KELLY'S LEGACY IN PERSONALITY THEORY: REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL

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Personal Construct Theory (PCT) appears to be frozen in history. Kelly's work is usually mentioned respectfully in any review of personality theories, yet virtually all contemporary work on PCT is ignored in orthodox psychology. In this article I examine this paradox and suggest reasons for it. I review the way in which PCT is treated in introductory texts, pointing to two types of account. In one, PCT is seen as a pre-scientific prototype of a cognitive approach to personality. In the other, it is seen as working at the phenomenological level of analysis (a level seen as of limited importance). I conclude by thinking about possible futures for PCT, and arguing for its importance as an approach for understanding (not explaining) human action.

Keywords: *personality theory, personal construct psychology, pragmatism, phenomenology*

In this article, I want to think about the position of Personal Construct Theory in contemporary psychology. And we are immediately presented with a paradox. Kelly appears to be both well enough known and respected. Yet PCT is pushed to the margins of personality theory. Even grid technique, often seen as having a life of its own is past its peak. Bell (2003) tells us that 10,000 grids per year have been analysed as early as 1973, and the 1980s were its 'high tide'. Walker and Winter (2007) tell us that Kelly is mentioned in nearly 50% of the volumes of the prestigious *Annual Review of Psychology* between 1955 and 2005. PCT is covered, albeit briefly, in every personality text that I have seen. And yet PCT is marginal in contemporary personality theory. Those with a serious interest in PCT are a shrinking group, tolerated but not listened to. As I collected my senior citizens' bus pass recently, I thought that it was rather similar. Provided you don't make a fuss, people will let you get on with your business. But you're increasingly invisible in a youth-driven world. Personal construct theory belongs to the past. Why?

In order to make some sense of this, I want to start by considering the official history of personality theories. So, what sort of account do we get of PCT in introductory textbooks? And how is PCT seen to fit into the narrative? We will see that the official history paints a distorted and emasculated picture of the theory. I will argue that it is frozen in the past because of the natural sciences framework in which contemporary personality theory is set. One reason for hope is that there are developments outside this orthodoxy that should welcome the pragmatic approach of PCT.

THE TEXTBOOK STORY

Perhaps the best way to glimpse the official position of PCT is to look at how it is portrayed in undergraduate textbooks. Just how is the range of personality theories presented to undergraduate students and where does PCT fit? What sort of story is told in introductory texts? Generally there are two:

Story 1. Different theories are treated as though they belonged to a pre-paradigmatic period in the development of psychological science (for example, Pervin & John, 2001). Scientific endeavour begins with the competition between different constructions of the world. A discipline can be called a science when some consensus emerges about its world-view. When paradigms are described, it is in terms of the development of physics. Newtonian physics gave way to Einstein's revolution as evidence emerged that a deeper truth had been unearthed by the theory of relativity. Psychology is a young science and is perhaps emerging with its first proper paradigm (like Newton's theory): a cognitive paradigm. In this story, PCT is described as one of those early

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constructions coming from the clinical field. Its contribution was to advocate a cognitive approach during the arid years of behaviourist hegemony. It is respected then as a precursor of cognitivism.

Story 2. Different personality theories are portrayed as occupying different levels of analysis – trait, psychodynamic, phenomenological, behavioural, cognitive and biological (for example, Mischel, Schoda & Smith, 2004). Again, physics is sometimes referred to. Rather like complementarity in physics, different theories are seen as co-existing, much as quantum theory exists side by side with the theory of relativity. Each has its own realm: quantum physics in sub-atomic particles and relativity at an astronomical level. Existing in a complementary way, different personality approaches support each other in providing a full description and explanation of behaviour. PCT fits into this narrative like this: it belongs to an era of grand theories that has now past. It works at the phenomenological level, telling us how people see themselves and what they are up to. This might be interesting, but of course this doesn't explain their behaviour. Underlying motives, or biological factors or cognitive structure might do this.

Story 2 sees psychological science as slightly more mature than does Story 1. It allows for the co-existence of alternative constructions. Even so, some have more power than others. The phenomenological level is about description only – understanding and not explanation. Mischel, Schoda and Smith (2004) write of "encouraging signs of integration", but this is what they see as at the explanatory level. Cognitive psychology can assimilate unconscious activity and anchors itself in brain science. Different parts of the brain and brain stem are activated in different types of shyness, we are told. This points to a link between cognitive-behavioural phenomena and brain activity. 'We now know' that there are different types of shyness, based on different types of brain activity.

WELL I NEVER!

I remember reading that there are three types of orthodox psychology research: *Look how careful I've been, I told you so!* and *Well, I never.* Most

of the impressive integration in the personality field is in the last category. This shyness finding was old hat even when H. J. Eysenck presented it 50 years ago. Of course, if the shy person wants help (and they might well not define themselves as shy), you don't have to know anything at all about brains to help them. And what is more, you don't have to look up much in the cognitive-behavioural literature either.

In both stories, it is sometimes said that PCT hasn't progressed in the USA because:
a) Kelly was quite a shy man who didn't push his theory much
b) PCT came out of nowhere, it wasn't linked to other developments in psychology. He denied it was a cognitive theory.
c) But for some reason, it's popular in England!

Both (a) and (b) are quite wrong of course. Cromwell (2007) has commented on the great boost Kelly got from the 1955 publication. He gave several addresses to a wide range of groups (collected together by Maher in 1969.) And his theory was firmly based in the pragmatic tradition – I'll return to this point later.

DOES THE EVIDENCE FIT THE STORY?

But what about the coherence of this narrative of psychology's development as a science? Does the evidence fit this theory? The argument is that there is an increasing consensus that a dominant cognitive paradigm is emerging. And cognition is increasingly linked to biological factors. We can see this, we are told, in the publications in top journals. Pervin and John (2001) cite a study by Robbins here. But the 'top journals' are North American. What about those in France, China and Russia? How many European articles from Spain, Italy, Scandinavia and Germany make it into these journals? Could it be that this is an Anglophonic prejudice? And could it be that contributors know that they had better speak a cognitive language before attempting a submission? Might the change in nomenclature of the *North American Personal Construct Network* to the *Constructivist Psychology Network* be interpreted as an acknowledgement of this condition? Much of what passes a constructivist here has a cognitive slant after all.

And how convincing is this story that cognitivism is a paradigm that it has triumphed over other paradigms, say, behaviourism, humanism and psychoanalysis and lexical trait theory, through the gathering of evidence? Let us look at its clash with 'trait and state theories' 40 years ago. This is when Walter Mischel (1968) published *Personality and Assessment.* As a clinical psychology student in the 1970s, I was much taken with this book, and will deal here with his demolition of trait theories.

The case of non-disappearing trait theory

Mischel's argument is often over-simplified and represented as advocating the situation-specificity of behaviour. In fact his argument was a pragmatic one: it is better not to assume the generality of behaviour on the basis of a trait assessment. There is of course some coherence to any individual's conduct, but this is not captured by trait theory. People act similarly in situations that *they see* as similar, and their behaviour is the result of their expectations of similar outcome of their behaviour. A person may be domineering with their child but not with the police officer who pulls them up for speeding. A trait like 'domineering' is not an underlying predisposition that explains behaviour. Mischel's argument may be summed up in this way:

1. As Skinner had claimed, traits give us a description of behaviour, masquerading as an explanation. To say somebody is dependent describes their behaviour but does not explain it. Explanations must be sought in their interaction with the environment. This is complex and accounts for the variation in their behaviour. Psychologists are bamboozled by factor analysis into believing that there is more generality in behaviour than is in fact the case. So higher order factors are often built on significant correlations of 0.3. But this only indicates 9% of the variance in common. A correlation may be statistically significant in that it is not entirely due to chance. This does not mean that it is psychologically meaningful. After all, when 81% of the variance is due to situational variables, there is little evidence of the power of traits

to explain behaviour. Any consistency in personality cannot be explained by trait structure.

2. Mischel (1968, p. 44) further points out that the claim of a consistent and stable personality structure rests on the assumption that this reflects the organisation of attributes in those being assessed. He goes on to argue that this assumption is in fact not justified. He cites extensive evidence that, instead, it reflects the perceptual prejudices of the assessors, who draw on a culturally shared trait theory to frame their observations. So traits are not a property of people being rated, but of those doing the rating. Like beauty, traits are in the eye of the beholder. The traits that we think we find in others represent our personal construction of them. One study he cited found that raters produced the same stable trait structure in people that they observed very briefly and did not know as in those that they knew well. This can only be the result of 'reading in' attributes on the flimsiest of evidence. People readily commit the Fundamental Attribution Error of attributing dispositions or traits to others when this is not justified (Langdridge and Butt, 2004). Yet the personality questionnaires that form the basis of Eysenck's and others' trait theories are constructed from factor analytical studies that are based on this error. What seems at first glance like a strength in trait theories is transformed into a flaw.

3. In fact there is nothing objective about 'objective tests', except that they are scored with a stencil. Mischel argues that what we get from a person's personality questionnaire is not an objective account of their behaviour, but an impression – in effect, a theory about themselves. You might be asked if you often have headaches, like going to parties or worry about the future. You are asked to work quickly, giving impressions rather than consulting behavioural referents for your choices. Now 'often' might mean 20% of the time to me and 50% of the time to you, but what gets recorded is respondents' impressions of themselves. I might tick 'Yes' to the same question that you tick 'No' to, even

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though you might have more headaches than me. Each question is loaded in one of the factors on which the instrument is constructed, and contributes to their score on it. These factors, as we have seen, are in turn contaminated by the Fundamental Attribution Error. Now this does not mean that this output is meaningless. But it indicates that it tells us something about the way we perceive and construe things, and not about the existence of a trait structure that is responsible for conduct.

If we are interested in a person's theory about him- or herself, Mischel suggests that we use a procedure that is specifically designed to do just this. Mischel himself was a student of George Kelly, and in this context frequently recommends both Kelly's clinical wisdom and his phenomenological methods.

Now, if the science of personality was following Kuhnian lines of paradigm development, one would expect this convincing argument to have carried the day. Trait theory should be sidelined. And although it has been relied on less in clinical contexts, it has continued to be used in occupational psychology. Here it lived on, while its proponents argued about whether it was best to describe an individual in terms of 3, 5 or 16 factors. The advent of the 'Big Five' is sometimes portrayed as an advance, an emerging consensus in the scientific community, but of course it never convinced either Eysenck or Cattell. Mischel's attack on what he calls the 'state theories' of psychoanalysis and humanism is altogether less convincing. And of course it has not led to their demise. They simply lead parallel lives outside orthodox psychology. To understand this, we have to remember where personality theories came from. They arose in parallel in three different traditions in psychology: the psychometric tradition produced trait measurements, the experimental tradition gave rise to behaviourism and later social cognitive learning theory, and the clinical tradition produced the theories of Freud, Rogers and Kelly. Theories had different jobs to do, depending on their focus of convenience.

So cognitivism has not emerged as a dominant paradigm within personality theory at all. This is simply a claim from those working within the orthodox experimental tradition. And even within this tradition the contention is unconvincing. We read that 'we now know' that cognitions do indeed cause behaviour, as though this has become clear from empirical work. Was it not the case that behaviourism simply went out of fashion? With the advent of the microchip and personal computer in the 1970s, computer models of the mind became acceptable. Cognitive psychology led to cognitive-behaviour therapy, and unorthodox psychoanalysts like Beck and Ellis suddenly discovered that they had been talking cognitive behavioural prose all their lives, so to speak. Here it is useful to remember Kelly's comment that clinical psychology is pure, not applied psychology. Psychotherapists do not scour the journals for laboratory findings that they can apply in their work. The clinical tradition produces theories of people that work in that context. Neither Beck (1976) nor Ellis (1962) relies on cognitive theory for their practice. The traffic is entirely in the other direction. Cognitive psychologists call on their practice to legitimise their theories.

In fact none of the social sciences fit Kuhn's theory of paradigm shifts. There are always different constructions of events that vie with each other. Which become dominant depends on societal forces (e.g. market forces), not on philosophical argument or experimental proofs. Trait theory didn't go away. It carried on in personnel work where people believed in it. Psychoanalysis wasn't replaced by rational theories – it carried on a parallel life because it is so deeply ingrained in our culture and people are prepared to pay for it.

In summary

Kelly is represented positively in the history of personality psychology because PCT fits nicely into the narrative of the development of a mature science. He is a fore-runner of cognitivism, a courageous early out-rider for the new paradigm. But PCT is frozen in history, squeezed into a Procrustean bed in a way he would doubtless construe as hostile. He didn't see constructs as cognitions that caused behaviour at all. If we accept the apparent respect with which PCT is treated, we consign ourselves to the past. Let's

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not fool ourselves that PCT is alive and kicking in contemporary personality theory; it's dead and mummified.

But there are reasons to be hopeful (if not cheerful!). Psychology does not fit well into the natural sciences, and like philosophy, sociology and political science, has had to settle for a number of traditions that exist in parallel. As we have seen, these are judged in terms of their usefulness and how they serve different interests. Increasingly, our discipline is fragmenting. No longer is there a simplistic insistence on prediction and control as the only criterion of scientific endeavour. It is recognised that foresight and understanding do not necessarily go hand in hand. Understanding itself is seen as a goal. This is where PCT's contribution can be most valuable.

PRAGMATISM

Earlier on, I said it is wrongly claimed that PCT stands as an isolated theory, and that Kelly invented it out of nothing. Consequently, it is a one-man show, and since he died, it inevitably went into a decline, having no firm grounding anywhere else in psychology. Kelly of course, is partly responsible for this misconception. Although he famously said that Dewey's pragmatism was everywhere between the lines of the theory, he did not reference his sources, preferring to argue everywhere from first principles. But he knew that knowledge is always a joint construction. Citing Dewey as an example of a leader of a movement, he says:

> *The leader simply adds a large increment to an already massive structure in order to complete an invention, whether it be social or physical. The main structure is supplied by the average and mediocre people, each of whom brings his little contribution and throws it onto the pile.* (Kelly, 1979: 16).

And Pragmatism is being noticed again. The work of James and Dewey is once again referred to in social psychology, Mead always had his followers in symbolic interactionism, and Richard Rorty's aggressive defences of neo-

pragmatism are widely known, both in and outside psychology. PCT is very firmly grounded in Pragmatism. This was a philosophical movement that took root in the USA in the wake of the Civil War. In the early 1870s Charles Peirce, William James, Oliver Wendell-Holmes and others formed the Metaphysical Club in Cambridge MS. Menand (2002) distilled the essence of pragmatism to the proposition that ideas are not 'out there', waiting to be discovered, but are constructions that are more or less useful in helping us in one venture or another. The pragmatists introduced a healthy scepticism into the academy – no theory was to be taken as truth, no idea accepted uncritically. Theories arise in practice, and are like tools to be put aside when they no longer give us a grip on the world. Dewey's version in particular was strongly against the dualisms that have dogged psychology, dualisms like person versus world and mind versus body. All this should certainly sound familiar to those with a deeper appreciation of Kelly's contribution.

Pragmatism was the dominant form of psychology up until the first decade of the twentieth century in the USA. William James had been the first psychology professor at Harvard, and his student Thorndike had conducted the famous animal experiments using cats in puzzle boxes. Dewey and Mead were at Chicago University in the philosophy department, but engaged in work on educational and social psychology. Mead was still there when his student John Watson split from the department with a group of others to form the first department of experimental psychology. Mead's work would become defined as the contrast pole to psychology – philosophy, and be rescued for the social sciences by interactionist sociology. Experimental psychology shaped itself on physics. No Cartesian dualism here – there was no mind in the body, no ghost in the machine.

This was the S-R psychology that Kelly (1969) rejected as useless. The clinical practice he devised is embedded in a pragmatic approach. He tells us that the work began as a clinical handbook, describing clinical strategies that had bee useful in Kansas. But the 'hows' of Volume 2 (Kelly, 1955) were followed up with the 'whys' of Volume 1 (Kelly, 1955). Here theory developed out of the practice, and PCT came into being. Kelly says he was surprised how far

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practice and theory had strayed from orthodox psychology, and Volume 1 begins with 'an invitation to adventure' without the customary critique of other approaches. Gone are all the landmarks familiar to the psychologist: motivation, learning and reinforcement. There is no separation of behaviour, cognition and affect. Instead, the Fundamental Postulate talks of 'psychological processes'. When emotions are dealt with, there is no reduction to physiology. All this makes PCT strange, even incredible to psychologists today. They see it as a criticism for example, that emotions are not described in physiological terms. And it highlights the second point I made earlier. The so-called integration of biological and psychological levels in contemporary personality theory: it has no pragmatic value. Knowing that parts of the brain are activated in shyness, pleasure or aggression helps us not one jot.

When Kelly proposed that a person's processes are channelized by their constructions, he wasn't denying that these same processes can also be understood physiologically. These are alternative systems of construction. This idea comes from William James' pluralism. James held that the universe holds together, but loosely and provisionally. We have to come at things from different perspectives in order to see what works, what makes sense. An object has properties independent of the observer, but only some of them will appear in any particular relationship. I may see a person as desirable, and this may dominate my perception of her. But this perception does not exhaust her attributes and from a different perspective, say that of an insurance agent, desirability may not feature at all. Kelly's claim was that we can make sense of quite a lot in terms of the way things appear to people, and this is one way in which the theory is phenomenological. Trying to appreciate the world-view of the person, the stories that they put together, is a useful way of making sense of their conduct. Now others might try to do the same job from an evolutionary or a physiological perspective. Fine. But you can't mix these all up – they are different systems of construction. Many psychologists don't seem to understand this. They think that throwing in some brain science furnishes deeper (and sadly, more scientific) explanations.

Pragmatism holds that there are different vocabularies for making sense of the same things – in this case, a person's processes. When we say that seeing different colours is explained by exposure to different wavelengths, we haven't explained anything. This is just the way physicists talk about light. When we say that emotions are caused by brain states or hormones, this is just the biologists' vocabulary for it. Actually, I'm not quite convinced by Kelly's accounts of anxiety, threat and guilt. I think existentialists like Farber (2000) have a better understanding of these emotions. But both Kelly and Farber provide us with proper psychological constructions. Anxiety is not caused by adrenaline and depression is not caused by a reduced level of 5HT in the synapses. These physiological changes may correlate with experience but they are not causal. If anything, in everyday life, the sequence of events will be reversed: the perception of an event as disturbing to my construction of myself may lead to all sorts of physiological churning. Dewey emphasised that we often confuse a sequence of events with causality.

Understanding and explanation

I think it useful here to distinguish between causal explanation and understanding (Butt, 2004). This was a bipolar construct first underlined by Dilthey in the late nineteenth century (and incidentally, Mead studied briefly with Dilthey in Berlin). Dilthey argued that causal explanation is appropriate for the natural sciences but not the human sciences – for example history and law. In causal explanation, we look for cause and effect relationships. So in physics, we can explain motion by identifying the forces acting on an object. A billiard ball moves as it does because of the force exerted on it by a cue, or another ball. Clearly, this is a very simple example, but we can see how the principle applies in more complicated examples where interactions combine to produce a particular effect. Several genes and environmental factors might together contribute to an individual's bodily constitution. Making sense of historical events is different though. We might say that World War 2 was caused by Germany invading Poland, but here we are using the word 'cause' in a loose and

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different sense. What we mean is that Britain and France's declaration of war is understandable in terms of the German invasion. There is no simple determinism here. The allies might have decided not to carry out their threat, and indeed Nazi Germany had gambled that they would back down, as they had over the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Causal explanations are deterministic, and there is nothing deterministic in human affairs.

Dilthey claimed that understanding is achieved not by looking for causal relations, but by putting events into a context. In this way we see them as part of a whole sequence of events. We note that the invasion of Poland was evidence to Britain and France of Germany's intention to expand beyond its borders, and beyond what it had already claimed as the greater Germany. The significance of this must be understood in terms of nineteenth and early twentieth century history; the issue of the balance of power in Europe. Understanding is based on the *meaning* of events to participants, not on inevitable causal sequences. Literally, it involves 'standing under' what something means to people, trying to appreciate the way in which they make sense of things. There is no inevitability about this, because the same thing has different meanings to different people, and no one is impelled to act in a particular way in response. One can feel threatened, but choose to retaliate, appease, ignore or re-interpret in the face of the threat. In trying to understand, we adopt different perspectives in order to contextualise an event. What is it part of? What does it mean?

It is through looking at how something fits into a larger whole that we understand meaning. And everything may be seen in different and ever-expanding contexts of course. We can see this clearly in the communication that occurs in conversation. We talk of understanding what someone is saying to us, and of interpreting it. We do this by listening to the words, and interpreting meaning by seeing how they form part of a sentence. The sentence is the structure that gives a meaning to the word that we would miss if we just looked it up in a dictionary. So when someone says 'Oh, I'm pleased to see you decided to turn up' we know that 'turn up' has nothing to do with their performing a summersault. 'Turn' is in itself ambiguous, but there is

nothing ambiguous about the way in which it is used here; the context clarifies the meaning. But the actual meaning of the sentence only becomes clear when we can place it in the context what else is happening, and the context of convention and social practice within which this is embedded. So, if we are thirty minutes late for an appointment, we might conclude that what was said was not meant literally. Such an understanding then requires an appreciation of what an appointment is, as well as a grasp of the uses of irony. So understanding involves a to-and-fro cycling between parts and whole to make sense of what is meant. Dilthey referred to this as the hermeneutic circle (hermeneutics being the name given to the art of interpretation). His claim was that the human sciences rest on this sort of method. Understanding people is more like interpreting a text than predicting the movement of particles. PCT is a psychology of understanding. It makes sense of a person's action by contextualising it in terms of a person's constructions. It looks for reasons, not causes. Cognitions don't cause behaviour or emotion. Action (Dewey) / construing (Kelly) comprises all three.

Understanding and phenomenology

Just as pragmatism is now being thought about once again, so, too is understanding. The new interest in interview methods is phenomenologically based. It's about investigating life-worlds, usually in the health field. What's it like, to suffer from irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes or cystic fibrosis? The aim here is not to explain anything causally, but to understand the patient's, victim's or client's point of view. The flaw in a lot of this work is that it assumes that people can reach inside themselves and describe how they feel. PCT's methods seem to me to offer some more interesting ways of helping people reach for expression. The beauty of asking people how two events are alike and so different from a third is that it exercises them. It gets them to think about concrete events that confront them. Exactly how is this person different from that one? Why does he make me feel uncomfortable yet she doesn't? What would have to change exactly in this situation for me to feel less anxious in it? Then the grid is such an

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excellent way of helping people think. What patterns can the subject see? Does it throw any light on what exactly makes him or her anxious/feel depressed/uneasy etc.

Of course many phenomenologists do not think that PCT is truly a phenomenological approach. But this need not worry us. Research like this is pragmatically based. What helps the patient, client or victim?

CONSTRUCTIVISM

In many ways, constructivism combines both pragmatism and phenomenology. And at its best, it is excellent stimulating stuff. But there is a long, long tail. Much of the work is disappointingly shallow, with no satisfactory literature review or proper grounding in constructivist theory of any stripe. A tangential reference to Kelly 1955 seems often to be the only credential on which many submissions are made to constructivist journals.

Perhaps the future for PCT does lie in the constructivist family. But we should think here of constructivism in its broad usage in the social sciences, not the rather restricted sense sometimes adopted by psychologists. Chiari and Nuzzo's (1996) definition of constructivism is broad. It includes all those approaches that emphasise the relational approach both between the person and other people, and the person and her world in general. It moves our focus from what is going on 'inside' people, as it were, to what goes on between them. Phenomenologists refer to this as the intentional relationship between the person and her world. This is still seen as a radical approach in psychology. But it forms a bridge with the other social sciences. Interpretive and phenomenological approaches in sociology have re-invigorated a critical humanism building on narrative as a key concept. This approach is also based on the pragmatism of Mead and Dewey, and has the same aim: helping people to make sense of both their own lives and those of others.

Lots of this work is based on narrative as a key metaphor – the person as story-teller. And this brings us to the Kellian model of the person as scientist. Kelly had been due to take part in symposium at Chicago University on motivation and emotion in September 1967. It was to be chaired by Theodore Mischel, and to bring together prominent psychologists and philosophers. Sadly, Kelly's death earlier in 1967 prevented him from taking part. But the other participants read each other's work in advance of preparing their papers. Kelly's was commented on favourably by British philosopher R. S. Peters (1969), who liked the 'man the scientist' metaphor because it credited the person with an agency denied them by behaviourism. But, he said, Kelly had not pursued his idea far enough. We can only think 'scientifically' because we are, in this day and age, all initiated into the rules of scientific thinking. The notion would have meant nothing to medieval people; it is only intelligible within a particular tradition. Sarbin (1986) makes a good case that person as author is a more basic metaphor. And stories are embedded in traditions and transmit cultures. They are not merely individual productions. When I began this paper, I looked at psychology as a science and reviewed two stories that are told about it. Perhaps the person as narrator reflects a more basic human potential to story experience in order to make sense of it. The story is a good vehicle for understanding.

Psychologists have adopted the language of the natural sciences, adopting a distance from their subject material. Causal explanation is an example of this, and is a restricted type of understanding that aims at prediction and control. This will do the job nicely, Rorty (1982) says, if we are trying to do something like evaluating artillery fire. The aim of the natural sciences *is* prediction and control. But the aim of the social sciences is not. Their job is to develop a vocabulary for moral reflection and to help people get a better grip on their lives, both collectively and individually. Understanding has a crucial role to play in any civilised society. It now has a place in psychology. And PCT is ideally placed to help provide this.

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