

Occupational Therapy, Society, and the Catholic Intellectual Tradition

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The Catholic Intellectual Tradition (CIT) is defined as a dialogue open to unrestricted questioning, crossing disciplinary boundaries, and exploring concepts of wholeness and ultimacy, in which everyone is encouraged to join this conversation to accelerate their personal growth (Kalscheur, 2021). This approach seeks to find deeper meaning in life by exploring how people's differences in ideas, beliefs, and experiences fit together cohesively. The CIT, grounded in the synthesis of faith and reason, highlights the quest for truth, recognizes the innate dignity of each person, and stresses the importance of continuous intellectual growth through lifelong learning and critical thinking (McCloskey, n.d.). It also advocates a commitment to the common good and social responsibility, urging individuals to use their knowledge in ways that benefit both themselves and society. This paper aims to examine the four principles of the CIT and their influence on OT practice, human dignity, ethics, client-centered care, and inclusive care within society.

The first pillar of the CIT is the open process of questioning, which involves honest conversations focused on seeking truth and human understanding, including different opinions on wholeness and ultimate reality (Kalscheur, 2021). In OT practice, this core principle is essential in the Application step of Cole's 7 Steps because group members aim to address and respond to "the question, 'Now that you know how things are, what are you going to do about it?'" (Cole, 2025, p. 10). As I step into my role as an occupational therapist, it's important to recognize that each member may have similar or different answers to this question, since people form their opinions based on their own truth (Kalscheur, 2021). Additionally, issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion can influence how people interpret and respond to situations, such as increasing inequalities—especially those affecting human needs—highlighting the need for new solutions to problems impacting different communities (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023).

For instance, if I am running an anxiety disorder group, it is important to understand that those who face marginalization and social inequalities have fewer chances of obtaining participation roles in social and political contexts. As a result, I may consider acting as a change agent to promote social and occupational justice by acknowledging that “inequitable social circumstances shape the availability of the occupational opportunities that determine what people are able to do, can choose to do, believe they should do, or can envision doing” (Picotin et al., 2021, p. 232). Thus, by engaging in open dialogue and exploring each client’s perspectives during the Application step, I can recognize how personal and environmental factors influence their plans of action and support equitable, meaningful participation.

The next pillar of the CIT is an authentic inquiry, which provides a philosophical foundation for interpersonal communication centered on human dignity and social justice issues (Roberts, 2012). Through the graduate OT program at Sacred Heart University, we have learned that practicing OT from an ethical, client-centered perspective requires utilizing the therapeutic use of self (TUOS) in its advocating mode to promote equality, freedom, justice, and dignity (Taylor, 2020). Current societal trends, such as increasing systemic and financial barriers, affect access to OT for various groups and can influence the availability of OT services (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023). In other words, social and economic inequalities contribute to health disparities, limiting who receives care, and how fully they can participate in meaningful activities. To effectively address these disparities, OTs can modify their sessions by offering flexible care options, such as Telehealth, and by providing services to individuals who may be unable to afford them, aligning with ethical responsibilities. By engaging in authentic inquiry to stay informed about societal trends and policies that might influence my future clients, I plan to

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continue reading literature on evidence-based practice, participate in advocacy and professional development opportunities, and become more involved with the AOTA once licensed.

Another principle of the CIT, known as the third principle, is the integrative habit of mind, which embraces diverse human knowledge and connects a range of disciplines in a way that can be understood holistically (Kalscheur, 2021). In OT, this pillar involves integrating concepts from psychology, abnormal psychology, and sociology to understand how behavior, mental health, and social systems influence occupational engagement. For example, psychological factors such as intrinsic traits, skills developed through experience, and coping strategies can support or hinder engagement and progress toward OT goals, while abnormal psychology primarily emphasizes mental health challenges that may impede engagement (Picotin et al., 2021). From a sociological perspective, micro-, meso-, and macro-environmental elements—such as physical, social, cultural, and institutional factors—further influence behaviors and occupational performance. To meet the needs of underserved and marginalized populations, I would consider environmental and societal parameters through the lens of equity because “when groups are situated differently in society with respect to status, resources, and opportunities, then equal treatment can perpetuate rather than reduce health, social, economic, legal, or political inequality” (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023, p. 3). Therefore, OTs may adapt activities to recognize that fair treatment involves providing different levels of support based on individuals' needs and circumstances. By considering personal, environmental, and societal factors, I will adopt an integrative habit of mind as a future OT practitioner to develop holistic, equitable, and meaningful treatments by integrating knowledge from various disciplines.

The final principle, the integrative approach to seeking truth, includes eight qualities focused on approaching knowledge and understanding in a holistic, ethical, and thoughtful way.

(Kalscheur, 2021). While working on my undergraduate degree at Sacred Heart University, I found myself searching for truth as I explored the four questions related to CIT I and CIT II. These questions encouraged students in an open seminar to examine their own truths, such as the meaning of being human, their relationship with God, living a meaningful and purposeful life, appreciating the natural world, and building a more just society for the common good. Through this experience, my beliefs on complex topics evolved through conversations and new insights from people from different disciplines. This pillar is rooted in ethics, as it is morally right to consider human experience at diverse levels. Recognizing that the integrative approach to seeking truth is complex is an important consideration for a future OT, as remaining client-centered requires understanding the needs and truths individuals may hold, which can affect the effectiveness of interventions.

In conclusion, the CIT is rooted in the interconnectedness of faith and reason and emphasizes human dignity, moral responsibility, and the pursuit of the greater good (McCloskey, n.d.). CIT, as it relates to OT, serves as a guiding framework that encourages practitioners to integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to advocate for social and occupational justice (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023). Understanding the four core principles enhances our ability to provide ethical, client-centered care by prioritizing and encouraging individuals to consider others' beliefs. When societal challenges to justice and inclusion occur, OTs can rely on CIT to guide adaptive strategies that promote meaningful client participation. Overall, including the CIT in OT practice benefits society by integrating psychology, abnormal psychology, and sociology to explain how behaviors, mental health, and social systems affect occupational engagement and participation.

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