

Culture and Point of View

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Abstract

I propose a theory of how systems of thought arise on the basis of differing cultural practices and argue that the theory accounts for substantial differences in East Asian and Western perception and thought processes. We find East Asians to be more holistic, attending to the entire field and assigning causality to it, making relatively little use of categories and formal logic, and relying on "dialectical" reasoning. Westerners are more analytic, paying attention primarily to the object and the categories to which it belongs and using rules, including formal logic, to understand its behavior. The two types of cognitive processes are embedded in different naïve metaphysical systems and tacit epistemologies. We speculate that the origin of these differences is traceable to markedly different social systems. The theory and the evidence presented call into question long held assumptions about basic cognitive processes and even about the appropriateness of the process-content distinction.