

CONSTRUING CONSTRUCTIONISM: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE TENSION BETWEEN PCP AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

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This paper represents a synthesis that brings together several lines of thinking about the supposed challenge that social constructionism brings to personal construct psychology (PCP). It consolidates previous writing within PCP relevant to this challenge, and notes problems with earlier theories that are analogous to social constructionism, as well as considering 'the social' in PCP. While not an argument in any strict sense it does reach a conclusion and it does raise some points of criticism for social constructionism, albeit that these are not new.

Keywords: *social constructionism, personal construct psychology, Marxism, neostructuralism, pragmatism, individual agency*

This paper is a journey which traverses two different paths, each one lined with 'reminiscences'; reminders, that is, of ideas and issues previously raised in different contexts. First, it revisits some philosophical difficulties for positions in social-psychological thinking that share the intellectual origins that social constructionism appears to share. These have been elaborated from different perspectives over a period of years. For example, as to the decentring of the subject and the value of reconsidering a radical strand in western thought - the anarcho-psychological tradition - that would recentre that subject (Warren, 1997); as to the philosophical problems within Marxism and the problem of the individual or the *self* in like social theory (Warren, 1998); and in an outline of a far reaching critique of 'neo-structuralism' as framed by Frank (1989) as the lopsided and problematic underpinning of positions such as that which is social constructionism (Warren, 2000). Second, it examines the role of 'the social' in personal construct psychology from those same elaborations and from the work of others. Overall, it is a review paper, but one which also goes - if but circumstantially - to support an argument that even if social constructionism is 'correct', or at least is an expanding rather than degenerating research program (Lakatos, 1970/1977) there is no particular difficulty for personal construct psychology. That is, in its initial formulation by Kelly (1955/1991), in early commentary on it, and in its development as a theory of human social-psychological functioning, personal construct psychology is not only compatible with the

broad thrust of social constructionism as it makes more precise the impact of the social domain on the individual, but possibly necessary to it (Warren, 2000). Further still, even if personal construct psychology is 'wrong' in the face of the arguments of social constructionism, then that merely completes the usefulness of the psychology of personal constructs, from which we can now move on. Personal construct psychology would appear to be in a 'no lose' situation *vis a vis* social constructionism!

SOME PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS FOR SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Lineage or Heredity

Old Family

In so far as social constructionism can be seen as having an intellectual lineage from Marx and Engel's response to Hegel, it remains exposed to philosophical criticism that emerges in response to the theories advanced by these thinkers. It is Marx and Engels who most vigorously focus on the social domain and who provide the clearest statement of the premise that guides all subsequent thinking in this mode. This is given succinctly when they revisit philosophy after having determined but a year previously, in their *The Holy Family* (1845), that philosophy was a vacuous

exercise which merely mystified things; that is, in their work *The German Ideology* (1845-6/1976) written in 1845-6 but not published in full until 1932, and in English translation till 1964. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels outline in detail how the different stages of human development see each generation handed from its predecessor a set of productive forces and a view of the relationship that human beings have with nature and each other, which prescribes for that new generation its "conditions of life" and gives it a "definite development, a special character". In general, their analysis of history shows "that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" (p. 62), that "it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness" (p.42).

An inflexible reading of these last ideas and the analyses on which they rest and which rest on them, significantly diminishes the here and now importance of the individual. The longer-term significance of the individual may be a different matter in that in the 'classless society' the true individual will be realised. However, while Marx acknowledges that each generation modifies the legacy from the last generation, that modification is itself less to do with individuals and more to do with social forces and movements. Those forces and movements comprise sub-elements within any particular set of social arrangements that constitute an *antithesis*; a set of oppositional or non-conformist interests to those that prevail at any given time and constitute the *thesis*, and these interests eventually bring about compromise. This compromise is the *synthesis*, and the compromise itself takes hold and becomes itself the status quo, the thesis. Thus the process continues until the dynamic of change - class conflict - is extinguished with the revolution that will usher in the classless society. This is the *materialist theory of history*, the idea that our mental state, our psychology is determined by the material conditions of life. That is, that the manner in which human beings go about the process of producing food, shelter and so on, in order to live, generates an individual consciousness, and a shared consciousness that is expressed in a group culture. It is in this argument that Marx 'turns Hegel on his head'. Marx locates the otherwise mysterious forces that Hegel sees as working themselves out in human history - a progressive development of self-consciousness and reason - in the more familiar conditions of the struggles of human beings, struggles that generate a belief in those myste-

rious unseen forces in the first place.

Various criticisms emerged of what was to become Marxism. A shallow criticism - though perhaps fair comment, nonetheless - asked, if people were as blind to reality as Marx and Engels argued - if people suffered generally from a 'false consciousness' concerning the truth, that is, if we all suffer from *ideology* - then how were Marx and Engels able to see that truth? Lenin's (1902/1973) specific answer was the notion of the 'vanguard party' composed of individuals who could 'see more clearly', who were free from *ideology*. The differentiation between *ideology* and that scientific thinking that disclosed the truth or reality of the materialist theory of history, however, remains a problem. This is somewhat ironic when Marx and Engels rely on traditional scientific thinking of their day and the data it produces, to support their own theory; the very thinking that was on their own account, illusory and its 'truths' tainted. Wanting to speak the truth and be taken seriously when one's truth is that there is no truth, critiquing the objectivity of data using data, being asked to provide empirical data to support an argument to the effect that empiricism is not the only way to knowledge, and so on, always generates conundrums.

More sophisticated argument targeted particular features of the materialist theory and, for example, addressed the problem of whether the existence of social classes was a necessary or a sufficient or both a necessary and sufficient condition for the existence of the State. The point was to challenge the logic of their argument that with the end of social class, so the end of the State. There is the related issue of the tightness of the relationship between the superstructure (cultural practices, ways of thinking and feeling, moral imperatives and so on) and the economic base. Marx and Engels in different of their writings sometimes talk of the economic conditions of life *determining* consciousness, at other times merely *conditioning* an already existing consciousness and cultural life; indeed, the above quotations from *The German Ideology* are already ambiguous. Again, Kamenka (1965) considered the notion of 'causality' in Marxism, discussing a richer idea which involved attention to both an alleged 'cause' and the 'field' in which it operated. In a particular 'field' - a specific set of social conditions, for example - an action may be successful in achieving a goal, but in a different field a different outcome may ensue. Kamenka's (1965) example notes how the introduction of the steam engine may

well produce capitalism in one set of wider social conditions, but not in a different set of social conditions. And, more recent thinking has attempted at different times to centre different factors, to 'reduce' a situation or event to different, allegedly more 'primary' dimension of life, other than social class. For example, reduction to gender, to membership of a particular ethnic group or clan, to a generational category ('grey power', 'baby boomers') to observable or invisible physical or mental difference from the 'norm'.

These comments should not be taken to mean that a Marxist analysis of social and economic life is not a most powerful one, exposing levels of action and interaction of social forces without which many social institutions and their impacts would be incomprehensible. There is a powerful sociological analysis in Marxism, but one with a number of philosophical problems when it speaks in a voice of 'totality' or 'the last' or 'the final' analysis. Of course, these general issues, and the more particular matter of Marxism lacking a psychology of the individual have been addressed by scholarship in this area. The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research (the Frankfurt School), for example, developed in various dimensions as its exemplar theorists tackled the problem. Thus, their attempt to develop psychoanalysis as a theory to fill the particular gap in Marxism, the gap of there being no psychology of the individual (for example, Marcuse, 1955/1969). The problem persists within Marxist scholarship with attempts ongoing to develop a theory of personality based on historical materialism (for example, Seve 1974/1978, Tucker, 1980). Equally illustrative is the School's investigation of the intersection of the social and the psychological in the phenomenon of *authoritarian personality*, as they charted the micro and macro origins, manifestation, and the social consequences of this outlook (Fromm, 1942; Adorno et al, 1950). Or, further, their attempts to articulate a notion of 'reason' – or Reason - in a theoretical context that challenged the very idea, usefully distinguishing traditional or instrumental reason (reasoning) from substantive or critical reasoning in a fashion is not irrelevant to our present reflections (for example, Habermas 1981/1987). That is, their concept of critical reasoning provides a way of recognizing the type of matters raised by social constructionism without surrender to a shallow relativism, and of incorporating, rather than jettisoning, ethics and values, or rendering these equally relative.

Whether Freud and Marx can in fact be integrated so cleverly, and whether an idea of reason can be salvaged, is a wider matter; but it is a matter that is alive, not yet dead. The debates around social constructionism echo these problems, and social constructionism is not oblivious to at least the issues, nor to the lineage. Gergen (1995), for example, acknowledges some of the history - if in general terms and without the meticulousness that the Hegel-Marx debate requires - and summarises the dimensions of criticism of social constructionism, though in a fashion that may give them less 'bite'. This may simply reflect his then purpose, or it may represent something deeper; for example, the state of interest in the history of ideas and problems of philosophy outside the discipline of Philosophy. He prefers, rather, to see criticism as somehow lost in its own fundamentalist paradigm, or to derive from "investments in various forms of life that appear to be threatened by" the arguments of social constructionism (p. 92). While few would disagree with his wish for constructive dialogue between social constructionism and its critics, and various critics do point to the valuable insights that this position generates, a less dismissive approach to what are long-standing problems in philosophy may be more productive.

The New Generation

The offspring of this last family are less easy to identify than their parents were. However, there is a clan that is found under the broad characterisation that is post-structuralism and post-modernism. An adequate discussion of this clan is beyond the parameters of the present project, but their general outlook is given first by way of growing critiques of it, and by a specific critique in the next section below. In essence, the critiques go, first, to similar matters that had been raised against Marx, and second, to particular issues within these 'isms'.

As to the first, there is a series of questions that we can for convenience frame as questions to social constructionism as they were to Marxism. For example, is social constructionism free of the very influences it asserts? If not, then how do those who are privileged enough to see the 'truth' avoid that social conditioning to which the rest of personkind appears doomed. Again, can a rich and thoroughgoing history of reflection on the individual in such thinkers as

Spinoza or Leibniz or Kant or Hegel, be dismissed as being, simply, 'illusory' because of the influence of social forces always operating on the individual, no less on these thinkers themselves? Yet again, and derived from the very ideas these last thinkers themselves raise, are there different considerations that may need to be engaged differently in relation to, respectively, 'individuals', 'persons', 'selves', and 'subjects' and does social constructionism do this? Further, following Kamenka (1965), will the same outcome always emerge for each individual/person/self/subject saturated with the same social discourses, or is there room for a *significant* personal interpretation of events and experience? Finally, does social constructionism conjure with forces and influences that seem to have no dynamism and no 'home' without reference to a centre or locus such as in the individual human being might provide? (Frank, 1989)

As to the second, there are several points to note, though not to detail, develop or defend here. First, given the significance of language, of discourse, we might note that a number of critics have challenged the adequacy of accounts of language given in so called post-structuralist and post-modern thinking, and by extension, in social constructionism. One particular issue is whether both the denotative and the connotative aspects of language are sufficiently dealt with. More generally, Passmore's (1985) discussion of the debate between Searle and Derrida, a debate turning around Austin's account of the relation between 'words and things', discloses the underlying tension between a view that the problems and questions of epistemology can be, and cannot be, dealt with in the Sociology of Knowledge, rather than in Philosophy. It also indicates, as also have others (for example, Frank, 1989), that the heirs of the Swiss linguist, Saussure, may not have fully understood the exact nature of that inheritance. Moreover, they may have also overlooked substantial accounts of the meaning of meaning in the work of thinkers like Frege, Russell, or Tarski (Scruton, 1994). There is then ground for concern as to whether social constructionism has fully digested reflection in the domains of philosophy of language or of linguistic philosophy, whatever the validity of the claim that social constructionism might support that it is in Sociology of Knowledge, not in Philosophy, that matters will be resolved.

Again, there is more targeted and severe criticism of social constructionism expressed, for example, by

Maze (2001). Maze sees social constructionism as "just the most recent of an apparently endless succession of relativistic epistemologies", a position that "borrows from deconstruction the same self-defeating scepticism" (p. 394). For him, its epistemology, as a central feature, denies the possibility of objective knowledge and is thus self-contradictory. As Maze notes of Gergen (1985) as the chief exponent of social constructionism, to

assert anything sincerely is to assert it as true. ... One could hardly dispute that Gergen's publications contain strings of assertions and are intended to be taken as attempts to say what is the case with regard to knowledge and discourse. We can politely disregard his self-depreciating disclaimer that his accounts are offered only for their entertainment value (p. 394).

Maze (2001) argues from a realist-objectivist standpoint and Liebrucks (2001), independently develops this argument. The key concept of social constructionism is shown as composed of three core themes or theses, none of which is incompatible with realism. Indeed, he argues, they are unintelligible if grounded in *anti-realism*. And Danziger (1997) in a comprehensive review which does recognize the valuable challenge that social constructionism lays down for psychology (and other fields of enquiry) also concludes that exponents remain dependent on the very positions they seek to repudiate. He concludes that social constructionism's own challenge "arises out of the predicament of the critic who wishes to develop a truly alternative agenda while still tied to the traditions by ties both visible and invisible" (Danziger, 1997, p. 416).

There are in these two dimensions of response to social constructionism contributions that go to questions that arose generally and have bedevilled social theory since Kant began and Hegel completed the 'Copernican revolution' by borrowing from the then developing style of thinking that was *hermeneutics* (Redding, 1996). That revolution put the 'knower' back at the centre of knowing, and, thus, the problems ever since of giving due weight to the impacts of social life - however understood - and individual sense-making. These problems are not unique to social constructionism but would seem to remain unresolved for, in, and by social constructionism.

Whether or not it inherits defective genes from the old family, social constructionism appears not to be free of some acquired defects. There is, however, an even more powerful critique that goes more generally to its genotype, and this is worth separate attention.

A Critique of Neo-Structuralism

The term *neostucturalism* was coined by Manfred Frank (1989) and his is a close and complex argument centred in a critique of key figures of so-called post-structuralist or post-modern thinking. We could not begin to address that argument fully here. In essence, though, Frank's argument was that thinkers who had allegedly discarded structuralism have rather expressed but a different version of it; still positing forces over and above the individual, forces by and through which the individual's consciousness is allegedly constructed, even 'structured', most obviously through language. All of them ended up discussing an idea of one sort or another concerning forces external to the individual, an individual who was but a passive 'location' or 'conduit' for those forces; those forces, that is, acted as 'structurings' of their consciousness. Frank's counter proposition was that even given these structuring forces of class or gender or ethnicity or whatever, and however they were felt by the individual (as discourses, or as subjects becoming 'objects' over which power and discipline are exercised) there remains, and, importantly *must* remain, a subjectivity that is the active, creative location of whatever forces and influences play upon it. Thus, the argument between modernism and postmodernism, as Reijen, (1992) reminds us, is that between a perspective on the self that sees it as *autonomous* (free), relatively, and a perspective that sees it as *heteronomous* (that is, subject to rules). In these terms, Van Reijen (1992) reads Frank as saying that those who stress the heteronomy of the subject and who "attribute to structure all power and the capability of self-reflection ... give in to an anthropomorphizing of structure" (p. 320). Frank's general intention was to find a compromise between French poststructuralism (antirationalism) and German hermeneutics (rationalism) and he resurrects Schleiermacher's hermeneutics in his argument toward this compromise. Frank's compromise provides very interesting insights for personal construct psychology, as well as for the tensions between personal construct psychology and social con-

structionism (Warren, 2000).

Frank's (1989) critique of Foucault, Lacan, Deleuze, Lyotard, Gadamer and Derrida, showed that they each saw human beings still as "nonunified plural beings, ignoring and deluding ourselves as to what we are and do, moved and shaped by forces over which we have no control" (Schwabb, 1989; p. xxxiv). However, Frank (1989) argues that what these thinkers identify and emphasize - the 'codes' and 'rules' that constitute language, tradition, collective meaning, and the like - do not give meaning to the record of writing and human things and signs and symbols, only the individual does. These things have no meaning without an individual giving them meaning; we do not have our existence, our subjective experience *in* them - they being over and above us - but *through* them. We construct meaning and our meaning making is unique. Thus, Frank argues that it is the individual as a creative centre of meaning making who is central and cannot be disposed of; though, of course, meaning is arrived at in contexts where the meanings of others cannot be ignored. As to the loss of the individual he also asks, in a lighter vein, whether we are wise in too easily throwing out the idea of the individual as *agent*, when pressures already exist in advanced technological society, in multinational corporatisation and cultural uni-dimensionalisation, to do that job quite satisfactorily?

In elaborating Frank's (1989) ideas for personal construct psychology Warren (2000) also noted that one of the seminal thinkers for postmodern ideas, Michel Foucault, himself moved to a position that had surprised even his own followers when he suggested that he had concentrated too much on 'power' at the expense of the scope individuals had to *interpret* and *resist*. That is, in his *The Subject and Power*, Foucault (1982) noted:

Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realised. ... At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom (1982, p. 790).

This apparent turn around was explained by one Fou-

cault commentator (O'Farrell, 1989), as Foucault accepting that he had largely ignored *individual* intentions, resistance and the like, only later going on to refine his position to embrace other aspects of life. That refinement involved his elaboration of the 'field of experience' in which people live as composed of *three* axes - truth, power, individual conduct - and the need to address all three, not just power, as his work had basically done to that time.

Frank's work, then, still not fully digested in social theory generally, provides a significant challenge to social constructionism. More importantly, it attempts a compromise that finds in *hermeneutics* - which was always centrally concerned with the *contexts* of our individual lives - a way to give due recognition to both the social and the psychological, and in dynamic interaction. In some instances, the social will be more significant and an individual's conduct best understood as a mere expression of their place and times; in others, the psychological will be more significant. In Barth's (1982) account of Schleiermacher's hermeneutics - which hermeneutics, as noted, Frank resurrected for his own argument toward the compromise he was trying to effect - he provides an example of where the broader social and the narrower psychological would, respectively, take on significance. In interpreting an historical text, for example, the social would be vital; in understanding a letter to a loved-one from a soldier at the war front, the psychological would be more salient. In both cases, though, the other perspective could not be ignored for a full understanding.

Better Social-Psychological Accounts of Psychological Life?

It has been previously suggested that social constructionism advances a position in relation to psychological life that Pragmatism might better illuminate (Warren, 1997). That suggestion came in the context of attempting to re-establish the anarcho-psychological tradition of thought in a context where the common wisdom was hailing the 'death' or the 'decentering' of the subject; that is, of the *agentic self*. By way of challenging the common wisdom, the ideas of the (perhaps) individualist anarchist, Max Stirner, were reviewed and some criticism of neo-structuralism outlined. In addition, the scope of Pragmatism was also noted by way of offering a position that gave a

central place to 'the social', yet without loss of the individual. That scope was succinctly expressed in a paper by Colapietro (1990). It is the second aspect that is presently more useful to recall.

Colapietro (1990) argued that what is in the so-called 'French account' of the subject is already and, importantly, better contained within Pragmatism. In Pragmatism, the agentic self is seen as, essentially, immersed in social contexts and subjected to structures and structurings but remains nonetheless a unique 'centre of action'. The 'discourses' to which each of us are subjected are just another form of communal experience and Pragmatism was always keen to give due weight to both the communal experiences and the 'individual livedness' of everyday life. He quotes from Dewey's *Experience and Nature* to emphasize a point to which we will return:

Philosophers have exhibited proper ingenuity in pointing holes in the beliefs of common sense, but they have also displayed improper ingenuity in ignoring the empirical things every one has; the things that so denote themselves [in our lived practical experience] that they have to be dealt with. (Colapietro, 1990, p. 651, citing Dewey)

Pragmatism takes significant account one's 'location' or 'grounding' in the lived-ness of life as a core feature of its articulation of an account of our social and our psychological functioning. Moreover, and most importantly here, it also specifically addresses the *psychological* dimension; Dewey's work, for example was concerned with thinking, problem solving, creative processes, teaching and learning. Importantly, for Dewey (1916/1966) education was the significant domain of these last activities - essentially an activity of interaction, communication, clashes of discourses and so on - and philosophy itself was secondary, defined as "*the general theory of education*" (p.328). Indeed, and pertinent here in regard to the domain of *praxis* that personal construct psychology has been argued to highlight (Warren, 2002): "The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice" (p. 328).

To be sure, Pragmatism is not without its own philosophical difficulties. However, in its original formulation as a theory of knowledge, later refinements

to bring out more clearly the essential focus on the 'life world' that it shares with Phenomenology - particularly but not only in its *hermeneutic* turn - and in neo-Pragmatism, there is a rich tradition on one hand, and one which directly focuses on 'the psychological', on the other. Further, what is here elaborated in terms of Dewey's philosophy and psychology can be equally done from the more specifically social-psychological with reference to the work of Mead (Butt, 2001). Again, social constructionism is not blind to these contributions and recognizes a certain congeniality with them; even though it may be Mead rather than Dewey who is found the better company.

A Miscellany of Problem Matters for Social Constructionism

Finally, our quote from Dewey serves to remind us of the need to take note of a number of dimensions of lived experience with which the individual has to deal. It reminds us also of how one's own, personal understanding seems poorly served by even the fullest account of social forces, language and discourse structurings, class pressures, and the like that may well impact on one, but questioningly do so 'without remainder'. Examples are obvious, like one's experience of death, of bereavement, of chronic illness, of personal crisis, even of significant change in one's life. These types of experience point to our personal vulnerability, our fragility, and our sense of impermanence. Similarly with the personal experience of aging, perhaps of decreasing personal efficacy and increasing dependence, an experience the anxiety in relation to which hardly seems assuaged by looking to the 'big picture'. Again, there is the experience of being an 'outsider' in one's own society, or in one's own culture, or one's own world; the personal experiences of a person of colour in a white society, of the aged or disabled in a culture of youth and narcissism. More generally, there is the alleged phenomenon of a being who has lost interest in Being, in a world where we are entrapped by particular things of the world and their demands of us (Heidegger, 1977). Again, social constructionism is not insensitive to some of these experiences, and even Gergen (1995, p. 98) recognizes personal disgust and fear, or at least a 'shudder', when he contemplates some of the ideas in Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

All of these last situations and events highlight

fields of experience that are excruciatingly personally meaningful. However these experiences might be encapsulated in an account of generalities of social class or ethnicity or discourses of this or that role we fill, whatever group meanings might be its *ground*, it remains the personal *figure* that in certain situations or contexts will be more critical. Such a situation or context, of course, is psychology, and, especially, therapy. One might be told that he or she is deluded in thinking that they are an agentic self, have a 'self', or have some dimension of their being outside the various layers of that being derived from their social class, culture, group, gender, biography, and so on. Yet, where does such a delusion live or exist - and, in any case, does the individual care?

THE 'SOCIAL' IN PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY

There is a second way to come at the question that animates this paper. This here involves a recall of what personal construct psychology says about the relationship between the individual and 'the social'.

What does personal construct psychology envision the individual doing? First, like a scientist, forming constructs with which to make sense of the world. Then, the individual tests those constructs. In a solipsistic world there would be no need to test one's constructs: indeed we might wonder at the process of forming them in the first place! But in all other worlds with which we are familiar, the individual attempts to square his or her meaning with that of another, or others, of his or her species. That activity in personal construct psychology is an activity of validating one's constructs, and in so far as one works through certain cycles in this process, one is said to be 'mentally well' or *optimally psychologically functioning*. The last point aside, what is built firmly into the theory is this notion that one goes to one's *social context* to validate one's construing.

Moreover, from the outset, Kelly (1955/1991) acknowledged that the individual's constructs would find a significant origin in that individual's micro and macro social contexts; the person is always *embedded* - just as Butt (1998) reminds us that the person is also *embodied*. Thus, Kelly (1955/1991) notes the significance of studying the culture in which a person has grown in order to fully understand the constructs being employed. At the same time, he exposes the

danger of stereotyping that can occur when we too readily and simplistically relate the construct systems of a series of individuals from a particular social or cultural context, to our own culture.

Importantly, however, if someone is to be understood as a person, then we must “neither ignore the cultural expectations under which they have validated their constructs ... nor make the mistake of focusing on the group constructs to the exclusion of the personal constructs of each” person (1955/1991, I, p.181/p. 126-7). As he observes of ‘Ronald Barrett’: while his culture might suggest that on a moonlit night he would be more interested in the potential activity in the back seat of a parked car with someone who might very reasonably be construed as ‘willing’ his personal construing suggests that he would more likely be forming hypotheses as to what was happening under the bonnet! (Kelly, 1955/1991, I, p. 340/ p. 253-4).

Clearly, from its original formulation, personal construct psychology has seen the person as embedded. Jones (1971) saw this early on, and a string of others have elaborated the significance of social context in which the person construes events and tests those constructions. Individuals were never seen as isolated from their lived social experience. This is apparent from the beginning in Kelly’s (1955/1991) original formulation. It is apparent also in elaborations since; for example, in Butt, (1996, 2000), in Kalekin-Fishman and Walker (1996), in Davidson and Reser (1996), in Epting et al (1996), in Willutzki and Duda (1996), in Scheer (2000). And, indeed, it is in that philosophy which can be read between the lines of personal construct psychology, that is Dewey’s version of Pragmatism (Warren, 1998).

In Barbu’s (1956) discussion of the types of personality associated with, respectively, democratic and totalitarian social organization, he makes a point that is relevant to the matter in focus in this paper. This is that it is not possible, nor is it particularly helpful, to answer the question “whether a democratic personality creates a democratic culture-pattern, or a democratic culture pattern creates a democratic personality” (p. 106). Perhaps there is a lesson in this observation for the issues raised between social constructionism and personal construct psychology? And, that lesson is usefully taken from a ‘searchlight analogy’ given by Carroll (1974), to be noted by way of our conclusion.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion at this point is but a reserved one. This follows the conclusion which emerges from one debate between a broadly Marxist and a broadly anarchist position. This drew out the essentially *sociological* argument of the Marxists and the essentially *existential* arguments of the anarchists. It was this: that the issues being raised by exponents of each perspective were those that their particular illumination of the same field revealed. This is understood using the analogy suggested by Carroll (1974) to give due credit to both the sociological perspective elaborated by Marx and his heirs, and the existential perspective elaborated by those who found greater fascination in the subtle nuances of human psychological functioning. That analogy was of two searchlights illuminating the same field, but from different angles. As Carroll (1974, p. 131) says, their two standpoints do not communicate; they direct searchlights whose fields of illumination are rarely intersecting. We might say in the spirit of this analogy that the one was highlighting the overall game, identifying its form, its movement, the application and breaches of its rules. The other showed-up brilliant individual moves and plays, feats of stamina, strength or endurance, of error and half-hearted plays or defence that might, for example, interest a ‘talent scout’ more than a supporter of either team. Neither was more correct than the other; they merely focused different things.

So was it with the Marxists and the anarchists and, later, the Existentialists. So may it be with social constructionism and personal constructivism?

Personal construct psychology and social constructionism, taken together as complimentary, make a formidable assault on the problem of understanding our psychological and sociological life - our psycho-social life. Separately, they are limited in the depth of the insights they can offer. Personal construct psychology is a Psychology, not a Philosophy, and it has its own range of convenience and its focus of convenience. But that *range* has always included our social life and that *focus* has always envisaged that a person who was not functioning optimally would find their optimal functioning only in a social context. Moreover, there is an argument for accepting that it was a particular type or style of social context that underlay the theory of personal constructs; that is, an *egalitarian* social context (Warren, 1996), not as a normative judgement but as an inherent assumption of the theory (akin to Hegel’s idea of ‘love’ in his ethical theory)

theory)

Is there, then, a 'problem' between social constructionism and personal constructivism? Present observations suggest not. But if there is, it is not one the resolution of which would yet suggest we abandon personal construct psychology.

As a final 'bold conjecture' in the present context – and at the risk of plagiarizing myself - it is of value to reiterate some concluding observations from an account of the debate between Marx and the philosopher of egoism, Max Stirner (Warren, 1997). There, the different positions were framed in terms of the four fundamental questions of philosophy as Immanuel Kant saw them: What can I know? What ought I do? What can I hope? What is Man? Thus a perspective that attempts to give credit to both positions might say as follows. First, I can know what the particular set of forces constituting the 'thesis of my times' allow. But its 'I' who knows and only when that knowledge is significant for me will it be *mine*, only when it is *personal*; though, of course, in this vein (mined by both Hegel and Marx) enough 'personals' will combine to generate social movements and forces that express an anti-thesis that challenges the dominant discourse. Second, my conduct will derive from the material conditions under which I live and the moral imperatives my historical times place on me. But, as history shows as much as does biography, I can see through moral imperatives, accept or reject them; why else the lengths to which the dominant forces in society have to go to ensure conformity? Third, my future - as is my life - is short and only the present is really meaning-full; though I too easily forget this, especially when distracted by other people's demands of me. But, when I grieve or I am lonely or frightened or in pain or facing my own aging and death, then I recall the significance of the intense present and the excruciatingly personal. And, fourthly, while I may find some interest in the nature of Humankind (Man), even in what 'these men' (Men) might do or think, I find little consolation in my *sameness*, especially when I am reminded of the intense present in the types of experiences just listed, and thereby of my *difference*. So, not 'What is Man', nor 'What do men do?', but 'Who is man?' is of more interest, and the answer is 'I'.

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