture worldwide.

My approach is not entirely new, of course. Others, such as Thomas Kuhn (1966) in his discussion of paradigms, have analyzed related approaches to the dominance of certain ideas and meanings. However, my approach is distinguished by its cross-cultural method, its reliance on bringing evidence from non-EuroAmerican cultures. I will do this in two ways: on the one hand, I will specifically discuss non-EuroAmerican approaches to cognition that are non-reductionistic, and on the other hand, I will juxtapose the cluster of concepts, the conceptual system of which “reductionism” is a part, with another cognitive approach and fall within the shadow of our dominant *thinkway*. The aim of this project is not to argue that an alternative approach is essentially correct; indeed, such an essentialist view would be a typically EuroAmerican approach. Rather, I wish to suggest that pluralism in cognitive approaches may be a more robust way of proceeding, even for science.

COMPONENTS OF REDUCTIONIST *THINKWAY*

Let us turn now to elucidating two specific ideas that are fundamental to the reductionist thinkway: representation and atomism. Let us consider representation first.

Representation

Traditionally, any adequate understanding of consciousness has to deal with the fact that consciousness represents the world. In the Cartesian model, which emphasized the wholly interior description of consciousness, a basic function of veridical consciousness was to re-present the world, e.g., to have an internal mental re-presentation of an external object. The whole procedure of Cartesian doubt called into question the possibility of having perfect representation, and yet the idea of representation was reintroduced and accepted in his argument for the existence of the external world (even if doubt remained about the adequacy of any particular representation). His copy-dualist analysis of mind put representation at its core.

Contemporary views reject such blatant copy-dualism, but representation still remains a central idea in even the most reductionist of philosophies. I think this is the point being made by Velmans (1998) when he describes contemporary accounts of consciousness: “Events in the world still cause conscious experiences that are located in some quite different inner space—albeit in the brain, not in an inner, nonmaterial soul. In short, both

dualist and reductionists agree that there is a clear separation of the external physical world from the world of conscious experience” (pp. 45-6). I will not follow Velmans to argue for a reflexive model of perception; he does quite an adequate job in making the argument. Rather, my goal is to bring attention to a EuroAmerican *thinkway*, not offer an alternative approach. My point, then, is that the idea of representation constitutes a fundamental methodology in our thinking. Even contemporary reductionist approaches, which purport to offer a radically different conclusion about the problem of consciousness, nevertheless, retain a key ingredient of the rejected view, because it is such a fundamental part of our *thinkway*. Thus, reductionists, those who offer modern, non-dualist, approaches to the problem of consciousness in reducing consciousness to brain processes, assume that consciousness represents, so representation has to be accounted for in any adequate philosophy of mind.

Atomism

Atomism is a second assumption of the dominant EuroAmerican *thinkway*, as it has developed historically. I do not have to reiterate the history of the exchange of Aristotelian approach in science for atomistic approaches during the 16th and 17th centuries. The geocentric view failed to account for the movement of heavenly bodies, and the combination of the heliocentric view and atomistic approaches seemed to solve pressing problems not only in science but in navigation and in providing food for a growing population; these factors provided powerful motivation for change. But, it was the Cartesian and Lockean approaches that raised the acceptance of atomism from a useful strategy in science to a part of the EuroAmerican *thinkway*. Descartes’ dualism both gave the justification for the exclusion of science from the control of the Church, as well as it defined science (as that enterprise that investigated the material world, which is defined mechanistically). We will see that Locke not only incorporated atomism into his empirical understanding of the world, but he supplied the foundation for atomistic psychology and political science, thus demonstrating how atomism could be applied to other areas, as it was in economics and, to a certain extent, medicine, to name additional areas. Since Locke’s version of atomism was more consistent with Newtonian science, and it was applied to areas outside of the physical sciences, let us examine the basic tenants of Lockean atomism.

Atomism asserts three things:

- 1) The world is composed of atoms. In this view, an atom should be understood as any indivisible, independent unit that ultimately constitutes that universe—whether it is a physical, psychological, political, or economic universe. Being indivisible (deriving from the Greek, *atomos*), atoms are the ultimate constituents of reality and provide the foundational units in the system.
- 2) Atoms exist in space. One can also say that atoms exist in a void, which points out that the function of the notion of space is to separate the atoms, making them inherently independent and without relationship to other atoms in their fundamental nature. This interpretation can be seen in juxtaposition to what I understand the implication of “space” is in Japanese, which is that space is what

connects objects. However, the EuroAmerican approach implores us to view space as separating objects. This idea, however, leads to the third characteristic of atomism, since these atoms do not remain separate.

- 3) The job of science is to develop the laws of association among atoms. As Newton says in his 31st Query to the Optics of 1730, “And, therefore, that nature may be lasting, the changes of corporeal things are to be placed only in the various separations and new associations and motions of these permanent particles...” (qtd. in (Berman, 1981),115). Understanding consists in finding the laws of how atoms combine to form larger units.

REDUCTIONISM BECOMES A *THINKWAY*

There are two steps in the reductionist view becoming a *thinkway* for EuroAmerican cultures. The first comes in the connection between atomism and reductionism. Atomism specifically describes an ontology, but it also suggests a cognitive approach to the world. If the ultimate constituents of the world are atoms, then if one wants to know the world, one has to know the atoms and how they associate. What one confronts in the world, of course, are tables and chairs, not atoms. But, atomism implies that if I am to understand tables and chairs, I have to understand their atoms and how they have associated to produce the tables and chairs; in other words, knowledge means reducing one’s understanding to the most basic level. Reductionism becomes an implicit imperative of atomism. Therefore, to accept an atomistic view of the world implies that I also accept reductionism as the method of arriving at knowledge.

I have already discussed the representational understanding of knowing, so atomism and representation combine to assume that knowledge means reducing one’s understanding to the atomic units and representing them adequately in a theory. This step brings together reductionism, representation and atomism as the basis of knowledge. Thus, when a EuroAmerican *thinkway* gives an impulse toward reduction to the lowest level, then one naturally questions the ontological status of the higher realm. In a nutshell, this is the “problem of consciousness.”

The second step in making this approach a *thinkway* come from employing the approach in so many different areas besides its roots in the physical sciences. Locke (1964) employed this approach in his understanding of the mind, noting that the mind was a *tubula rasa*; in other words, its first nature was to be a void, analogous to physical space. Ideas, mental atoms, were impressed on the slate, and the job of psychology was to explain the laws of how these simple ideas associated to become complex ideas. Behaviorist psychology is simply Lockean atomism applied to atomic behaviors.

Additionally, Locke (1980) employed atomism in his view of social contract, with humans being the political atoms found in a void-like state of nature, with the social contract supplying the laws of association of these atoms into a larger unit. The social contract view is simply atomism applied to politics. Laissez-faire capitalism also reflects

this atomistic approach, and arguably medicine. Thus, the reductionistic *thinkway* has become imbedded culturally in how we think about a range of issues.

To be fair, it should be noted that applying a *thinkway* within a culture is a complicated affair, more so than I can address in this paper. For instance, although I have so far been talking about EuroAmerican culture, one does not find the impulse to reductionism equally in all EuroAmerican cultures, and not equally in all areas of human endeavor. For instance, Payer (1996) argues that there are interestingly different approaches to the theory and practice of medicine within several EuroAmerican cultures. One contrast she makes is between American and French medicine. The basic approach of American medicine, for instance, is “the virus in the machine,” such that the default position in diagnosis, as well as how one treats illnesses, becomes that one must aggressively attack the virus in the machine. On the other hand, the fundamental approach in French medicine, Payer asserts, revolves around the idea of *terrain*, a word difficult to translate into English, but it seems to relate to one’s constitution. French diagnosis does not follow the American practice of listing all possibilities and then eliminating all of them except one; rather, the physician is taught to diagnosis by putting all the symptoms together, like pieces in a puzzle; thus, it is a more wholistic and less atomistic approach. And, in French medicine, one seeks to modify the *terrain*, rather than fight germs. Thus, although I cannot discuss the issue further in this paper, the reductionist *thinkway* is probably more dominant in a greater variety of contexts in some EuroAmerican societies (particularly in the US) than others. Nevertheless, I believe that the basic impulse to reductionism exists throughout EuroAmerican culture.

THE NARROWNESS OF REDUCTIONISM

The discussion of different approaches to medicine brings me to the last point in my argument, that it is possible to conceive of an alternative to the impulse to reductionism. Although I will mainly use material from non-EuroAmerican cultures, it is worth noting, pursuing the differences in American and French medicine, that as a result of their different approaches to medicine, fewer invasive procedures are employed in intensive care in France, and yet there is no noticeable difference in the two societies in patients doing well (Payer, 66). The alternatives that exist in EuroAmerican cultures also show that reductionism is too narrow.

Again, I want to highlight the point that reductionism is not viewed simply as one among many strategies that are viable.ⁱⁱ Reductionism has become part of a cluster of ideas that mutually reinforce each other and make up our *thinkway*: among these ideas are atomism, representation, foundationalism, mind as reason/computation, essentialism, and mechanism, to name a few. Reductionist thinking based on atomism assumes that these atoms form the foundation that must be represented in knowledge. In turn, this approach implies essentialism, as these atomistic elements, and separated by “space” and thus display essential properties in their natures. Given the ubiquity of atomistic thinking, reductionism has become part of our *thinkway*. It is not accepted merely as one useful strategy among many, but reductionism is *de rigour*, the order of the day. Thus, one has an impulse to reductionism, as it has become virtually synonymous with rational

thinking, centrally in the sciences, which has employed the atomistic paradigm most straightforwardly.

Now, however, I want to turn to evidence in cross-cultural psychology to emphasize that the EuroAmerican *thinkway* that encompasses reductionism turns out to be rather unusual among the world's cultures. Let me contrast this reductionist view with another way of thinking, one that I have studied on the small Indonesian island of Bali. Rather than adopting the reductionist view that knowledge consists in knowing the essential elements and representing them, the Balinese take a more contextual approach. The phrase, "*desa, kala, patra,*" is basic to understanding their approach to knowledge. It can be translated as place, time and circumstance. In other words, knowledge must be contextualized such that any understanding takes into consideration the place, time and circumstance of the knower and the known. The idea that there could be one atomistic, essential understanding doesn't make sense to them, which is not to say that they cannot assume reductionism as a strategy. Hobart (1990) points out: "essentializing is a strategy, or style, to which Balinese resort in various circumstances," so that "Balinese on occasion do enunciate what they hold to be definitive" (117). In other words, we are not talking about a people being incapable of choosing a reductionist strategy, or their being unwilling to see its benefit and choose it on occasion; rather, the Balinese lack the impulse to reductionism. It is not the default position for them; it is not their *thinkway*.

Related to the notion of contextual understanding is their appreciation for polysemy. As Geertz (1973) has pointed out, the Balinese have a preference for polysemy, the proliferation of meaning as opposed to a reduction of meanings. The Balinese prefer a symbol that is rich to one that is simplistically clear, and one that is deep to one that is apparent. To the Balinese, reality is so complex that no reduced characterization can adequately grasp it. The contexts are so numerous that one can never grasp the world fully with any one perspective. At best we can examine manifestations in the world, but we can never grasp the world in any essentialist manner.

There is ample evidence that other non-EuroAmerican cultures prefer a contextual approach to understanding, rather than an abstract, essentialist, one. For instance, Sylvia Scribner (Hunt 1982) conducted research among preliterate peoples, giving them examples of syllogistic thinking. For instance, she asked:

All people who own houses pay a house tax.
Boima does not pay a house tax.
Does Boima own a house?

She was surprised to find so many people ignoring the syllogistic logic and answering affirmatively that Boima owned a house (in fact, the one just down the lane, a fact they were sure of). She discovered that they were capable of abstract, syllogistic thinking, but they thought it was not appropriate in many situations; in further investigation, she found that the increase in abstract thinking did not correlate with increased age or intelligence, but to formal schooling. In other words, such cognition was a product of a particular type of cognitive training.

EXAMPLES OF REDUCTIONIST *THINKWAY*:

Let me be clear about my argument. It makes sense to me to accept the reductionist *thinkway* as a typical strategy in science. The urge to get at the root of the problem and the desire too “get it right” by reflecting or representing the way things are has often proven to be a successful approach. Indeed, it is no accident that science developed within this *thinkway*, and it has become a methodological instantiation of the *thinkway*. Nevertheless, in spite of its successes, I believe there is ample evidence that a *thinkway* that carries an impulse to reductionism can be dysfunctional. Let me quickly offer two examples from religion, both reflecting American societies more than European societies, and then I will turn to another cross-cultural example.

The first example from religion concerns the continuing debate between creationists and evolutionary biologists, which is a product of both groups accepting the reductionist *thinkway*. Rather than accepting that there are alternative legitimate cognitive strategies to knowledge, both groups argue that they are representing the world as it really is. Fundamentalist religion can take itself to be contradicting scientific results precisely because it believes that knowledge is representation. The fact that large numbers of people cannot understand that religion inherently is not best thought of as employing the reductionist *thinkway* speaks to the power and the ubiquity of the general acceptance of this *thinkway*, showing that it has become synonymous with thinking correctly.

The other, related, example is the estimate of 8,196 protestant denominations existing in the West (Barrett, 1982). The different denominations result from conflict, from each of them believing that they have the right representation of the religious world, no matter how small their difference from other denominations. Each of them wants to “get it right,” to represent the essential nature of religious knowledge, down to doctrinal minutia. Rather than thinking that such diversity is a benefit, a wonderful result of nature being so complex that each of these denominations reflect different legitimate aspects of the religious universe (as is the tendency in Hinduism), these denominations become competing sects bemoaning the failure of the others to “get it right.” Again, we see the reductionist *thinkway* accepted as the appropriate mode of thinking.

Let me return to a cross-cultural contrast of *thinkways*. Shweder and Bourne (1984) carried out a study in India and America, asking subjects to describe a good friend. They discovered that the participants used different descriptors to a statistically significant degree, which they argued pointed to adopting different ways of thinking as well as possessing different concepts of the person. While Americans tended to describe their friend in abstract, contextless terms, such as to say that they were intelligent or kind, Indians tended to describe their friends in very specific ways--as being able to solve difficult problems, or having brought food to them when they were sick. For Shweder and Bourne, these differences pointed to different concepts of the person. I believe also that these approaches to description of persons point out different *thinkways*, different assumptions about the world and how one comes to an adequate understanding of it. Indians were quite capable of abstract, contextless thinking, but on the whole they found

it inappropriate as a strategy in describing persons. They preferred a more contextual, concrete description. I agree with Shweder and Bourne in attributing this difference to their rejection of atomistic, reductionist thinking.ⁱⁱⁱ

CONCLUSION

I have raised the issue of reducing consciousness to physical processes to a much more general level than the issue is usually dealt with by introducing the term, *thinkways*. On this level, when discussing cultural cognitive proclivities, the argument has to be more general and less precise than the arguments typically are in philosophical psychology (one is reminded of the similar argument in Aristotle concerning ethics). At this level, all one can do is present an array of arguments and data to make one's conclusions persuasive.

To that end, I have argued that there exists a EuroAmerican *thinkway*, a particular way of thinking that is mediated through culture and institutions such that we are socialized with an impulse to accept a certain way of thinking as appropriate. Like any assumption, it is seldom made explicit and, in effect, becomes the default position. Of course, this fact does not automatically undercut the *thinkway*. In many instances, it will be employed with positive results. The problem is not that it can be a useful strategy, but that it is automatically used, even when the results may be dysfunctional. Let me point out the problem in an analogy: we may have employed in childhood a strategy that turned out to be successful against bullies, but in adulthood we continue to employ it automatically without questioning whether the old strategy is the best one in the particular contemporary situation; indeed, such a strategy is usually so deep in our psyche that we would be hard pressed even to recognize it as a strategy.

Through the use of the term, *thinkways*, I have tried to point out that cognition is a cultural product, and that culture has embedded in us the impulse to think in certain ways. I believe that our impulse toward reductionism is part of a cluster of ideas that compose our EuroAmerican *thinkway*, so that we are driven to apply it in all situations. The attempt to reduce consciousness to material processes, I want to suggest, is a result of this impulse. As such, this impulse ought to be questioned. I have not argued in this paper that such a reduction is inadequate, but I have only set the stage for such an argument. The heavy lifting of making that argument will have to be done by others, but I think that I have made such a task lighter. Typically, the argument against reduction is a Herculean task, precisely because we already possess the cultural impulse to accept reductionism. It is a part of our *thinkway*, a set of ideas about epistemology and ontology that is reproduced through social practices. The only way that we can overcome the overwhelming influence of this impulse is to make it explicit, and to recognize it for what it is. Much as Aristotle argued that the only way to act morally is first to consciously recognize what our tendencies to act are, and then secondly to bend over backwards to compensate for these tendencies, we need first to understand our EuroAmerican *thinkway*, and then compensate for it.

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ⁱ I do not have to point out the irony involved here, that even individualist societies are based on a relational system; at their fundamental level, even individualist selfways are grafted on the trunk of a systems view. Perhaps this is what Plato had in mind when Socrates argued in the *Crito* (Plato, 1975) for an intimate view of the relationship between the individual and the society. Although it is possible for Socrates to talk about duties to society being formed out of a contract made with the society—surely the forerunner of the social contract view—nevertheless, Socrates presented a forceful argument that the deeper relationship was more intimate and familial, more like the son connected to the father, than a contractual relationship.

ⁱⁱ My point about the difference between American and French medicine does not contradict this view, but only makes it more complex by showing that there are other

social factors that are at work in any society that may compete for acceptance in specific areas, such as medicine (which has a long history in each society).

ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, I believe that there is an intimate connection among concepts of the person, a way of thinking, and a thinkway containing reductionism or polysemy. The EuroAmerican thinkway has been described by Geertz (1983) in his classic statement: “The Western conception of the person as a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against the social and natural background, is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world’s cultures” (p. 59). This atomistic notion of the self fits together with and reinforces reductionism and abstractness in thinking, all becoming aspects of our EuroAmerican *thinkway*.