Criminal Psychology

A Critical Textual Analysis

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Abstract

The criminal justice system plays an important role in the reproduction of social power relations, and it embodies an official response to the problem of interpersonal violence. Andrews and Bonta's (2003) *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* is an influential text in this setting, informing the Psychological Services of New Zealand's Department of Corrections, and serving as a key text in the training of psychologists for work in this field. The present study is a critical reading of Andrews and Bonta's (2003) text in relation to the problem of violence. This critical reading begins with the development of a theoretical context for analysis. A subsequent analysis of the text focuses on three prominent discursive themes: a construction of the text's rational empiricism, of its advocating for treatment over punishment of offenders, and of the tension between critical and mainstream accounts of psychology in criminal justice settings. The relationship of these themes to discourses of violence is discussed.

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The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by entering its prisons

Dostoevsky[1]

Introduction

The Problem of Violence

The problem of violence "links various forensic specialists together, regardless of their particular academic orientation" (Arrigo, 2003, p. xvi). It is an area of concern that transcends not only the boundaries between theoretical orientations, but disciplinary boundaries, cultural boundaries, and political boundaries. Warfare, institutional violence, domestic violence, street crime, sexual violence, psychological violence, and the lasting effects of historical violence are all accounts of people violating other people, and in terms of one or more of these accounts, the problem of violence impacts upon all of us.

It is a psychological problem inasmuch as these diverse accounts of violence can all be retold with their protagonists behaving differently: we can conceive of people who behave violently behaving otherwise. This is not to suggest that the gap between ideal and observed behaviour can be closed by psychological theory alone, but—as the science of human behaviour—psychology's role in this context is important. In the forensic domain, this role is obvious and explicit. Psychology informs the "normative ethical systems" in which criminal behaviour is defined and addressed (Blackburn, 1993, p. 1).

If a parent has five children and regularly beats the most disobedient one, we do not conclude that the parent's relationship with the other four children is non-violent simply because the other four children are not beaten. The other four children may be obedient due to their terror of being subjected to the violence that

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1   Attributed (Platt, 1989, p. 286).

is inflicted upon their disobedient sibling. Violence as an instrument of control does not have to be explicitly directed at everyone in the population: it need only be applied to some, and its coercive effects may nevertheless be felt[2] by all[3]. Thus, as the quotation that opens this introduction suggests, one index of violence in a society is the treatment of those deemed most deserving of violence. In the treatment of prisoners we can observe the limits of the violence that a community is prepared to endorse and to justify. Criminal violence transgresses these limits: the transgression is sometimes but not always a matter of degree.

Consider a woman who is physically overcome by several men who restrain her first with their bodies, then with chains, and who then take her to a place of privacy —far away from any family or friends who might assist or advocate for her—where she is kept, against her will, for years. This behaviour could be interpreted as monstrous violence, but such behaviour is easily made acceptable simply by positioning the woman as a criminal and the men as officers of the law. These social categories and the narratives around them are enabling conditions for the enactment of violence. A particular human body is not more or less vulnerable to violence simply by virtue of its physical construction and location. The same physical body in the same physical location can be *socially* positioned as a spiritual leader, or as a child molester: these social positionings constrain or enable the use of violence. It is therefore critically important to our efforts to address the problem of violence that we work to understand the complex systems of discourse that legitimate[4] it.

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2 These effects are not necessarily felt *consciously*. Miller (1997, p.18) gives a psychoanalytic account of how fear can become unconscious. As a young child, a patient was afraid of his mother, but to experience this fear was to display it, and to be punished for it. In order not to be punished for it, he had to stop experiencing it. The metaphor he used was that of living in a body that was a "glass house" into which his mother could look. The only way to hide his negative emotions toward her was to bury them, hiding them from himself in order to hide them from others.

3 Foucault's (1975/1995, p. 195) idea of *panopticism*—discussed on pp. 50-55 of the present text—can be, in this context, a history of the development and optimisation of methods for transmitting these coercive effects through disciplinary practices.

4 Not only in the legal sense, but in the broad sense in which almost any act can be "legitimated", even when others contest its legitimacy.

The old adage, "sticks and stones may break my bones but names can never hurt me," misses the point that it is nearly always "names" that make the use of "sticks and stones" seem reasonable. Even with a very mechanistic understanding of social behaviour, our words and ideas are constitutive of violence: a little distance along the causal chain does not disconnect an event from its consequences.

Psychological theory around criminal behaviour is therefore highly socially significant. It gives accounts of the causes of criminal offending, and also of the best ways to address it (Blackburn, 1993, p. 392[5]). These accounts draw upon and enter into the discourse around violence. Prison—an embodiment of society's conditional approval of violence—is also the treatment context for those whose violence is most strongly disapproved of by their community. All of this—like the example of the single punished child—takes place in relation to a larger population that is far from oblivious to it. In fact, if prime-time television programming is any guide to public interest, people are fascinated with crime and forensic practices (Arrigo, 2003, p. xv). According to Foucault[6], deviance fascinates us because it is only through the contemplation of abnormality that we can know how to be normal. The psychology of criminal behaviour practised by forensic psychologists is therefore similar to the general psychology of abnormal behaviour practised by clinicians inasmuch as it is a body of theories of deviance and so, implicitly, a body of discourse around how a normal human life is to be lived.

The Text

I was introduced to Andrews and Bonta's (2003) *Psychology of Criminal Conduct* by a lecturer in advanced forensic psychology. She had worked as a clinical psychologist for New Zealand's Department of Corrections, and was using Andrews and Bonta's

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5   To assist in locating the relevant portions of texts, I will often give page numbers despite having not quoted directly from the text. This is not to suggest that other portions of the referenced text are not also relevant.

6   Foucault's ideas are discussed on pp. 45-56 of the present text. "For Foucault, individuals are never made visible in their normality, but only in their abnormality" (Fleming, 2003, p. 105).

(2003) book as a required text for her course. During the lecture in which she introduced the text, she described it as the "Bible" for the Corrections Department's Psychological Services. I might have forgotten this remark, were it not for another comment made by a visitor who was invited to speak to us later in the same week. The visitor, a Department of Corrections psychologist working in a sex offender treatment unit, noticed the text on the lecturer's table and said, "Ah, I see you have the Bible."

I was curious as to the amount of truth in this jest, so decided to see if the text was acknowledged anywhere on the Department of Corrections website (Department of Corrections, 2004, November 18). It was quickly obvious that the text was an important one for the Department. Not only are the Psychological Services guided by the theories outlined in Andrews and Bonta (2003), but in some respects the entire Department of Corrections reflects their influence. The Department's website explicitly acknowledges the text as providing the principles that form "the foundation of our offender management approaches" (Department of Corrections, 2004, June 1). The Department's policies are oriented toward its motto[7], "Reducing Re-offending", and the Andrews and Bonta (2003) text provides the science that guides this practice. The Department's magazine (Department of Corrections, 2003, September, p.8) declares, "No single book brings together the increasing body of knowledge about offending and its treatment more thoroughly than the Psychology of Criminal Conduct by Don Andrews and James Bonta."

The text also features prominently in the training of psychologists to work in criminal justice settings. In 2005, three of the four New Zealand universities that offered postgraduate papers in the psychology of criminal behaviour used Andrews and Bonta (2003) as a text. The Principal Psychologist of the Palmerston North office of the Corrections Department's Psychological Services has confirmed, in

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7   The most prominent graphic on the home page of the Department's website (Department of Corrections, 2004, November 18) is an image of New Zealand with the words "Reducing Re-offending" written across it.

discussions about the book, that it is an important text for psychologists in the Department (G. Sinclair, personal communication, Feburary 8, 2005).

Andrews and Bonta (2003) is therefore an influential text in New Zealand society. It makes a substantial contribution to an important area of social practice. On these grounds alone, it is a text worth examining. Before I had learned of its prestige and influence, however, it had already made a strong impression on me. From an initial reading, three general features stood out.

Firstly, it was densely packed with empirical data. In terms of scholarship, it was impressive by virtue of the sheer quantity of research that had been brought to bear on the topic, and the theoretical integration of these findings into coherent intervention strategies. Secondly, it articulated a pro-treatment, anti-punishment position. This was argued in terms of a pragmatic concern with what was most effective at reducing criminal conduct. Thirdly—and, for me, most strikingly—it was explicitly and dramatically[8] hostile to theoretical perspectives that privileged broad sociological explanations of crime over individualistic explanations. The vehemence of the rhetoric suggested that much was at stake: the text's most emotive language seemed to be deployed around this issue, and so it seemed likely that the issue was one of major discursive[9] importance.

Psychology and the Criminal Justice System

Stylistic cues aside, the text's construction of a bitter dispute between its own "rational empiricism" (Andrews & Bonta, 2003, p. 2) and the "antipsychology" (Andrews & Bonta, 2003, p. 33) of its critics is an important theme, because any

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8 The directness and drama of the rhetorical presentation are discussed in the *Close Reading* on pp. 88-112.

9 *Discursive* means, in the present text, pertaining to *discourse* as described in the subsection *Discourse and Power* (pp. 42-50). Thus it has some overlap with the traditional meaning, "dealing with a wide range of topics" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002), a little more with "proceeding by argument or reasoning" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002) but is most congruent with a Foucauldian understanding of discourse (Foucault, 1969/2002b) or a "discursive psychology" (Edwards & Potter, 1992).

practice involving significant non-consensual intervention into other people's lives requires very careful monitoring and rigorous critique. In this context, the text's prominence in New Zealand's criminal justice system means that its having "been under severe attack for years" (p. 2) is of some concern: it would be negligent to leave unexamined the text's construction of its critics as "criminologists who placed higher value on social theory and political ideology than on rationality and/or respect for evidence." (p. 2).

My decision to focus upon this issue was therefore informed by the importance attributed to it by the text itself, and by a concern with ethical practice. Criminal justice settings present psychologists with what Blackburn (1993) refers to as a "perennial dilemma" (p. 410). It is a problem that can be summarised by the question, "Who is the client?" (Monahan, 1980, cited in Blackburn, 1993, p. 409). When one party secures the services of a psychologist to modify the behaviour of another, any reference to the object of such treatment as the "client" is a dubious usage of the term. In the community outside prison, the client is usually the party who employs the psychologist and determines the goals of treatment and the criteria by which the quality of the treatment is to be assessed: in these terms, the prisoner is not the client. The psychologist in this situation is not professionally accountable to the person being treated, but rather to others whose interests may have little in common with those of the person being treated. Clearly, this is a situation requiring careful consideration of ethical standards.

The first principle of the New Zealand Psychological Society's (2002) *Code of Ethics* requires that "Psychologists respect the dignity of persons and peoples with whom they relate in their work and are sensitive to their welfare and rights." A practical component of this first ethical principle is the requirement that "Psychologists seek to obtain as full and active participation as possible from all persons in decisions that affect them". With regard to any compromise of basic rights, "Ultimately, they must be able to justify the decision made." Blackburn's (1993) text (also entitled *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*) concludes with the statement: "A *minimal* [italics added] requirement is for psychologists to be aware of the social and legal context

of criminal justice and behaviour problems." (p. 412). Given these ethical obligations, sociological criticism of psychological practice has to be properly addressed. When such criticism is positioned as "antipsychology", the ethical significance of psychological theory is apparent.

The general theoretical orientation from which I approach this research is that of *critical psychology*. Before outlining a methodological strategy, it is necessary to discuss this *critical psychology* in relation to the "rational empiricism" with which the text aligns itself. The explication of these terms will help to develop the context in which I intend to analyse the text's construction of them and the tension between them, and the relationship of this tension to other discourse.

Critical Psychology

Critical psychology can be understood as a family[10] of critical approaches to the theory and practice of psychology. These approaches are richly heterogenous (Spears, 1997) and to contrive a categorical definition of critical psychology would be to exclude something important. Nevertheless, two prominent themes give an indication of the character of critical psychology. One of these is an explicit concern with the social justice implications of psychological theory and practice, particularly when the status quo in psychology seems to contribute to social injustice (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997). The other is a discursive orientation (Edwards & Potter, 1992) that radically extends the nature and scope of social critique beyond its traditional parameters. Together these themes have guided the development of a set of practices that can serve as a reflexive critique of the discipline.

Critical psychology contextualises psychological knowledge by examining the relationships between systems of discourse and systems of social organisation. This

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10 In the Wittgensteinian sense (Wittgenstein, 1953/1963, p. 32ᵉ) of a group in which nothing is necessarily common to all members, yet the members cohere by means of overlapping commonalities.

shift of focus can produce markedly different interpretations of psychological phenomena. For example, clinical disorders that explain personal distress by locating the problem within the distressed individual can appear as manifestations of social injustice that have been individualised by mainstream psychology. A hyperbolic but illustrative example is the diagnosis of *drapetomania*, a mental illness proposed by a surgeon in nineteenth century Louisiana (Fernando, 1991). Drapetomania was "the disease causing slaves to run away." (Fernando, 1991, p. 36). From our vantage-point outside a culture that normalised slavery, the way in which this diagnosis reduces a political problem to an individual psychological disorder is glaringly obvious. Critical psychologists argue that our own diagnoses owe their apparent neutrality to our immersion in the culture that has constructed them.

Thus, much as a drapetomaniac could conceivably be described as someone distressed by a culture of slavery, a clinically depressed patient could conceivably be described as someone distressed by a culture of patriarchy[11]. From this broad sociological perspective, blindness to the injustices of our own culture makes mainstream psychology complicit in these injustices. Critical psychology and mainstream psychology are thus dichotomised, with critical psychology carrying most of the responsibility for elucidating the historical and political dimensions of psychological knowledge. In this dichotomy mainstream psychology, far from providing psychologists with knowledge that enables them to address injustices, actually encourages psychologists to participate in these injustices by developing knowledge that perpetuates them. In this way the mainstream can work to maintain the status quo[12] by normalising individuals who conform and pathologising individuals who do not.

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11 Gergen (1999, p. 169) relates a Polish saying: "If you aren't depressed you must be stupid".

12 Such work is not regarded a deliberate conspiracy to strengthen oppressive power relations, nor is it regarded as being carried out by immoral or unintelligent people. Rather, it is a systemic activity analogous to Herman & Chomsky's (1994) model of propaganda in the mass media of a capitalist democracy, in which an ostensibly free community of people with good intentions still comes to give voice to the interests of a privileged group.

Of course, a simple dichotomy of critical and mainstream overlooks many commonalities and interdependencies. Important among these are concerns for social justice in mainstream psychology: such concerns are particularly consonant with critical aims when they call for general advocacy rather than limiting treatment to the presenting individual (e.g. Bemak & Chung, 2005), as is often the case in community psychology (Dalton, 2001) and other approaches that encourage critical examination of the politico-psychological domain. Dividing psychology into two camps—the critical margins and the uncritical mainstream—may be useful for articulating critical concerns, but counterproductive in terms of promoting an awareness of the relevance of these concerns within the wider discipline. It also tends to reduce critical psychology to its negative aspect—critique of the mainstream—without acknowledging its creative potential to generate new ways of understanding ourselves and new ways of relating to each other.

If charting a boundary between critical and mainstream psychologies is problematic, mapping the positions *within* critical psychology can be even more difficult. Parker (2002) provides a useful overview of some significant areas of debate or divergence among these positions. A glance at the contentious issues he highlights—postmodernism, epistemological relativism, and the later[13] philosophy of Wittgenstein—gives an indication of the breadth of scholarship involved in addressing them. The present research cannot be conducted without developing a reading position that takes these issues into account.

Methodological Strategy

Methodological rigour in qualitative research—even in a theoretical context of mainstream psychology[14]—involves different criteria from those that are important

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13 Wittgenstein's later work (e.g. Wittgenstein, 1953/1963) differed substantially from his earlier work, and challenged more than it developed his earlier ideas (Dilman, 2002, p. 9).

14 To the extent that qualitative research can be said to be "mainstream" at all: quantitative experimental approaches dominate psychological research (Silverman, 2000, p. 93); so much so that Smith (1996, p. 189) contrasts "mainstream" with "qualitative" psychology.

in experimental or quasi-experimental research. While "qualitative research has traditionally been criticized by mainstream psychology for failing to meet conventional scientific standards" (Smith, 1996, p. 191), these standards are linked to understandings of science that are—as will be discussed on pp. 26-28 of the present text—more in tune with nineteenth-century scholarship than with that of contemporary accounts. "Indeed, according to some writers and practitioners of science, a psychology that involved a move towards qualitative methodology would be more in keeping with contemporary definitions of what science is and what it can achieve." (Smith, 1996, p. 191).

Qualitative approaches to studying human activity have other advantages. *Content validity*—the extent to which the intended object of research is actually being studied—can be compromised by the movement from linguistic to formal quantitative research practices. The following humourous vignette[15] illustrates the point:

> Qualitative Researcher: "Many people these days are bored with their work and are . . ."

> Quantitative Researcher: "What people, how many, when do they feel this way, where do they work, what do they do, why are they bored, how long have they felt this way, what are their needs, when do they feel excited, where did they come from, what parts of their work bother them most, which . . ."

> Qualitative Researcher: "Never mind."

Griffin (2000) maps some of the important critical positions in the "new social psychology" (p. 22), and notes that they "share an interest in qualitative analyses of talk and text" (p. 22). In terms of her account, the present study is informed by a critical psychology like that of the 1999 conference at the University of Sydney, in

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15 Borrowed from Van Maanen in Marshall (1990, p. 197).

which a "politically engaged community psychology" (p. 22) is understood to be consistent with a "poststructuralist/Foucauldian approach to critical discourse analysis" (p. 22).

There is no clearly defined, widely agreed upon procedural method for critical discourse analysis or text work (Meyer, 2001), and this may be a good thing (Van Dijk, 2001). Methods are "theory laden" (Slife & Williams, 1995, p. 5): their aims, forms and techniques reproduce the theoretical assumptions that inform them. For many critical approaches, it is not a case of "lacking" a formal method; rather, these approaches resist formal methods as covert articulations of mainstream theoretical assumptions about the ability of such methods to generate objective psychological facts (Simpson, 1993)[16]. "Moreover, from a discourse and rhetorical perspective the idea of method as a discrete category (as it is traditionally understood in social psychology) becomes untenable . . . . *Method is theory in disguise.*" (Potter, 1997, p. 57).

This rejection of methodological formalism—particularly when combined with the perspectivism characteristic of some critical psychological theory—"introduces a degree of fuzziness into analysis." (Manning, 1998, p. 166). As a result, discourse analysis can been described as an "art" (Philips & Hardy, 2002, p. 80), a "contemplative exercise" (Íñiguez, 1997, p. 155) or a "provocative activity" (Íñiguez, 1997, p. 155); none of which is helpful to the task of establishing the present work's methodological rigour. Feigning objectivity by imposing a formal method on the analysis would conflict with the theoretical assumptions that inform it; at the same time, standards of methodological accountability in social science research preclude simply engaging with the text in a phrase-by-phrase analysis and assuming that the "art" of this reading will be sufficient to legitimate the analysis.

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16 Simpson (1993, p. 111) describes as "interpretative positivism" an approach to text that denies subjectivity in interpretation by seeking an objectivity in "the formal methods of analysis themselves."

In terms of Heidegger's "hermeneutic circle" (Packer, 1989), critical reading is an interaction (Birch, 1989, p. 7) between reader and text, in which the reader does not simply discover what is present in the text, or even produce through interaction with the text a final, present meaning. Instead, interpretation is continually informed by the text itself, in a hermeneutic cycle. In accordance with this understanding of critical textual analysis—and in order to demonstrate some of the process by which I have arrived at my interpretations of specific passages of text—I will first engage with the text at a broad theoretical level, by developing a critical reading position from which to conduct a close analysis of selected passages of text.

The development of this reading position will provide a theoretical context within which the validity of my analysis can be assessed. Where rigour in a mainstream theoretical context consists of strict adherence to established methodological guidelines, rigour in a critical context—that is, in the context of psychological theory that is critical of mainstream theoretical assumptions—can be understood as a *thorough explication* of critical theoretical assumptions. Accordingly, the analysis[17] begins with the development of a critical theoretical background, after which a close reading can be undertaken.

Another methodological issue is that of data sampling. "Probability sampling . . . is largely inappropriate for qualitative research" (Richie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 78). For example, it would not be appropriate to use a computer to generate random numbers within the range of the text's page numbers in order to select a "representative" sample of the data: such methods "falsely assume that discourse is randomly scattered" (Pauly, 1991, cited in Potter, 1996, p. 106).

Qualitative research more commonly employs one of a variety of approaches to *purposive sampling* (Richie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 79). Again, in terms of

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17 Analysis often means "the exact determination of the elements or components of something complex" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002, p. 75); in the present text the usage of "analysis" is closer to its alternate meaning of "critical examination" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002, p. 75) without the implication that a text consists of "essential elements".

methodological rigour, criteria of explicitness are more important than criteria of generalisability. In purposive sampling, no effort is made to eliminate sampling bias, because the bias is the point of the method: some phenomena or data are of interest to the researcher; these phenomena or data are examined.

In the present research, I have aligned my selection of textual excerpts with my initial response to the text (outlined on p. 9 of the present text); that is, in terms of three broad themes: *rational empiricism*, *treatment or punishment*, and *sociology as antipsychology*. Also in accordance with these first impressions, the analysis focuses primarily on the latter theme of conflict between the text and its critics.

This returns us to the issue of contrast between mainstream and critical psychological theory. The development of a theoretical context or reading position for analysis—the first part of a response to the text—can begin with this issue.

Analysis

Theoretical Context

The differences between critical psychology and the mainstream—and also the debates within critical psychology—often reflect epistemological differences. Different sets of related epistemological assumptions underlie the critical and mainstream approaches to psychology. One of the key differences is described by Shotter (1993, p.89) as an opposition between realism (Alston, 1997) and social constructionism (Gergen, 1985). As is often the case with philosophical disputes, the opposition is not a simple case of negations: one set of propositions does not map neatly onto an opposing, contradictory set of propositions. Instead, the empiricist epistemology associated with realism and the discursive epistemology associated with constructionism are complex interpretive strategies that are inseparable from the histories and values that inform them[18].

The realist, empiricist epistemological assumptions that inform mainstream psychology—and the practices arising from these assumptions—are often referred to as *positivism* (Wexler, 1996; Rappaport & Stewart, 1997). This is not necessarily the strict logical positivism[19] of philosophy, although it reflects a similar outlook. "Positivism" describes the tendency to regard everything as explainable in scientific terms, and to regard a reductionistic empirical approach—particularly one in which one's findings can be quantified—as the best kind of science. The term originated in

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18 The description of these epistemological frameworks as "inseparable from the histories and values that inform them" is itself an assertion that fits better with a constructionist epistemology. An empiricist espousing ontological realism might argue that there is a single objective reality and that empiricism is simply our best means of access to it, regardless of cultural or historical location. In either case, the epistemologies are certainly complex sets of related assumptions.

19 Logical positivism was a movement in early twentieth century philosophy that endeavoured to take empiricism to its rational limit: any assertion was to be considered meaningless if it could not be reduced to statements of logical truth, or verified by an appeal to sensory experience. Hanfling (1981, p. 1) says, "A leading advocate of the doctrine, asked in 1979 what he now saw as its main defects, replied: 'I suppose the most important...was that nearly all of it was false.'"

the philosophy of Auguste Comte[20] (Hanfling, 1981, p. 6). Comte's work "exemplifies the views of the nature of science that dominated nineteenth-century thought—which not only took scientific knowledge to be the paradigm of all (valid) knowledge, but also saw in science the solution to the major practical problems facing mankind." (Giddens, 1974, pp. 1-2).

Explicating the assumptions of the status quo makes it easier to appreciate the significance of alternate ideas. Given that positivism is the status quo—not only in psychology but in many ways, as will be described below, throughout the intellectual fabric of modern society—it is the emergence of this outlook that I will address first in my discussion of epistemology.

Background to Positivism

Our[21] intellectual tradition has typically been organised into three broad historical eras: the ancient world, the medieval world and the modern world (e.g. Russell, 1961; Tarnas, 1991). The "ancients" were, in this narrative, the Greeks, since Roman ideas were developments of the philosophies and mythologies of Greece. The medieval intellectual world was dominated by Christian thought, exemplified in the writings of Catholic philosophers. Finally the modern world is our own era, characterised by secular science. Some would add another era, the "postmodern", or at least suggest that we are in the process of shifting to postmodernity (Deely, 2001).

Appreciating the significance of the metaphor in the familiar historical terms "Enlightenment" and "Dark Ages" is helpful for understanding why positivist ideas are so compelling to modern thinkers. It was one thing for Rennaissance thinkers to gaze back through an entire millennium of Western culture, as if through a fog of

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20 He also coined the term "sociology" (Giddens, 1974, p. 1).
21 Traditionally that of the "West", but increasingly that of the world, inasmuch as participation in the global economy—and the global scientific and arts communities —"Westernises" other cultures, subordinating the relevance (to global Western culture) of their histories to that of this intellectual tradition.

ignorance and superstition, at a glorious past (Tarnas, 1991, p. 209); but the scientific revolution made even the glory of the Greeks seem like a few primitive sparks of intelligence, next to the manifest power of modern thought (Roberts, 1997, pp. 659-660). That Descartes, in the seventeenth century, could be so confident in his own rationality as to attempt to build his entire philosophy upon it (on the basis of the *cogito*)—deposing all other authorities as inferior—is a testament to the historical triumph of reason. A few generations earlier, it would have been unthinkable to regard as dubious the combined authorities of the Church, the Bible, and all the great philosophers from Plato and Aristotle through to Aquinas (Tarnas, 1991).

But the new, scientific cosmology had radically altered humanity's perception of its relationship with the universe. The Copernican revolution was not merely a radical change in astronomy: it ushered in a new cosmology in the full sense of the word. For the first time, the gods moved just as we predicted. The "gods", in fact, were material things, obeying physical laws, no more divine than rocks. Science transformed us from things that only the gods could understand, into the only things that could understand the gods. Just at the time that, for Europeans, the geographical world was rapidly expanding (Rietbergen, 1998, p. 232), and a New World was opening up to physical and cultural exploration, so it seemed that our old intellectual world had been narrow, immature, misguided and oppressive. In our development from the dark ages to enlightenment, it was the scientific revolution that had liberated us by rolling away the stone from the cave of ignorance.

The impact of these changes is hard to overstate. Premodern society looked back to a superior past from which it had descended; modern society regards itself as riding the crest of progress, away from an inferior past. Technology appeared as the tangible proof of science's worth. Instead of hoping uselessly that the gods, or God, would save us from plagues and famines, we were able to create new medicines and machines to achieve our own salvation. In dazzling contrast to the dark ages of unscientific speculation, it was suddenly clear that "the world's phenomena were

being superbly comprehended, to humanity's inestimable benefit, by science, and that the terms of that comprehension were fundamentally naturalistic." (Tarnas, 1991, p. 310).

Given this history, it is hardly surprising that the beliefs and practices associated with science are held in the highest esteem. Even when the aura of science has been tainted by the contribution science has made to industrial pollution, Nazi death camps and nuclear weapons, it is still very easy to regard these things as abuses of a power given to us by science; a great power with the potential for great good. For positivists, this power comes from an accurate knowledge of the world, which is obtained by means of a disciplined and systematic research practice.

The roots of this practice are in a rationalist, empiricist epistemology, the elements and origins of which are complex. The Cartesian elevation of rationality over authority is important, but other elements of the scientific outlook are already implicit in this reasoning. Descartes, frustrated with what he regarded as a long history of philosophy that had yielded not a single undisputed fact (Deely, 2001, p. 513), was attempting to establish a secure basis for knowledge by building into philosophy the certainty of mathematics. By working carefully from first principles, Descartes was trying to separate the necessary from the unnecessary; to purify his thinking. This logic was guided by the principle of parsimony or "Ockham's razor"[22] —an idea so fundamental to modern thought that it is easily taken for granted— which featured in the philosophy of the Bishop of Ockham three hundred years earlier (Tarnas, 1991).

Ockham was also an early proponent of nominalism, in which categories of things are not regarded, in the Platonic tradition, as universal forms in which our minds participate, but rather as abstractions that we have applied to a material reality (Skirbekk & Gilje, 1972/2001). So a horse is not the spirit of a horse embodied in

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22 *Non sunt multiplicanda entia praeter necessitatem*—entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity: this is the conceptual "razor" attributed to Ockham, although it never occurs in this form in his writing (Deely, 2001, p. 346).

matter, and recognised because the spirit of the horse is also accessible to the human mind. Instead, there are material things, all unique in their own materiality; we observe similarities between some of them and so we call them "horses". Matter does not reflect an underlying spiritual order that is also reflected in our ideas; instead, our ideas are derived from the matter they describe.

Just as Ockham's principle of parsimony is implicit in Descartes' logical reasoning, so his nominalism is implicit in Locke's (1689/1975) empiricism. If ideas are derived from observations of the material world, and not possessed of their own inherent nature, then the best ideas are those that accurately represent the material world. It is worth noting that Locke, like Descartes, was frustrated by what he saw as the "hopelessly unclear and inadequate" ideas of his time (Skirbekk & Gilje, 1972/2001, p. 212). The impact of the dramatic progress of natural science can be discerned in this desire, of both philosophers, to supplant a confused tradition with a new certainty. Scientists had arrived at startling and profound new truths by building carefully upon just what was empirically evident, and rejecting ideas that were not grounded in this way; philosophers sought to abstract and systematise the principles of this success.

Francis Bacon made all this explicit. The pursuit of knowledge should consist of a careful, systematic accumulation of empirical facts. For Bacon, this was the essence of the emancipatory power of science. "The whole basis of his philosophy was practical: to give mankind mastery over the forces of nature by means of scientific discoveries and inventions." (Russell, 1961). Bacon gives voice to the modern ideal of technological control over nature when he writes about the "new tool" of science, which will lead us to the "new Atlantis"; an enlightened paradise on earth (Skirbekk & Gilje, 1972/2001, p. 155).

Today, we are reminded constantly of the sheer efficacy of science by the proliferation of technology, and the many achievements we have realised through science that would once have been considered entirely beyond the realm of human

possibility. We look up at the moon and see an object upon which human beings have stood.

Another important aspect of the positivist approach is apparent in Descartes: a dualist conception of mind and matter. This is not to say that positivism will necessarily acknowledge its dualism—a monistic materialism is compatible with the explicit tenets of positivistic science—but the dualism is implicit in a positivist epistemology. For positivists, an epistemology of thoroughgoing empiricism depends upon a realist ontology[23]. Empiricism is to ground knowledge in sensory experience because our senses are supposed to be stimulated by an objective reality. This is not merely a rejection of solipsism. The realist assumption is not just that there *is* a world out there, but that it is *out* there; a clear distinction has to be made between the apperceptive subject and the objects of perception. Very simply, if reality is objective, then subjectivity must be something that can be separated from it. If the two are conflated—that is, if the relationship between subject and object is illusory, or at least not one in which the subject is able to observe the object "from a distance," in the sense that the object is not affected by the subject—then the notion of objectivity becomes highly problematic.

Associated with this dualism is the visual metaphor alluded to above. Jupiter's moons, according to this dualism of observer and observed, neither knew nor cared that Galileo was looking at them. Their nature was "out there" to be seen or overlooked. Positivistic research methodology is therefore concerned with the maintenance of this metaphorical distance between researcher and researched[24]. "Experimenter effects" are regarded as avoidable, and obstructive to the research; one should observe reality as though one were not present in it. This value is

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23 One can be a strict empiricist without being an ontological realist but, as the development of empiricism from Locke through Berkeley to Hume demonstrates (pp. 21-23), this detaches the phenomenological world from the ontological, which undermines the very thing that makes empiricism so important to positivism (its power to authorise knowledge as representing an objective reality).

24 Levin's (1993) *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* gathers together various accounts of this "ocularcentrism".

embedded in the terms "objective" and "subjective": the object of research is not to be regarded "subjectively", from the perspective of the researcher, but rather "objectively", as if from the perspective of other objects.

Finally, there is a tendency in positivistic science to quantify data. The reasons for this tendency are fairly straightforward in the context of a rational empiricism that deals in objective facts. If there are objective facts, their successful articulation depends upon clear, honest and unambiguous communication. Honesty is encouraged methodologically by adherence to standards of open publication and reproducibility: one's research should be documented, the documentation made available to one's peers, and the research should be reproducible so that others can confirm or contest its findings.

Clarity and lack of ambiguity are more difficult to achieve. Even if one writes very carefully, it is difficult to describe one's observations in unambiguous terms. Quantification addresses this ambiguity: numbers are the positivistic solution to Babel[25]. We may all understand "fear" differently, but we know precisely what "four" means. Numbers seem to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries: they can be translated many times while retaining the meaning they held in the original language.

Positivism, then, is not merely a set of epistemological assumptions and methodological practices: it is the particular set of assumptions and practices that are held to be responsible for our salvation from the darkness of an ignorant past. Kruger (2002), in describing postmodernism's "true nature" (p. 456) speaks of the "danger that the public is being adversely affected by these indulgent thought

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25 The Biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) has humanity speaking one language, and building a tower to reach the heavens. God, concerned that a unilingual humanity is too powerful (and, presumably, that His territory is about to be punctured by a tower!) decides to sunder our language into many so that we can no longer understand each other. The Tower is abandoned. In the combined terms of this narrative and the narrative of scientific progress, quantitative science is humanity's restored language, and the rapid development of technology is our recommencement of work on the Tower.

experiments. In a world where the teaching of evolution by natural selection is still controversial in some regions, the fragile scientific literacy of the general public should be carefully cultivated." (p. 456). To challenge positivism is no small thing: it is not merely to suggest an alternate way of understanding the world. To challenge positivism is to risk losing our tenuous grip on rationality and embarking on an atavistic descent into superstition; a second collapse of Western civilisation, made far worse by the fact[26] that modern barbarians are armed with nuclear weapons.

All the same, from a philosophical point of view, there are some major difficulties and inconsistencies among the positivist epistemological assumptions. The first of these concerns the relationship of empirical experience to ontological reality. In the development of empiricism from Locke through Berkeley to Hume, the problems with this relationship became increasingly explicit.

Developments in Empiricism

Locke's (1689/1975) empiricism is straightforward—and philosophically obsolete, as the following discussion will show—but it is the most congruent with positivistic science, probably because it arose in the same historical circumstances. Locke embraced the Newtonian model of reality—a world of material things, affecting each other mechanically—and applied it to the realm of the mind. Real things impacted on the senses, and the mind was formed of these accumulated impacts. Thus Locke understood the mind to be a *tabula rasa* informed entirely by the senses: his position can be summarised with the classical statement of empiricism, "nothing exists in the mind that was not first in the senses"[27]. The rational skepticism of Descartes had provided a foundation for modern thought. A secure foundation, however, was not enough; the whole structure needed to be dependable. Locke's

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26 This fact—the looming threat of barbaric enemies, armed with weapons of mass destruction—is, like the rest of the scenario described above, a cultural "fact", whatever else it may be. That is to say, it has been proven: it has proven to be useful for justifying war.

27 *Nihil est in intellectu, quod non antea fuerit in sensu.* Kant (1789/1999) gives it in this form; he also notes that the principle "agrees with Locke's" (p. 303).

answer was that the evidence of our senses was the only reliable guide as to which ideas were dependable.

Berkeley however, in developing this line of thought more rigorously, articulated its inherent problem. If all that we know comes via experience, and the mind has no direct access to other sources of knowledge, then we have no rational grounds for believing that a world beyond our experience exists at all (Tarnas, 1991, p. 335). If we are true to our empiricism, we must acknowledge that the contents of the mind are all we can know about. We may want to believe that our perceptions are caused by objects that exist "outside" our minds, but we have no proof of this: all we can speak of with certainty is the perceptions to which we have direct access. Clearly this position is a problem for the realist notion of an objective reality that has an existence independent of perception.

Berkeley's radical solution to this problem was simply to deny the existence of matter altogether (Ayers, 1982, p. 51). According to Berkeley, *esse est percipi*—to be is to be perceived (Tarnas, 1991, p. 336). Our experiences are not an effect or representation of the universe; they *are* the universe. This is the prototypical idealist conception of reality. Despite the elegance of this solution, it confronts us directly with the philosophical "problem of other minds". For Berkeley, God was the way out of solipsism; it was the mind of God that contained us all in God's perception, thereby connecting the phenomenological world of the individual mind to that of other minds.

Hume however pointed out that a truly rigorous empiricism must go further than this, and dispense with the idea of God. Weinberg (1977, p. 112) writes that "it was Hume more than any of his contemporaries or predecessors who brought about the transition from a theological to a naturalistic view of the world." Empiricism determined what was real and what was not; God was not empirically evident, therefore God was, quite literally, not a sensible idea. Hume represented a rigorously consistent empiricism; he accepted the Lockean promotion of empirical evidence as the source of knowledge, but refused to compromise this empiricism as

Locke and Berkeley had done. Locke thought empirical evidence to be caused by an objective material reality; Berkeley showed that there is no empirical evidence for such a reality, so denied it by identifying matter with mind and regarding the universe as the mind of God (Tarnas, 1991). Hume was skeptical of *everything* beyond our senses; an objective material world, God; even causation, and the assumption that things that have been a certain way in the past will continue to be the same in the future (Tarnas, 1991; Weinberg, 1977). Russell (1961) says:

> Hume's philosophy, whether true or false, represents the bankruptcy of eighteenth-century reasonableness. He starts out, like Locke, with the intention of being sensible and empirical, taking nothing on trust, but seeking whatever instruction is to be obtained from experience and observation. But having a better intellect than Locke's, a greater acuteness in analysis, and a smaller capacity for accepting comfortable inconsistencies, he arrives at the disastrous conclusion that from experience and observation nothing is to be learnt. (p. 645)

Empiricism either justified the scientific outlook while being rationally inconsistent, or was rationally consistent but had nothing to say about the value of scientific knowledge. The modernist ideal had been to construct a system of knowledge based entirely on empirical evidence and pure reason; now it seemed that the two were fundamentally incompatible.

The "central philosophical position of the modern era" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 340) was articulated late in the eighteenth century by Immanuel Kant. Kant initiated what is often called a "Copernican revolution" in philosophy (e.g. Dilman, 2002, p. 9; Tarnas, 1991, p. 417). The Copernican revolution changed our understanding of the universe by showing that the movements of the heavens could only be properly understood when our own movement was accounted for, since it was our movement that endowed the heavens with their apparent movements; the Kantian revolution forever our understanding of reality by showing that the nature of objects could only be properly understood when our own nature was accounted for,

since it was the structure of our minds that endowed objects with their apparent structure. It was not simply the case that our thoughts were conforming with the objects of experience; the objects themselves were actually conforming with our thoughts (Dilman, 2002, p. 9). Just as pre-Copernican astronomers had studied the sky without realising that their own movement accounted for much of what they observed, pre-Kantian philosophers had studied the world without realising that their own ideas accounted for much of what they perceived.

Kant's insight was to consider the "*a priori* forms of human sensibility" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 343) as a kind of filter through which the world *in itself*[28]—about which we could never know directly—was made accessible to the human mind. Kant retained the realist assertion that there is an objective world "out there" beyond human perception, but at the same time agreed with the strict empiricist position that there was nothing we could learn about this objective world[29] *in itself*. What we could learn about was the phenomenal world—the mental, experiential world—which was structured according to *a priori* forms of human understanding.

So, things did have some kind of "real existence", but this was utterly beyond human comprehension. Our minds perceived them in terms of *a priori* forms— substance, location in space and time, causal relationships, and so on—thereby creating a universe to which we did have access. For Kant, empiricism was justified without rationality being compromised: our knowledge could be grounded in empirical observations of the phenomenal universe—the universe in which we exist, and the only one we can ever know—while at the same time, reason could be

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28 Kant distinguished between the phenomenon and the *noumenon*, or "*das Ding an sich*"—"the thing in itself" (Hoffman, 1982, p. 36).

29 Despite saying that we could know nothing about this transcendent world, and thereby reducing metaphysics to faith, Kant's position involves the metaphysical judgements that the transcendent world actually exists, and that it impacts upon the phenomenal world. Although this has been a point of dispute (Skirbekk & Gilje, 1972/2001, p. 279), it is not necessarily an inconsistency: a metaphysical judgement can still be made as a statement of faith or, as we might understand it today, an existential choice. On the other hand, it is also possible to interpret Kant's position as a form of idealism (Langton, 1998, pp. 207-209).

trusted, since its exercise did not lead inexorably, via Hume, to a solipsism in which the real world and "other minds" did not exist.

This is enough background for a broad understanding of the epistemological assumptions underlying positivism. In one respect, it is too much: Kant's central insight—that we contribute to reality when we experience it—is crucial to constructionist epistemologies. The character of positivism is distinctively empiricist, but not in a sophisticated Kantian sense; rather it resembles the earlier empiricist philosophies. Nevertheless, Kant is important in this context because he represents a final great philosophical effort to justify the realist ontology that is so vital to positivist epistemologies. After Kant, the "thing in itself" was largely abandoned (Russell, 1961, p. 689). What remained was a profoundly important question: how, and to what extent, did our minds structure the reality we experience? "Thus philosophy's true task was to investigate the formal structure of the mind, for only there would it find the true origin and foundation for certain knowledge of the world." (Tarnas, 1991, p. 347).

Kant's "Copernican revolution in philosophy" was the beginning of the end for positivist philosophy. If it had been disconcerting that philosophers had been unable to explain how science gave us access to an objective reality, it was much worse now that they were able to explain that it was doing no such thing. On the other hand, and regardless of these challenges to its epistemological foundations, the development of scientific theory progressed from triumph to triumph. Next to these spectacular successes, critical philosophy must often have seemed to be an irrelevant, whingeing denial of pragmatic truth; something like an engineer insisting that a bee *couldn't* fly because it was aerodynamically impossible. Positivistic science just worked[30], and so there did not seem to be any need for it to respond to Kant's demolition of naïve realism.

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30 That is, it worked for the privileged few whose opinions in these matters were considered to be valid. Whether it "worked" for the large numbers of people without voices who found themselves to be controlled in new ways, attacked with new weapons, labouring in new industries and so on, is another question.

Problems with Positivism

All this changed around the beginning of the twentieth century when a series of
dramatic developments in physics displaced the Newtonian model from its position
as the foundational scientific theory[31]. The key elements of the new model—
Einstein's theory of relativity (Einstein, 1912/2003, 1952/1961), Planck's quantum
theory (Mehra & Rechenberg, 1982), Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy
(Heisenberg, 1928/1930), and a host of related ideas—were profoundly consonant
with the Kantian insight that reality was structured by the observer. Where Newton
had assumed an objective, universal space and time within which all events took
place, Einstein showed that the passage of time is different for different observers
(Einstein, 1952/1961, pp. 26-27, 1912/2003, p. 8). Where Newtonian physics had
postulated tiny objectively real particles as the building blocks of all matter,
quantum physics describes a world of probabilistic wave functions (Abers, 2004,
p. 49) that only resolve themselves into material events when observed (Hey &
Walters, 2003, pp. 172-179); and the nature of the events depends upon the nature of
the observations[32] (Norris, 2004, p. 11).

Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy is often described in terms of our inability
to know the precise location and momentum of a particle (e.g. Penrose, 1989, pp.
321-325); our knowledge of these things being inversely correlated, so that the more
precisely we measure one, the less we can determine the other. However,
Heisenberg's own (1928/1930) account is much more striking, particularly in
relation to the importance of the subject/object distinction to positivism, and in
relation to the "turn to language" that will be discussed later[33]. According to
Heisenberg, "This indeterminateness of the picture of the process is a direct result of

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31 As the "ultimate science of matter" (Fuller, 1998, p. 85) physics has "become the
    indisputable foundation of the sciences" (p. 85), at least in terms of "philosophical respect"
    (p. 85).
32 Ghirardi (1997), arguing for the preservation of some form of realism despite the
    implications of quantum physics, acknowledges that its "contextuality raises serious
    problems for anybody wanting to take a realistic position" (p. 227).
33 *The Linguistic Turn* on pp. 31-38.

the indeterminateness of the concept 'observation'—it is not possible to decide, other than arbitrarily, what objects are to be considered as part of the observed system and what as part of the observer's apparatus" (p. 64). Here was something that physicists did not expect to find in the fabric of the universe: language and subjectivity.

Physics thus presented a new model of reality in which events[34] were not only irreducibly and inescapably relativistic, but also impenetrably unpredictable. The neat determinism implied by Newton's mechanical cosmology was abandoned. As momentous as these changes were, together they formed just one manifestation of an accelerating movement beyond the comfortable certainties of nineteenth century science. Developments in mathematics that came to be known as *chaos theory* showed that—even if, as in the old physics, the universe were fundamentally deterministic—it would still remain forever beyond the reach of prediction (Schuster, 1995).[35]

Then another mathematical discovery was made by the logician Kurt Gödel in 1931. Known as his "Incompleteness Theorem", it demonstrated that formal logical systems are *always* incomplete, in the sense that they necessarily depend upon external axioms to support at least some of their own assertions (Irvine, 1996, p. 27). This was a decisive end to the ambitions of logical positivists who had hoped to build an empirically grounded system of knowledge with the certainty of mathematics. Gödel showed that even in mathematics, a theory or branch of mathematics would always need to go beyond itself in order to *prove* itself, and that every time a system was transgressed in this way, more axioms would be introduced, the proofs of which would require further transgressions, and so on *ad infinitum*.

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34 At least in the contexts of very high energies and very small particles; the old model can still be useful in the everyday, macroscopic world.

35 Williams & Arrigo (2002) consider some of the specific implications of chaos theory to psychology in criminal justice settings (e.g. with regard to predictions of dangerousness).

Logical positivism now seemed philosophically indefensible. It looked to an objective empirical reality as its informant, but this had been shown—not only by philosophers, but now by physicists—to be a phantom. Worse, the very glue that was to bind the system together—a tidy, coherent, rational system of formal logical assertions—was shown to be just as phantasmal: a knowledge system could never prove itself to be true. No matter how badly we wanted one, we would *never* have a watertight, logically irrefutable system of knowledge with which to describe our world.

To what extent these discoveries were influenced by the earlier developments in philosophy is debatable. If Kant had shown in the eighteenth century that what was observed was largely a function of the observer, physics—the foundational "hard science"—finally agreed with this account. The twentieth century developments in mathematics, by setting limits on reason itself, further undermined the Baconian dream of a straight path to paradise via rational empiricism.

The assumptions that informed scientists between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries have had plenty of time to disseminate, and are now widespread (Crotty, 1998, p. 27). The language of positivism—including that of positivistic psychology —draws much of its rhetorical power from these assumptions. So, despite being based upon an uncritical realism that has now been largely discredited in both philosophy and the physical sciences, positivist ideas seem reasonable because they are congruent with "common sense"[36]. The disturbing, relativistic notions of constructionism—although better informed philosophically and now even

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36 Thus the "common sense" assumptions of positivism are refuted by the very authorities upon which they are allegedly based. Science and reason do not support positivism, but the *popular myth* of science and reason does. The linear narrative of philosophical and scientific progress presented above—and particularly its construction as a sequence of the discoveries of "great men"—is an account of this popular "history of science" that positivism draws upon, albeit implicitly, to justify itself. It is therefore a version of the popular myth in some respects, and not the account that I would present if I were not specifically setting out to extend this popular history into the present era, in order to highlight its inherent contradictions. Lynch (1998) describes what a properly "constructivist" history might look like.

empirically—offend our commonsense notions of reality, and so are much more difficult to defend.

All of this can seem irrelevant to the daily practice of psychology: such abstract theoretical debates can seem far removed from the everyday problems of human behaviour with which psychologists work. They are relevant however, for at least two reasons.

Firstly, to the extent that psychological practice is informed by theory, it is an embodiment or enactment of this theory and retains some of its character. For example, someone whose behavioural abnormality is accounted for in terms of neurochemical imbalances will likely receive a different treatment from someone whose behavioural abnormality is accounted for in terms of the learned behaviour of a healthy brain. Psychologists' theoretical assumptions can be a guide as to how they treat other people; their clients in particular. Epistemological assumptions are among the foundational elements of a theory, so it is important to examine them.

Secondly, and regardless of the above, groups and individuals have various kinds of stake in whatever they do—including the practice of psychology—and these investments can motivate them to practise in ways that conflict with the interests of other groups or individuals. People are frequently required to account for what they are doing, and such accounts can consist largely of theoretical justifications. Thus, theory does not merely inform practice in the sense that it guides psychologists when they need to make practical decisions; it also opens possibilities for certain kinds of practice by offering itself as a rhetorical justification for such practices.

It would be simplistic to equate theoretical positions with political positions[37], but it is important to acknowledge that "issues of politics intermesh closely with issues of

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37 Fuller (1998) illustrates some of the complexity in the overlap between epistemology and politics in his discussion of "Left constructivism" and "Right constructivism" (pp. 96-97).

theory" (Shakespeare, 1998, p. 168). Critical psychologists do not take up positions of disagreement with positivistic theory purely because the debates are fascinating and positivism is flawed. They are more likely to criticise the theoretical assumptions of positivism because these assumptions are rhetorical justifications for an approach to practice of which they are critical (Shotter, 1990, pp. 155-156). This approach to psychological practice may be one in which a technology of social control[38] is uncritically accepted as if its categories and methodologies were somehow "objective" and divorced from the interests of the social groups that employ it (Wexler, 1996, p. 158; Shotter, 1993, p. 98).

The positivist assumption that there is an objective reality—the truth of which is represented linguistically by accurate statements—is implicitly a distancing of theory from personal or political motivation. An unscrupulous theorist, according to this positivist account, may distort the facts in order to further his or her personal or political agenda, but an honest researcher builds theory upon a foundation of empirical fact, pursuing knowledge not for the sake of any group or individual, but "for its own sake". The facts are morally and politically neutral—certainly they may advantage or disadvantage some groups, but this is not the fault of the theorists who describe them: to deny the facts would be dishonest. It may be "found" that one race tends to be more intelligent than another, for example. Whatever the facts may be, positivists can—by appealing to the objective nature of reality—offer the rhetorical equivalent of "don't shoot the messenger" because the facts they are are reporting are "discovered", not constructed.

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38 "Social control" does not mean coercion: only in the forensic domain and in cases of involuntary commitment to psychiatric institutions is psychology's contribution to social control likely to be associated with coercion. While these "troublesome" cases are much more noticeable due to the conflict involved, psychology makes a far greater contribution to social control not by dealing with troublesome desires, but rather by shaping in people desires that are not troublesome. This aligning of private selves with the social order is perhaps better described not as "control" but as "governance" or "management" (Rose, 1990, p. 111, 1999).

The Linguistic Turn

The ideas of "discovery" or "construction" of knowledge have a linguistic analogue. In terms of language use a statement can be described as "denotative" or "performative" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 9)[39]. A denotative statement[40] is one that describes a particular state of affairs. So, "the dog is on the table" is denotative. A performative statement is one that is made in order to achieve an effect. So, "the library is now closed" is performative[41]. This distinction—or rather, its melting away—is a major factor in the rising importance of language for the social sciences.

The *linguistic turn* (Norris, 2004) or "turn to language" is a way of describing a general trend in twentieth century scholarship towards a focus on the role of language in all human activity. This trend is complex and involves a variety of changes in orientation, but there is overall a reflexive character to the linguistic turn that resembles that of the Copernican or Kantian revolutions. As with these shifts, the linguistic turn is a shift toward an *"endogenic perspective* regarding the origins of knowledge" (Gergen, 1985, p. 269) in which we attend to the role of our own activity in perceiving, interpreting and contributing to events, in contrast with the *exogenic perspective* in which events are regarded as external things impacting upon our relatively passive minds[42].

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39 The performative/denotative distinction is analogous to the constructed/discovered distinction when they are considered in terms of agency and responsibility. Intentionality is explicit in the ideas of "performing" or "constructing", and so the language user accepts responsibility for the effects of this language use. In "stating the facts" or "discovering the facts", however, performative language effects are de-emphasised.

40 Here "statement" is being used in the commonly accepted sense of an "expression whose content is assessable in terms of truth or validity" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002).

41 Lyotard (1979/1984, p. 9) uses a similar example, in which the statement could as easily be denotative as performative. Discussing "performatives", Potter & Wetherell (1987, p. 15) use examples like, "I sentence you to six months hard labour". This less ambiguous example fits more closely with Austin's (1962) constative/performative distinction, nevertheless the importance of such "performatives" is not their reflexive, self-referential nature (in which it is their own activity that is "being described"), but rather the way this calls attention to performativity in language generally. The difference between a judge declaring "I sentence you to six months hard labour" and a prisoner in the dock replying, "I sentence *you* to six months hard labour" is one of social power relations, not grammar.

42 For Copernicus it was an assumption of physical rather than mental passivity, but the shift to a reflexive awareness is similar.

By contextualising the subject in relation to the field of objects, this reflexive awareness transforms theory, not only in the broad philosophical domain of epistemology, but in the familiar personal domain of our concepts of agency, personhood and the "self" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, pp. 127-129). Such changes have so many implications for psychological theory and practice that they cannot be easily summarised, but an examination of the performative or rhetorical nature of discourse—including our own—is of central importance, inasmuch as it is possible to understand and assess all other knowledge claims in these terms.

One aspect, then, of the reflexivity involved in the linguistic turn is an acknowledgement that the tidy distinction between denotative and performative remarks is illusory[43]. For example, "the dog is on the table"—ostensibly a denotative statement—can be performative, as when it is shouted from the other side of a dinner party to someone who is near a table upon which a dog has hopped up to sniff at the hors d'euvres. The imperative that is implied by this statement—"get the dog off the table!"—is one that most of us would recognise in the circumstances described above, yet it is a meaning that can only be grasped with an awareness of the social context. Furthermore, the performative function of the statement is much more important than the disinterested statement of fact that it might seem to be if it were interpreted without an awareness of its social context. Similarly, "he is a high-risk offender" or "she has been diagnosed with schizophrenia" are denotative statements with performative functions that depend upon the context of their use. Part of the linguistic turn involves a recognition of this potentiality in language.

Shotter (1993, p. 73) says, "central to an understanding of anything psychological is an understanding of the role of language in human affairs." This assertion makes more sense in a theoretical context informed by the linguistic turn, but even the most mechanical theories of human behaviour are infused with interpretive activity. A theory that describes us as biological machines existing to propagate our

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43 This is a reflexive acknowledgement because it effectively says, "this statement—that there is no tidy denotative/performative distinction—is itself a performative as well as a denotative statement".

DNA must talk about the degree to which an organism's reproductive power is enhanced or threatened, and—even if such theories are not reflexively acknowledged as performative attempts to propagate the DNA of their theorists—such talk relies at the very least upon the interpretation of social behaviour in terms of reproductive power.

Whatever the role of language in shaping ideas like "photons" or "air pressure", it would be very difficult to argue that language is not an essential factor in the social domain. A human science operating in this field—working, as psychology does, with linguistic constructs as complex as "agreeableness" or "aggression"—requires an awareness of this rhetorical dimension. Without such an awareness, psychology could be said to be largely unconscious in the sense that, as a discipline, it is largely unaware of the effects of its activities, and even of its reasons for acting[44].

Positivistic approaches to psychology, which "rhetorically deny rhetoric" or "seek to persuade the reader that no persuasion is intended" (Billig, 1991, p. 209) are at present highly successful strategies in a game they claim not to be playing. They are informed by a tradition of positivistic scientific scholarship concerned with elevating the rhetorical power of its pronouncements by distancing them from notions of subjectivity and rhetoric. Critical psychology however is informed by the interdisciplinary scholarship around the turn to language. A brief examination of two developments at the roots[45] of this scholarship will suffice to justify Shotter's assertion that an understanding of language is central to any psychological understanding. The first took place in linguistics itself and the second in the philosophy of language.

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44 Parker (1997) gives a different and much richer account of the unconsciousness of social psychology, mapping areas of the discipline in terms of psychoanalytic structure, and including a discussion of Burman's (1994, p. 104) notion that psychoanalysis is itself "the repressed other of psychology".

45 Parker (2002, p. 119) notes that some critical scholarship has appropriated (rather than developed from) this material: in either case it informs critical discourse.

In linguistics, Saussure's structuralism[46] (Saussure, 1916/1986; Burr, 2003, pp. 50-52; Quigley, 2004, pp. 43-75) was a formal recognition of the interdependency of signs. The importance of this development stems from the fact that Saussure "departs from all previous theories of meaning" (Phillips, 2000, p. 117) in replacing the traditional assumption that a sign refers to an ontologically real "thing" with a new understanding of the sign as containing its own signified. So, according to Saussure's model, a sign consists of a signifier—say, the word "dog" which is, in this case, three letters arranged on a page—and a signified: the *concept* of a dog (Saussure, 1916/1986, p. 149). The physical phenomena we refer to as a dog are not part of this model. With hindsight this is fairly obvious—as Burr (2003, pp. 50-51) points out, the child being corrected for referring to a cat as a dog is not suffering from an error of visual perception, but rather is being taught about the boundaries of the concept—but it is nevertheless a critical departure from the "common sense" understanding of language, in which words are a representation of things.

Saussure understood that the relationship of signifier to signified was arbitrary, in the sense that it was determined by social convention: thus "dog" may be replaced with "kuri" or "chien" or any other word that, by convention, signifies the concept associated with the dog. Again, this seems obvious and of no great consequence: however, Saussure's more unsettling point was that in the absence of a direct, natural relationship between a "thing" in the world and the signs that traditionally referred to it (a notorious[47] example being snow, and the many Eskimo words for its many varieties) the signified concepts were not being derived from things in the way that nominalists had always supposed. Instead, the relationship between a

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46 The term *structuralism* now has a much broader meaning, related to the principles of structural linguistics but applied to human culture generally (Milner, 1994). Phillips (2000, p. 117) describes it as "the name given to a wide range of discourses that study underlying structures of signification".

47 Martin (1986) discusses the dubious scholarship around the oral tradition that Eskimos have many words for snow—sometimes hundreds of them—in contrast with our one. I am using it as an example despite this, because it is familiar and its point is still valid: different languages do inscribe different boundaries on experience—e.g. the Māori "teina" meaning younger sibling of the same gender or "cousin of the same sex in a younger branch of the family" (Williams, 1971, p. 410)—and these inscriptions involve our relationships with the phenomena to which they refer (e.g. compare "cow" with "beef").

signified concept and the "thing" to which it referred was—like that between the signifier and signified—an arbitrary relationship, established by social convention. Language was not something that happened as a result of our exposure to phenomena with inherent meanings; rather it was something that we developed with each other so as to organise phenomena in meaningful ways.

This was a shift to a structural understanding of language, because the meaning of the signifier had to come from its relationship to other signifiers. Thus the signs "dog" and "hog" are significant by virtue of their difference from each other: they belong to a system of signification in which each has meaning in relation to other signs. The signifiers are different because the difference between a "d" and an "h" is significant; in a similar way, the underlying signifieds are different because we associate the differences we find significant in them (claws as opposed to hooves, for example) with the different signifiers. All are defined by difference in relation to each other. Most importantly, this system of structural relationships connects the signs of a language to each other, rather than to external referents. Thus, "when Saussure talks of the arbitrary linking of signifiers to signifieds, he is saying that, with the aid of language, we have divided up our world into arbitrary categories." (Burr, 2003, p. 51).

With Wittgenstein we have yet another "Copernican revolution" (Dilman, 2002), this time, as with Kant, in philosophy. Dilman (2002, pp. 9-10) discusses the parallels between Kant's understanding of the relationship between *thought* and reality, and Wittgenstein's understanding of the relationship between *language* and reality. Both claim that "objective" reality is not the independent, pre-existent reality that it is commonly taken for granted as being.

Wittgenstein's position however is more unsettling than Kant's, because Kant's *a priori* forms of human thought retain a kind of objectivity, or at least stability, whereas Wittgenstein—by understanding these forms as socially negotiated, and so dynamic—radically destabilises reality. Dilman (2002) describes this awakening to language as "a tremendous achievement the likes of which I find it hard to think of

in philosophy" (p. 9). While the enormous respect that is sometimes accorded to Wittgenstein does not say anything about the value of his perspective, it does give some indication of the degree to which it transforms prior understandings of philosophy. Edmonds and Eidinow (2001, p. 11) relate Wasfi Hijab's remark: "People often say that all philosophy is just a footnote to Plato[48]...but they should add, 'until Wittgenstein'." The whole history of philosophy can become, after Wittgenstein, not the pursuit of truth, but rather the history of its production.

While Saussure focused on linguistic structure, Wittgenstein's (1953/1963) focus was on the "language games" by which we determine meaning. The significance of Wittgenstein's use of the word *game* is described by Lyotard (1979/1984, p. 10) as relating to the way in which, in a game like chess, the properties of the pieces (like the meanings of words) are determined by the proper way to use them.

So, the meaning of a move in chess is determined by rules that have been established by social agreement. To introduce a new piece—a frog, for example— and move it around the board would be meaningless unless it were first established, with at least one other player, what a frog meant in this context and how it was to be used. In a game, meaning is not inherent in any action or sign: it is derived from rules that are constructed socially. Wittgenstein's insight was that the meanings of words are determined similarly. No word has an inherent, natural meaning—not even words that refer to "natural" things like trees and stones. The meanings of even these words are agreed upon socially: if it were not so, the words would be as meaningless in our everyday "language games" as a frog in chess.

With this understanding of language, the quest for an objective truth that can be articulated in language does indeed seem rather odd. It is analogous to a quest for a chess piece so radiant with its own inherent meaning that the rules for its use have nothing to do with social agreement, but instead come directly from the piece itself.

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48 "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." (Whitehead, 1929, p. 53).

Wittgenstein (1953/1963) says, "Grammar tells what kind of object anything is" (p. 116ᵉ). For example, our language has already told us that something is a thing —"with a continued and independent existence"—before we even begin to investigate the properties of the thing (Dilman, 2002, p. 10). Were "it" not already a thing by virtue of language, "it" could not have properties for us to investigate. This applies to *all* things, but it can be particularly obvious in psychology, where the production in language of psychological things like "attitudes" is studied by critical psychologists (Billig, 1990, p. 51).

From Saussure, then, we have a model of language in which concepts have no meaning except in relation to other concepts, and from Wittgenstein a model of language in which "meaning" is best considered in terms of *use*—and "furthermore, a *use only in a context*" (Shotter, 1993, p. 79). Both are profoundly important ideas, both point to social activity as the source of meaning, and together they have exerted an influence far beyond the disciplinary boundaries of linguistics and philosophy.

Mainstream psychology can seem oblivious to all this (Wexler, 1996, p. 1) but in some areas its effects have been felt strongly. During the 1960's and 70's, social psychology entered a period that has been described in the literature[49] as a "crisis" (Pancer, 1997). Many felt that the discipline was not making any clear progress or contribution to knowledge, and that this was due in part to serious problems at the level of theory, including an over-reliance on laboratory methods and a reductionistic tendency to explain social interactions in individualistic terms (Pancer, 1997). While social psychologists were debating these issues, some sociologists were considering the implications of the linguistic turn for social theory. In the late 1960's, Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckman, 1967) described a social world that both produced and was produced by its inhabitants. The endogenic perspective was gradually emerging as

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49 Morgan's (1996) rhetorical analysis of this literature describes some of its themes and how they relate to the ongoing development of the discipline.

an alternate frame of reference for thinkers frustrated with the shortcomings of their various traditions, and in this climate, psychologists began developing a distinctively psychological body of theory around the idea that knowledge was socially constructed.

Social constructionism (Gergen, 1985) is therefore an approach to psychological theory that has roots in developments both within and outside the discipline. The turn to language is enormously important for social theorists, not least because "epistemological inquiry along with the philosophy of science could both give way, or become subsumed by, social inquiry." (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). More recently, Gergen (1999, p. 4) has suggested that these trends are perhaps "a shift in cultural beliefs that is equal in significance to movement from the Dark Ages of Western history to the Enlightenment".

This is bold rhetoric, but the statements are neither unreasonable, nor even as bold as they could reasonably be. They are reasonable because the linguistic turn is inevitably a sociological turn inasmuch as the shift from an exogenic to an endogenic epistemology makes our understanding of all things dependent upon our understanding of social processes. They are less bold than they could be, because they frame the change in terms of academic theory. It concerns, however, our personal subjectivity as well—the constitution of our experience.

Social Constructionism

Gergen (1999, p. 115) heads his chapter, *Toward Relational Selves* with a quotation from Buber's (1923/1958) *I and Thou*. Buber's philosophy of dialogue[50] anticipates something of the social constructionist perspective in its focus on the importance of language and relationality to consciousness. Buber (1923/1958) points out that the "I" as it is actually used in language has no independent essence, but exists in relation to other things; most importantly, as the "I" in "I-Thou" relationships, or as

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50 Martin Buber was a Jewish religious philosopher.

the "I" in "I-It" relationships. There is—in the invitation to live in the world as the "I" in "I-Thou" rather than "I-It"—already a suggestion that our subjectivity is bound up with language.

There is much more to Buber's point than a poetic utilisation of the relativity of "I" in language. It draws our attention to the relational nature of being. The letters on this page are only legible because the ink contrasts with the paper. This constrasting is a relationship, upon which the identity of the letters is dependent. Were there nothing but ink, there would be no letters: the "not ink" defines the ink; the letter exists only in relation to its background. For anything to exist[51], it must have an other against which to define itself[52]. Just as another thing is necessary for anything to exist phenomenologically, so another person is necessary for anyone to exist socially. The self is as meaningless in a social void as a black letter on a black page. The contrasts—the relationships—are the "essence" of a thing: this is phenomenologically self-evident. There is a parallel between this observation and Saussure's analysis of words as defined by difference from each other, so that structural linguistics could almost be described as a metaphor for this phenomenological contextuality; the necessity of the "other" for being.

In social constructionism then, it is not merely words or knowledge that are socially constructed, but *selves* (Gergen, 1999). This is not just the "self" that is spoken and written about, but the actual subjective experience of personhood that comes into being through language. This can seem absurd because our popular discourses— and mainstream psychology's endorsement of them through a "scientific recoding of uncritical culture" (Wexler, 1996, p. xviii)—do not encourage us to think of ourselves relationally, but rather as separate, self-contained information processors.

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51 I could say, "exist conceptually", but this would imply another kind of existence, a world of "things in themselves" beyond human perception or conception, and the epistemological problems involved in attempting to talk about such a world have already been discussed.
52 Exactly one such other is what we prefer, according to Lévi-Strauss, who documents the importance of binary oppositions to language and culture (Kurtzweil, 1996, p. 15); Derrida (1972/1981) discusses our privileging one term over the other.

We are encouraged not to consider talk of thoughts, feelings and attitudes as motivated social behaviour, but rather as "expressions" of internal psychological states. Thus an attitude is a real thing; an "underlying cognitive entity" (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 16) residing in a human brain.

Yet as Burr (2003, p. 128) points out, "our talk about the things we remember, think and feel does not refer to entities or states inside us. Their existence cannot be inferred from such talk. If the things that people say are social acts, governed by the moment-to-moment requirements of social interactions, then they cannot also be simple expressions of internal states." This social constructionist account—in which subjectivity is produced discursively, through meaningful social interaction—is rationally consistent, yet it challenges common sense assumptions, and more than this; the subjective experience of human consciousness in our culture.

Common sense[53] argues that we can think by ourselves, therefore our minds are independent. If subjectivity is produced discursively, how can a "sense of self" persist in the absence of others? This illusion of independence is easily remedied by attending to one important aspect our subjectivity: sexuality is clearly relational, yet we have no difficulty understanding that we can retain something of our sexual subjectivity when others are not present. Our sexual subjectivities are structured and animated by the traces of other people, and the potential for relationship with other people. Other aspects of our subjectivities are similarly structured and animated by sociality.

In these terms, it is precisely because we are subjects who have been constructed by our language as separate, independent, self-conscious individuals that the idea of our being constructed by language at all is counterintuitive. However, for social

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53 Billig (1991) points out that common sense has a history. "In using common-sense notions, people will find themselves repeating the assumptions of their times. Moreover, according to theorists of ideology, they will be repeating assumptions which confirm existing arrangements of power." (Billig, 1991, p. 1). Einstein (1912/2003, p. 11) put it this way: "Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age 18".

constructionists there is no self beyond language[54] that "uses" language—rather to use language is to be a self[55].

An important implication of this dynamic account of subjectivity is its "anti-essentialism" (Burr, 2003, p. 5). Accounts that predicate themselves on objectively real psychological qualities are relatively static and universal: in contrast, constructionist accounts are historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003, p. 7). This is important because it indicates that, for example, the psychology of American undergraduate college students in laboratories—upon which much of mainstream psychology has traditionally been based (Sears, 1986)—may be very different from that of New Zealand Māori; and that a psychology of women may differ substantially from a psychology of men; even that psychological knowledge of people in one prison cannot necessarily be applied to people in a different prison.

Potter (1997) frames all this in terms of a rejection of "foundationalism". Much of the social interaction through which identities are constructed is rhetorical: people use language to achieve ends, and these ends will harmonise or conflict to varying degrees with those of other language users. From a rhetorical perspective, appeals

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54 In other words, the "self" concept, like all concepts, is acquired through and defined by language. If concepts are linguistic then it is literally the case that anything beyond language is inconceivable: this includes a subjectivity beyond language. Some might retain a dualism here; a kind of mysticism in which the world we can speak about is structured linguistically, while another translinguistic world of somehow "pure" sensory experience—beyond language—exists despite its ineffability. The idea of pure sensory experience is however highly dubious: sensory stimulation only becomes "experience" through some kind of organisation and interpretation, even at the most basic level. According to social constructionist accounts, language structures the psyche at unconscious levels, not just the articulable level of conscious thought.

55 Interestingly in this context, the idea that "to use language is to be a self"—albeit from a very different perspective—forms the basis of the *Turing Test*, discussed by Bowers (1990, pp. 128-134) and many popular texts concering artificial intelligence (e.g. Penrose, 1989). Essentially the Turing Test is to determine "whether a machine can reasonably be said to think" (Penrose, 1989, p. 7). Here thought is referring not merely to information processing, but to actual consciousness (Penrose, 1989, pp. 6-13) or subjectivity. If the idea that our own subjectivity depends upon language is not yet popular, nevertheless it is a popular idea that language is the evidence that something else is a conscious "self". The contrast perhaps says more about the rhetorical nature of terms like "consciousness" than it does about the ontological status of their referents, in machines or in people.

to "objective Truth" are about legitimation (Lyotard, 1979/1984). Where a personal opinion may not carry much weight, "scientific fact" or "the Word of God" or other varieties of objective Truth can be much more effective. In these terms, essentialism in psychology—the assertion that "this is the objective truth about (this aspect of) human behaviour"—is a manifestation of rhetorical foundationalism. It is a way for one group to privilege its accounts over those of other groups. Discourse, then, is a complex and interesting field of study: it is, as has long been understood, the social domain in which political struggles and negotiations take place—be they in the United Nations or in the kitchen—and, at the same time, it is material with which the human psyche is constructed.

Discourse and Power

Political[56] power is traditionally "said to be exercised whenever A gets B to do something which B would not otherwise have done" (Heywood, 1997, p. 11). This aligns nicely with a mechanical understanding of reality: a stone that would otherwise have remained at rest is moved by the application of physical power; the larger the stone, the more physical power is required to overcome it. Similarly, social power has often been understood as the capacity to make others—whether by enticement, persuasion or coercion—do what they would not otherwise do; the less likely it is that they would otherwise do it, the more social power is required to make them.

This mechanistic understanding of power is much too simplistic, however, for a model of social interactions. As Latour (1986) notes, power is not something that somebody "has", in the way a body has physical power, because social power

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56 Heywood (1997, p. 4) defines politics broadly as "the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live", but the term is commonly used in reference to the affairs of a "State or part of a State" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). The feminist slogan that "the personal is political" is, however, much more congruent with a critical social psychology that seeks "to redeem and articulate the increasingly repressed social psychological dynamics that make possible the reproduction of the current organization of social life" (Wexler, 1996, p. 78).

depends upon social relationships, and these are not contained in a person. We are accustomed to thinking of political leaders as having power when people obey them and losing power when people stop obeying them, but when such a "loss" takes place, nothing has departed the person of the leader: the change takes place in the will and behaviour of the many who previously were inclined to obey. Power then, like so much else, has been individualised in theory when it is better understood in relational terms, in terms of discourse.

Dictionary definitions of *discourse* include, "talk", "an account, a narrative", and in the context of linguistics, "a connected series of utterances, forming a unit for analysis" (Trumble & Stevenson, 2002). The linguistic turn in general and the social constructionist account in particular transform even these traditional descriptions, because they allow us to read "talk" as "the social negotiation of reality, including the subjectivities through which this reality is experienced", or something similar. To leave it at that, however, would be to replace one individualistic model with another. We could imagine a world of neatly separate individuals, negotiating reality in something like a "free market" of discourse.

What differentiates speech from mere noise, however, is its conformity with socially determined systems of signification. To speak meaningfully is to use discourse that has meaning for others; to play language games is to "play by the rules". There may be, for all practical purposes, no limit to the number of possible sentences that can be generated in any human language, but there is similarly no limit to the number of possible games of chess that can be played: in neither case are the players free from constraints. The constraints are themselves negotiable, but they are still there: we cannot choose to break the social rules of a chess game by introducing a row of frogs and expect the game to be counted as valid, and we are similarly constrained in language games. The others with whom we interact linguistically must be familiar with the discourse we are using, or our ideas will not be counted as valid.

Ideas that are invalid or meaningless in this sense of shared meaning can be made valid by metaphor: a recognised discourse (for example, a discourse of violent

conquest by the penetration of a human body with a weapon) is metaphorically applied to a different discourse (human heterosexual relationships, so that to penetrate in this context is to conquer). What was symbolically foreign (like the frog in chess) is now recognised as meaningful (like a frog that represents a king in an animal chess set) and can seem to belong; to fit "naturally" with that discourse. Of course, alternate discourses can also be related metaphorically (the discourse of heterosexual relationships could—even if it were limited to discourses of violent conquest—draw instead upon the discourse of the conquest of a body by being eaten, so that to take into one's self is to conquer) and it is this possibility that makes discourse analysis so complex in the context of power. Discourses depend upon social recognition, but can be made more or less acceptable by association with other discourses—and the users of discourse are themselves positioned within it, and so defined or constrained by it.

Discourse, then, is not merely something we use; our subjectivities are formed of it[57]. This understanding contributes to theories of discourse that are informed by the linguistic turn, or by critical theory in general. For Potter and Wetherell (1987, p. 7) discourse is "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds". Burr (2003, p. 64) calls a discourse "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events". Edwards and Potter (1992, p. 15) say that discourse is "to be treated as a social practice which can be studied as a real-world phenomenon rather than a theoretical abstraction". These definitions variously attend to its scope, its function, and the way to treat it in the social sciences. Burman (1991, p. 333) notes that "discourse analysis" in some of its varieties can "return to traditional psychological research practices and effects". This would be difficult, however, where discourse work is attentive to the work of Foucault.

Foucault theorises discourse in the context of a "distinctive approach to power" (Weedon, 1999, p. 116). Deleuze (1986/1988, p. 70) describes Foucault's notion of

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57 "Put in Lacanian terms, *the subject is the discourse of the other*." (Mansfield, 2000, p. 43).

power as "a relation between forces". It is a useful conception of power because it retains some of the simplicity of the mechanistic model while eliminating some of its shortcomings, including the tendency to conflate power with violence. Violence "acts on specific bodies" (Deleuze, 1986/1988, p. 70) whereas power acts upon other actions. Thus, if we imagine a person who would act in a certain way, the application of power acts upon this action, so that the person behaves differently; this application of power may involve a threat of violence, but violence itself is applied to bodies. So a beating is an application of physical, mechanical power in terms of bodies, but in terms of social relations it is an application of social power to the extent that it is "action upon action"—a power that transforms behaviour. A spectacle of horrifying violence upon a single body may therefore be understood as the application of power to all of its spectators if their actions are changed as a result. Foucault's approach to history is informed by structuralist insights[58] regarding the relationship of language to an objective reality, in particular the implications this has for any notion of a continuous, objective history beyond that of the present. In his (1969/2002b) introduction to *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault says:

> To be brief, then, let us say that history, in its traditional form, undertook to 'memorize' the *monuments* of the past, transform them into *documents*, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms *documents* into *monuments*. (pp. 7-8)

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58 Foucault denied being "a structuralist" despite his early work, at least, being structuralist in the "general sense" (Milner, 1994, p. 85) that it sought to understand systems of knowledge in terms of underlying structural contexts. That he distanced himself from structuralism could perhaps be understood as an effort to define his own project by contrast with those of other prominent "structuralist" intellectuals, but his later work in particular is probably best regarded as *poststructuralist* (Milner, 1994, p. 86), because it treats structural contexts as fluid and decentred (poststructuralism is discussed on p. 58 of the present text). Deleuze (1986/1988, p. 11) says of Foucault's work: "Context explains nothing, since its nature varies according to the particular discursive formation or family of statements under consideration".

This is an articulation of the reflexivity of the linguistic turn as realised in the discipline of history. A monument is a solid, enduring testimony to "what really happened"; it is a symbol of the real. Archaeologists uncovered real things, and historians were responsible for their interpretation. History was therefore about finding out what real things really say about the past; uncovering the meaning of the monuments uncovered by archaeology. After the linguistic turn, the situation is almost reversed. Monuments are no longer the traces of a reality that we must document: they are themselves the documents of a former history; not a former era in a continuous history, but a different history, discontinuous with the present. Conversely, documents do not merely "document reality": they possess their own reality, which is important to study. A postmodern[59] history "aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument" (Foucault, 1969/2002b, p. 8) inasmuch as it endeavours to "examine each event in terms of its own evident arrangement" (Foucault, 1966/1994, p. 218).

If conventional history is imagined as a timeline, with each event defined in relation to other events in a single, unified account, Foucault's history is far more complex: the timeline becomes a field of lines, or pieces of lines, scattered both horizontally and vertically; no "grand narrative" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 51) or "totalising discourse" (Laclau, 1990, p. 92) imposes a monological order upon them. Without an all-embracing "objective" history, in which events are situated in relation to broad themes of progress and struggle, we are left in that state which so often accompanies reflexive shifts: a disorienting relativism. If historical accounts are performative practices, continually re-inventing the past in the service of present interests, then the organisation of these accounts into a "general history" (Foucault, 1969/2002b, p. 10) is no longer a straightforward chronological sequencing. "The problem that now presents itself—and which defines the task of a general history— is to determine what form of relation may be legitimately described between these different series" (Foucault, 1969/2002b, p. 11). Given that such a general history

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59 In the sense of Lyotard's (1979/1984, p. xxiv) loose definition of postmodernity as "incredulity toward metanarratives"; a continuous history is such a metanarrative.

must itself be understood as an historically situated, performative undertaking, this is a challenging and important task.

An archaeological metaphor invites us to examine the actual practices of our particular moment in history, and their realisation in discourse. They are "realised" because they are not described, they are *done*: the question is not, "what is this discourse saying", but rather, "what is this discourse doing?", in terms of social relations. How does it position people? Whom does this discourse empower with linguistic resources that can be profitably put to use? Whom does it constrain? Whose interests does its articulation serve? What other discourses does it engage with, and to what use does it put them?

These questions, with which a Foucauldian history is concerned, examine discursive content—not in relation to grand contextualising narratives—but in relation to discursive function. This is not to say that content is unimportant, but rather that function is the interpretive ground from which a coherent analysis can grow. Foucault (1969/2002b, pp. 34-43) organises discourse loosely into "discursive formations" which are not organised around an "object" of discourse, such as madness (Foucault, 1969/2002b, pp. 35) but rather around a complex conceptualisation of the functional aspects of the discourse; around the "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1969/2002b, p. 54). So, in the case of madness (Foucault, 1961/2002a), there is a developing system of practices—practices of social categorisation, of inclusion and exclusion, of developing the "names" by which the application of social power or of the violence of "sticks and stones" are enabled—and it is this system of practices in relation to the discourse of madness around which a Foucauldian discourse analysis can be organised[60]. This approach to discourse work is therefore one in which the relationship between discourse and power is brought sharply into focus.

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60 Foucault also broadens the scope of discursive epistemological analysis by reference to the general interrelationship of all the discursive formations of a particular historical moment, "a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge" (Foucault, 1969/2002b, p. 211) which he calls an *episteme*.

Foucault's (1975/1995) study of the prison, *Discipline and Punish*, is used as an example by Phillips (2000, pp. 188-189) of the usefulness of contradiction to the task of establishing the function of discourse. He notes that in *Discipline and Punish*, "an apparently inefficient and contradictory institution in fact serves a function other than the ones it was explicitly set up to serve" (Phillips, 2000, p. 189). Where a practice is not consistent with other practices or with the content of the discourse around it, we can look for consistency elsewhere as a guide to its function[61].

Discipline and Punish was more than an "archaeological" inquiry. In writing a traditional historical narrative as something akin to a sequence of archaeological snapshots—each bringing into focus the relations between discourse, power and subjectivities at a particular historical moment—Foucault was constructing what he described as a *genealogy*[62]. A familial genealogy contextualises an individual, not by reference to a broad historical narrative, but by reference to immediate ancestors; Foucault's genealogical inquiry contextualises a discursive formation by reference to immediately antecedent discourses and social practices. With regard to this examination of the past—specifically as to whether he is "interested" in the past or not—Foucault (1975/1995, p. 31) says, "No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present." A reflexive history therefore moves from an inevitably anachronistic history of the past—in which modern discourse is employed to construct an account of this past—to a Foucauldian *history of the present* in which modern discourse is contextualised by examining changes in the relationships between this discourse and the social practices around it. In this way the close relationship between

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61 Potter & Wetherell (1987, p. 126) make a similar point in the context of personal spoken interactions: "By highlighting the functions of talk we can explain why a category of people should be described in one way on one occasion and in a different way on another".

62 ". . . a genealogy of the present scientificolegal complex from which the power to punish derives its bases, justifications and rules" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 23). Foucault's use of the term *genealogy* was inspired by his reading of Nietzsche (Norris, 1994, p. 191). Nietzsche's (1887/2003) *On the Genealogy of Morals* is "perspectivist" in the sense that it examines the history of good and evil not as if they were enduring, objective entities, but rather as ideas that have been used in different ways by different groups.

knowledge and power can be demonstrated, by providing "a causal explanation of changes in discursive formations" (Gutting, 1989, p. 271).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1975/1995) describes the history of the prison in terms of the development of social practices and power relations connected with discourses of criminality. He discusses the transition from a culture of punitive spectacle, in which the body of the criminal was subjected to rituals of violence, to the modern "economy of suspended rights" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 11), in which the criminal is subjected not to pain, but to "discipline" in the sense of control by others.

> As a result of this new restraint, a whole army of technicians took over from the executioner, the immediate anatomist of pain: warders, doctors, chaplains, psychiatrists, psychologists, educationalists; by their very presence near the prisoner, they sing the praises that the law needs: they reassure it that the body and pain are not the ultimate objects of its punitive action. Today a doctor must watch over those condemned to death, right up to the last moment—thus juxtaposing himself as the agent of welfare, as the alleviator of pain, with the official whose task it is to end life. This is worth thinking about. (p. 11)

Foucault, then, does not interpret the transition from torture—the infliction of as much physical suffering as people can devise to inflict upon another human being —to discipline—the "meticulous control of the operations[63] of the body" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 137)—as a confirmation of the traditional narrative of progress from a barbaric past to an enlightened present. Rather he interprets it as the development of a set of practices for the production of a disciplined, efficient and obedient

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63 This transition from mutilation of the body to a focus upon control of the *operations* of the body is important in the context of Foucault's theory of power as *action upon action*. "Meticulous control of the operations of the body" is in this context a more direct application of power. A clumsy and inefficient system involving spectacles of violence is evolving into a much more efficient and effective system of social control.

population. He contextualises this analysis with respect to the developing *episteme*; one in which systems of knowledge were enabling an increasingly comprehensive surveillance and control of individual behaviour:

> Is it surprising that the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? (pp. 227-228)

Against this background he presents the *panopticon*—a model for an ideal prison, devised by Jeremy Bentham late in the eighteenth century (Bentham, 1787/1995)—as an architectural symbol of "panopticism", an emerging practice of social control.

Panopticism

The panopticon (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 200) is a building designed for the efficient control of behaviour. Its purpose is to achieve the maximum amount of social control with the minumum expenditure of energy. At the centre, a tower stands in relative darkness. All around it, arranged cylindrically in multiple tiers, are the individual cells of the prisoners (or mental patients, or workers, or school children, etc.) who, isolated from each other, are illuminated so that all of them can be seen by a supervisor in the tower, but none of them are able to see the supervisor. To avoid sanctions, the people in the cells must constantly behave as if observed, yet there need only be a single person in the central tower, and from time to time, the tower can even be empty. Through an elaborate system of discipline and surveillance, the control of hundreds of people—not just in the sense of preventing undesired behaviour, but of ensuring that desired behaviours are continually undertaken—is enabled.

The panopticon itself is obsolete: with closed-circuit television cameras, microphones and other modern surveillance technologies, the practice of "dissociating the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 202)—and, in the terms of Buber's I-Thou/I-It distinction, creating for the supervisor's I[64] a menagerie of Its—has been developed and refined beyond what was possible in Bentham's day. With *panopticism*, Foucault presents the panopticon as a metaphor for a new understanding and practice of power. As such it is not limited to architecture; it is the relationships of social power rather than those of spatial location with which Foucault is concerned. It is to be understood "as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 205).

It is not so much the tower's unverifiable but always possible surveillance that is important, as the effect of this: the prisoner "*inscribes in himself* [itallics added] the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault, 1975/1995, pp. 202-203). What was previously an overt power relation *enters the subjectivity* of the prisoner or other so "disciplined" person. The actual presence or absence of the gaze of the punishing other cannot be ascertained, and it becomes irrelevant, because this gaze becomes one with that of the subject: anything the subject does *might* be observed, and so the subject's own gaze becomes infused with the coercive effects of the other's gaze.

Panopticism therefore makes possible the *effects* of coercion—its action upon the action of others—without the need for its actual presence (in the sense of a tangible threat of violence). This is the key to its efficiency and its effectiveness: there is

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64 In terms of positivism's visual metaphor (p. 14) this is the scientist's ideal: the supervisor's I is the supervisor's eye, and the Its in cages are the many things or objects of study. The title of Foucault's work in French that has been translated into English as *Discipline and Punish* is *Surveiller et Punir*. *Surveiller*, as the translator notes, is arguably closer in meaning to *supervise* than *discipline*, but he has good reasons for preferring *discipline*. Still, I think it is noteworthy in this context that *supervise* and *surveiller* have the same etymological roots: they both mean to watch from above. There is also a parallel between this supervision of power relationships and the function of *metanarrative*, a term nearly synonymous with *overview* (which shares the etymological roots described above).

never a single moment in which the subject can behave as she or he might in the absence of coercion[65].

In the context of social justice and the problem of violence, the implications of panopticism are complicated by psychological theory after Freud. We do not have to accept the terms of psychoanalytic discourse to acknowledge the wealth of evidence that much of our behaviour is unconscious (Baumeister, 2005) or to endeavour to account for this in terms of social theory (Jost, Banaji, & Nosek, 2004).

Panopticism is manifestly efficient as a method of social control through its allowing the few to easily control the many, but if we admit the possibility that the omnipresent supervisor's gaze may fade from consciousness over time, then it can also be understood as a method for systematically concealing the desires of the few in the desires of the many; not by aligning the desires of the many with those of the few by means of propaganda, but by the use of coercion made invisible by its transformation into the "automatic functioning of power" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 201). "Repression is a hopelessly expensive and inefficient way of controlling populations" (Mansfield, 2000, p. 110). The more sophisticated and efficient solution is to generate populations of self-controlling individuals.

In *Governing the Soul*, Rose (1999) applies these Foucauldian ideas specifically to modern psychological practices[66]. In contributing to "a genealogy of the modern self" (Rose, 1999, p. ix) Rose details the practices by which the modern autonomous

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65 As a prison, the panopticon is a structure for the broadcasting of coercive effects; the perpetual possibility of the supervisor's gaze distributes and amplifies the power—the actions upon the prisoners' actions—of any threat of penalties. More generally, however, panopticism's dissemination of control is about "making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and distant elements" (Foucault, 1975/1995, p. 216). It is an efficient and adaptable model. If we imagine panoptic networks in which rings of entire panopticons are watched by other towers, which are themselves being watched, there is an effortless efficiency to this dissemination of power through intersubjectivity that makes it analogous in some respects to the dissemination of data through the Internet.

66 "One of the central points Foucault is making is that the prisons themselves, as well as the tracts on the ideal form of punishment, are only the clearly articulated expressions of more generalized practices of disciplining both individuals and populations" (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 153).

individual is constructed, with the "gaze of the psychologist" serving as a normalising gaze. This gaze is applied—as never before in history—to every aspect of individual behaviour. Norms of child development through infancy; norms of behaviour at preschool; norms of skill competence at school; norms of cognition; norms of sexuality; norms of moral development: through an ever more tightly woven network of discourses, the modern subject is rigorously defined and comprehensively positioned in relation to others. The development of these many categories of behavioural normality and abnormality provide modern subjects with meticulously detailed taxonomies in which to locate themselves and others. One is no longer "sane" or "mad"; mental illness has been subdivided into over 360 different specific disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Sanity is no less finely grained; many people can provide a three-digit quantitative value as a measure of their intelligence, and there are a plethora of other psychometric instruments measuring everything from "femininity" or "capacity for status" (Murphy & Davidshofer, 1998, pp. 372-373) to various specific measures of "dangerousness" (Arrigo, 2002, p. 88).

Our subjectivity is structured by these discourses, and we understand each other in their terms. This assessment is not something that happens only in formal settings such as schools, workplaces, hospitals or prisons: it is a context within which our personal interactions at home and in public take place. Even with regard to formal institutions, it should not be imagined that the normalising effects of these institutions are limited to the individuals within them. Foucault (1975/1995, p. 211) describes this in relation to a school. It is not just the children who are being monitored and normalised, but the parents too: a child whose behaviour deviates significantly from that of his or her peers will soon draw the gaze of experts to the child's family situation. Language connects the gaze of one stranger to that of many others: returning to the metaphor of the panopticon, there is a sense in which each of us is a node in a vast panoptic network. Foucault's account of disciplinary power is not the traditional story in which social power is evident in overt acts; it is instead an account that describes power in terms of the relationships between these acts, the discourse around them, and the subjectivities of the people involved.

Panopticism is important among Foucault's ideas because of its increasing relevance to our "information age". Deleuze (1990/1995) says:

> "Foucault's often taken as the theorist of disciplinary societies and of their principal technology, *confinement* (not just in hospitals and prisons, but in schools, factories, and barracks). But he was actually one of the first to say that we're moving away from disciplinary societies, we've already left them behind. We're moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication. . . . Compared with the approaching forms of ceaseless control in open sites, we may come to see the harshest confinement as part of a wonderful happy past." (pp. 174-175)

These ideas serve to further emphasise the importance of political awareness in psychological theory. The traditional account—in which the psyche is a kind of substance, activity or "emergent property" that arises from and resides in the body —presents the human psyche as a relatively stable entity; at least as stable as the time scale of genetic evolution, in which bodies have been similar for thousands of years. Discursive intersubjectivity, however, allows for the possibility of rapid and profound changes in human consciousness regardless of slow bodily evolution[67]. In this context, mass communications media are of great importance to the future of

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67 Unlike older computers, modern personal computers do not have their operating systems "hard wired" so that they are ready to operate when switched on. Instead, there is a delay while the operating system is loaded as software from disk: the enormous advantage of this approach is that the entire operating system can be changed, so that the "personality" of the computer—its functionality, user interface and so forth—can be radically transformed without any hardware being removed or installed. The disadvantage is that faulty software or a virus can render a computer useless, or even destructive: useful behaviour is not "hard wired". A rough analogy can be drawn with the evolutionary change from instinctive to cultural behaviour. The enormous advantage of a linguistic intersubjectivity is that human society is tremendously adaptable: a radically different set of personal motivations, expectations and ways of relating to the world can be "installed" on the same biological network. The disadvantage is that something as fluid and variable as language can lead human beings to destroy their environment and each other: useful behaviour is not "hard wired". An essentialist psychology is in this respect similar to a computer science that treats operating systems as if they can be damaged, repaired or tuned, but are essentially stable: it is largely ignorant of the possibilities and of the risks.

human psychology—they are not merely helping to "connect", but to *generate* the minds of tomorrow's human beings—and so their dominance by an agenda of mass manipulation for financial gain is of real concern. Even without this bias, global communications media have moved us into a uniquely precarious position in which language effects can and do impact—in a matter of seconds—upon many millions of people. Psychological theories of discursive intersubjectivity greatly emphasise the notion that we should take discourse seriously, and attend to our use of language with care.

Foucault's ideas are a foregrounding of the relationships between discourse, power and subjectivity. The linguistic turn had already moved discourse to the foreground of social theory, by displacing an epistemology in which language was taken to represent reality with a reflexive account of language as structuring rather than merely describing the world. Foucault extended this new awareness of discourse into the study of history, presenting history and psychology as related systems of discourse, in which human subjects are not autonomous, independent beings *immersed in* power relations, but rather are social, interdependent beings *formed of* those power relations.

A theory of subjectivity—the original concern of psychology[68]—is therefore inextricable from theories of discourse and social power: its extrication amounts to a presentation of arbitrary social conditions as "natural" in a way that exalts the political status quo. There are already important traces of this idea in Freud—by whose account the deep structures of the psyche take shape in response to immediately relevant social power relations—but it has been largely thanks to the linguistic turn that it has become possible to articulate the radically arbitrary nature of subjectivity in psychological terms.

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68 "Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychology laboratory" (Ward, 2002, p. 113). His aim was "the methodical, scientific study of consciousness and subjectivity" (Blumenthal, 2001, p. 127).

Within the academic boundaries of psychology, social constructionism has developed and continues to develop as a body of theory around the implications of these ideas for the discipline. Disciplinary boundaries themselves have lost some of their importance: the discursive turn—by virtue of its emphasis on contextuality and its rejection of transcendental categories of knowledge—blurs the boundaries of academic disciplines, and from this perspective social constructionism can be regarded as an articulation, in the language of psychology, of broader cultural shifts.

Discussing Lyotard's (1979/1984) account of these shifts, Mansfield (2000, p. 165) describes it as an explanation of "how knowledge is validated in the contemporary world", now that the idea of an objective reality to which certain groups are privy has lost its philosophical credibility.

> Lyotard relies on a narrative model of validation. In other words, he argues that what we come to accept as the truth receives its authority when it conforms to larger stories of the human place in the world, that govern a given society in a given stage of its development. What is important is not whether something can be absolutely and objectively verified. Instead, facts, ideas, theories and knowledges are said to be true if they match or help develop the fundamental visions of the world that societies use to define themselves. (p. 165)

With subjectivity, objective reality, and truth itself all relativised as social constructions, there is no more solid ground upon which to build a Cartesian certainty. Every assertion can be contested, and where we might once have attempted to legitimate our assertions through appeals to absolute authority (God, "the facts" or a favoured theory) we can now describe such attempts as appeals to grand narratives. In a pluralistic society that does not have a monolithic, totalising narrative by which to live, legitimation is a problem that—according to postmodern theory—defines our age: while some of us articulate our values passionately, they differ from those of our neighbours, so that collectively we are confused, with no

shared purpose or meaning. Whether we say pessimistically that "we have been abandoned in a junkyard of values"[69], optimistically that we are wiping the slate of social theory clean in order to make room for us to create something better, or cynically that postmodern theory is nothing more than the effete *"fin-de-siècle* wisdom" (Norris, 1994, p. 1) of social critics "utterly remote from any contact with realities outside the seminar-room" (Norris, 1994, p. 1), legitimation is a stumbling-block that has to be negotiated—one way or another—for psychological theory to position itself in contemporary debates.

Postmodernity

Discourses of postmodernity have developed in the context of this crisis in legitimation (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 6). Lyotard says that he is "simplifying to the extreme" when he defines the postmodern as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (1979/1984, p. xxiv), but this is still a useful definition. Postmodern theory very largely consists of post-(modern theories): poststructuralism, postfeminism, posthumanism, post-Marxism, and so on. Their modernist counterparts are regarded by postmodern theorists as authoritarian[70], because they pretend to be able to articulate ideas or values that are objectively better than those of competing accounts. Not surprisingly, traditional theorists are inclined to condemn postmodernity as, at best, a weakening of theory by misguided colleagues or, more seriously, a backlash from the discursive engines of the status quo: a versatile set of rhetorical tools for bleeding the ethical force out of emancipatory arguments.

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69 The text in which this appears (Mansfield, 2000, p. 163) is presenting it as a pessimistic appraisal of postmodernism, rather than the judgement of the text itself.

70 For example, Schrift (1990, p. 101) says, "most Marxists are not postmodern insofar as they advocate *transferring* [italics added] the authority of the state to the party . . . or the authority of the owners to the workers *without recasting the nature of authoritarian relations themselves* [italics added]". A change of metanarrative is only a change as to who is subordinate and who is using violence—justified by the privileged metanarrative—to keep them subordinate. A challenge to violence *per se* involves a willingness to question the practice—intrinsic to authoritarianism—of privileging one narrative and subordinating others.

So, where structuralism aspires to a better understanding of society through an awareness of contextual structures, poststructuralism says, "Context explains nothing" (Deleuze, 1986/1988, p. 11). Structural linguistics freed us from the reification of referents: the "things" to which signifieds were supposed to point were shadows of the signifieds themselves. Poststructuralism goes further: even the signified is a reified referent, a "thing" (in this case a "concept") that does not exist as we imagine it to. We like to imagine that the concepts of our thought and language are fully *present* to us, but this *logocentrism*[71]—which "accepts the vulnerability of representation but asserts an independent truth" (Phillips, 2000, p. 77)—is a failure to take seriously the structuralist account of contextuality. For a signified or signifier to be fully "explained" by its context, the *entire* context would have to be present to consciousness. This is what we assume if we isolate the sign as a signifier/signified unit in which a "transcendental signified" (Derrida, 1967/1976, p. 50) is called to mind by its signifier.

Instead, when we appeal to context in order to understand the signified, we are effectively appealing to other signifieds: thus the signified is itself a signifier of sorts, in an endless chain of signification[72]. A concept can only be "explained" in terms of other concepts, which may in turn be explained by others, and so on *ad infinitum*—we can never arrive at a conclusive meaning. Meaning is *deferred* indefinitely.

Just as "structuralism" does not mean only structural linguistics, "poststructuralism" does not mean only Derrida's critique of the assumptions of structural linguistics, but *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1967/1976) is a key poststructuralist text, as the "limitlessness of play" introduced by the "absence of the transcendental signified" (Derrida, 1967/1976, p. 50) is characteristic of poststructuralist philosophy.

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71 Derrida, who coined the term *logocentrism*, discusses its interpretation in Derrida & Ferraris, 2001, p. 77.

72 Derrida (1982, p. 11) says, "the signified concept is never present in and of itself"; it is not therefore "simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality".

Derrida's most familiar legacy, *deconstruction*[73] (Derrida, 1967/1976, p. 24) has been called "applied poststructuralism" (Barry, 1995, p. 70).

So where a modernist theory like Marxism would delegitimate one grand narrative in order to supplant it with another, poststructuralist theory—like Foucault's later work—is wary of all such accounts, because a consciousness of the specific performative functions of discourse is dulled whenever our attention is shifted from the discourse itself to a contemplation and/or reification of the truths it claims to describe. While advocates of poststructuralist approaches are likely to present this as an uncompromisingly rigorous and scrupulous reflexivity, others are repelled by the "vertigo of self-reflexive doubt" that Gergen (1991, p. 104) describes as characteristic of postmodern culture.

This repulsion is most understandable in a context of ethical discourse. For example, the idea of "social injustice", in modernist theory, represents a real thing: in postmodern theory, "social injustice" is rhetoric[74]: it is a way that people who dislike a social situation interpret and describe it. As a result, postmodernity is often accused of taking reflexivity too far: of using the blurring of language and reality as an excuse for "a spiral of avoidance and textual solipsism" (Parker, 2002, p. 72).

Baudrillard's (1981/1994) *hyperreality* is another account of postmodernity that illustrates this unsettling blurring of representation and reality from a different angle. We can imagine, for example, that film and television portrayals of sexual

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73 Deconstruction does not "destroy" a text, as by refuting its assertions, but rather deconstructs it in roughly the sense of "showing how it was put together": drawing attention to metaphors, implicit assumptions and other features of the text that could be described as unconscious (for the writer, the reader, or both). Deconstruction thereby calls attention to construction, and the way a text's construction tries to work against the "limitlessness of play" in meaning.

74 Or at least, its rhetorical aspect is of essential importance in postmodern accounts: to speak of a social injustice that exists beyond rhetoric is to project one's desires onto a set of circumstances and then disown them as inherent in the circumstances, rather than existing in relation to one's subjectivity. Whether this effectively *reduces* social injustice to rhetoric—especially in the absence of a realist ontology to rigidify even the "set of circumstances" prior to its construction as social injustice—is an important and, of course, emotive question: it will be discussed in the subsection entitled *Relativism* (pp. 70-78).

intercourse were once informed by experience that had little to do with such portrayals. Now, however, when the average American has observed *thousands* of filmed and televised enactments of sexual intercourse[75] before participating in the physical reality, this can no longer be the case: particularly when these Americans whose understandings of sexual intercourse were informed by media representations go on to become film and television actors, adding another layer of representation for the next generation of viewers, and so on. Thus Baudrillard suggests that the real has given way to the *hyperreal*—a "real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard, 1981/1994, p. 1). In the hyperreal there is no reality beyond simulation[76]: a film cannot portray an authentic enactment of sexual intercourse if the authenticity of such activity is taken to mean that it is somehow "pure" and uninfluenced by other enactments. Rather, it must be accepted that human activity is social and contextual: "real" sexual activity *is* infused with Hollywood's portrayals of it, just as it has always been infused with social expectations of one kind or another. The search for an essentialist human activity is a denial of the role of language in such activity.

There are echoes here of the poststructuralist "chain of signification", but in Baudrillard's account the importance of this to human subjectivity is more obvious. The rational empiricist reality "out there" does not exist for us to discover: we are too much a part of it, and it of us, so that our "discovery" is less a passive finding and more an active choosing[77].

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75 Based on 2002 television programme content studied in (and typical viewing patterns cited in) Kunkel et al. (2003). Filmed enactments are superfluous to these figures.

76 Baudrillard (1981/1994, p. 3) gives psychosomatic illness as another example of his notion of *simulation*. A person can, for instance, become infected by harmful bacteria and manifest various symptoms: illness in this case is (traditionally) considered to be the "reality". Alternately, one can be healthy and *feign* illness: in this case, health is the "reality" and illness is the *dissimulation*—the *mis*representation—of this reality. With psychosomatic illness, however, one *simulates* illness: it is not "feigning" illness because there is no reality of health that is being misrepresented. Instead, there is a hyperreality in which the simulation of illness *is* the illness.

77 There is an obvious resonance here with elements of the existentialist philosophies of Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beauvoir, and others: existentialist implications of postmodern theory are discussed in the subsection entitled *Postexistentialism* on pp. 78-81.

These and many other accounts of postmodernity contribute to a growing sense of cultural change, with "postmodernism" sometimes used as a sweeping generalisation for the social and intellectual shifts of the last few decades, and more often for the practices associated with them. These shifts deepen and extend the reflexivity and the relativism that is already latent in Kant[78], and apparent in Nietzsche or Wittgenstein. Many accounts that are critical of postmodernism construct this as a kind of regression, or at least an abandonment or perversion of the "unfinished project of modernity" (Habermas, 1981/1996; Bohman, 1996). For example Norris (1993), drawing attention to the positive, emancipatory effects of an enlightenment tradition that condemned "unthinking doctrinal adherence to passive consensus belief" (p. 304) says, "Postmodernism amounts to a vote of no confidence in this entire tradition of enlightened philosophical, ethical and social thought." (p. 304).

With the delegitimation of metanarratives, a nostalgia for order—even an order imposed upon some by others—can be articulated with an orchestral metaphor. The musical order of a symphony degenerates into noise when the composer's "grand narrative" disintegrates into the cacophany of a hundred musicians playing from different scores. In this metaphor the delegitimation of the conductor's "metanarrative" disintegrates the various local "narratives" of the musicians and permits them to develop independently: the ensuing disintegration of music into noise can be a metaphor for the disintegration of social order into anarchic chaos.

Also, as this orchestral degeneration produces in its pastiche of melodies a blurring of boundaries and an increase in the complexity of analysis or representation, so the development of postmodern theory—and related psychological theory—is both a degeneration and blurring together of former, simpler ideas. A stable objective

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78 Lyotard (1979/1984, pp. 77-78) highlights Kant's idea of the *sublime*—a "strong and equivocal emotion" containing "both pleasure and pain" (p. 77)—as an earlier variant of Nietzsche's perspectivism. Kant regards the commandment that we are not to make images of God as "the most sublime passage in the Bible in that *it forbids all presentation of the Absolute.* [itallics added]" (Lyotard, 1979/1984, p. 78).

reality melts into a fluid, reflexive feedback loop of subject and object; fact and desire blend together; the tidy containment of minds in bodies spills out into a chaotic intersubjectivity; monological historical narratives fragment into discontinuous localised accounts; "things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"[79]. At the very moment that discourse comes into focus as the field in which everything important is taking place, all the discursive landmarks and reference points are swept away, so that the *value* of this "important" activity becomes impossible to pin down: how can the relativistic truth claims of social constructionism be any "better" than the claims of positivism? If an ethical standard is an element of discourse with no objective referent, what are we to base our ethical arguments upon?

Before engaging with this question—concerning the nature of the "new disorder" (J. Dupré, 1993)—it is worth taking one more look at the nature of the order from which it is supposed to be breaking away. I suggested a metaphor of music degenerating into noise as an articulation of one variety of antipathy toward postmodernity. Although there is a sense in which the conductor's order is imposed[80] upon the musicians, nevertheless this metaphor conjures up an image of

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79 From *The Second Coming*, a poem by W. B. Yeats. Despite the title, it does not read as a particularly optimistic appraisal of rapid social change: it ends, "what rough beast, its hour come round at last, slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?" (Finneran, 1989, p. 187). It is perhaps an articulation of a fear of relativism, and its (perceived) political consequence: "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world".

80 Modernist political theory may differ dramatically in terms of whose order is to be imposed upon whom, but fascist, communist and liberal democratic theory have this much in common: whether it be the will of the master race (construed in fascist societies as representing "us", the noble majority), the will of the proletariat (construed in communist societies as representing "us", the noble majority) or simply "the will of the people" (construed in democratic societies as representing "us", the noble majority), some group's will is legitimated—by appeal to an authoritative grand narrative—in order to impose itself by violence upon others. This is not to suggest that a society in which minority voices are "outvoted" is essentially the same as a society in which minority voices are silenced with overt hatred, but there are two important issues that this contrast avoids: firstly, women and minorities of various kinds—who together are the actual majority in any society—have suffered and continue to suffer degradation and violence in liberal democratic societies; secondly, that (after Foucault, Rose, Chomsky and others) we can be very skeptical of accounts of democracy that present the subject—who has been carefully constructed from infancy by the power relations of his or her society—as a "free agent" in some transcendental sense. If we shift our focus from the various constructions of "left wing" or "right wing" political theories, violence looks remarkably similar regardless of who is wearing what uniform.

modern society as a voluntary association of well dressed musicians playing their instruments passionately under the direction of a conductor's genius[81]. Given that postmodernism defines itself—etymologically and, according to Habermas (1981/1996), ideologically—as contrasting with modernism, it is useful to consider this "modernity" that has been variously constructed as an enlightened project that postmodernity threatens to undermine, or an authoritarian nightmare from which postmodernity urges us to awaken.

One account of the *Passage to Modernity* is offered by L. K. Dupré (1993). Its conclusion begins:

> Modernity is an *event* that has transformed the relation between the cosmos, its transcendent source, and its human interpreter. To explain this as the outcome of historical precedents is to ignore its most significant quality— namely, its success in rendering all rival views of the real obsolete. Its innovative power made modernity, which began as a local Western phenomenon, a universal project capable of forcing its theoretical and practical principles on all but the most isolated civilizations. "Modern" has become the predicate of a unified world culture. (p. 249)

While acknowledging that this Western project was *forced* upon other civilisations, it goes on to say, "The West could not have exercised such a global influence if other civilizations, however different, had not been receptive to innovation" (p. 249)[82].

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81 This image is more or less congruent with the account of modernity that Louis Dupré— writing from Yale University in New England—gives overleaf. The account that follows it —that of Enrique Dussel, writing from the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*— evokes a somewhat less civilised image. If we observe the orchestra from this alternate perspective, the conductor is not the only one holding a baton. Beyond the spotlights, those who are not performing are being held in cages, and further out in the darkness the audience are too busy trying to survive to appreciate the music; although occasionally one or two of them strap explosives to their bodies and hurl themselves at the strings section.

82 Roughly analogous to the logic of date rape: dinner invitation = "she was asking for it".

Later, violence is associated not with the massacres of colonisation, but with attempts to recover cultural independence. It continues:

> Some traditional societies feeling threatened by modernity have attempted to defend themselves against it by often violent reversals to the past. Such rearguard actions are not likely to prevail. Science and technology have become inevitable and practically indispensable for survival, even for those who reject the ideologies that made them possible. Their methods and principles are by nature universal, however particular (and, to some, questionable) their origins may be. Nor can any region close itself definitively to the impact of modern culture. For one of that culture's remarkable achievements consists in having created an all-encompassing system of communications. The downfall of the communist regimes was due in major part to an inability to screen their radical experiments in social engineering from outside influences. A modern society cannot permanently withhold information from its members. Open communication forms an integral part of its make-up. With respect to science and technology we can expect the culture of the future to be global and homogenous. (p. 250)

Thus Dupré's text gives voice to the official and popular account of modern society, with which the positivism of mainstream psychology is so compatible. Contrast this with an alternate account in Dussel's (1996) *The Underside of Modernity*:

> Modernity is born when Europe . . . begins its expansion beyond its historical limits. Europe arrives in Africa; in India and Japan, thanks to Portugal; in Latin America, and from there to the Philippines, thanks to the Spanish conquest. That is to say, Europe has become itself "center." The other races and cultures now appear as "immature," barbarous, underdeveloped. (p. 52)

A chilling passage relates how, during the conquest of the Aztec empire, "less than one hundred" of the invaders died, along with "a few horses", while *a hundred thousand* Mexicans died, "without counting the ones who died of hunger and

plague" (p. 52). It is all the more chilling for its resonance with recent events in the Middle East in which, according to popular accounts, dozens of liberators died while spreading the universal benefits of our culture to the premodern[83] non-West; again, *thousands* of times more barbarous premoderns had to perish in order for their fellows to enjoy the freedom[84] of Western society.

Modernity then, considered in terms of discursive performativity, is a metanarrative that positions Western culture as the enlightened culmination of a continuous, progressive history, in which other cultures represent peoples who can be located at various "earlier stages" of this history. Non-Western peoples are therefore undeveloped peoples, in much the same way that a child is an undeveloped adult, and it is the role of the "developed world"—as the adult in this scenario—to gently (but *firmly*, if necessary) guide their development.

In this context it is worth noting that the European conquest of the world began under the auspices of a Christian metanarrative in which spiritual enlightenment— the right understanding of God—justified the use of violence to achieve what was "right" in the world[85]. While discourses of religious/spiritual enlightenment have

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83 Religious societies are by definition premodern, in the modernist scheme of things: their modern industries and technologies can be understood in this context as the technological power of modernity in the undisciplined hands of "undeveloped" (barbaric) nations.

84 A freedom that—as in the conquests of the Americas—includes the freedom to offer its resources up to its liberators in the "trade" that such equitable and consensual cultural intercourse makes possible.

85 All of the patriarchal, monotheistic Semitic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) recognise—as a pivotal moment in their shared tradition—God's promise to Abraham: "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen 22:17). Abraham is *the* patriarch: the very name "Abraham" means "father of many nations" (Gen 17:5) and this promise to Abraham is important in terms of "the God of Abraham"—once understood as one among many gods (Smith, 2001)—being understood as the *universal* God of all people. It is interesting therefore—in relation to the postmodern notion of an inherent violence in totalising discourse—that this promise was made to Abraham explicitly because he was willing to murder his own child (Gen 22:10): the child is tied up as a burnt offering and Abraham has the knife in his hand before God—satisfied that the patriarch will do anything his God tells him to—promises the world to Abraham's seed. However modernity may distance itself from its cultural origins, it remains willing to demonstrate its faith in Absolute Truth by killing for it.

been supplanted by or transformed into discourses of political/intellectual enlightenment—the right understanding of nature—the project of colonisation has had no difficulty putting the new Truth to the same purpose. Whatever the merits or otherwise of the postmodern accusation that totalising discourse is *necessarily* implicated with violence—the physical violence an embodiment of exclusionary practices in the discourse (Lyotard, 1979/1984)[86]—it is not difficult to perceive the historical associations between narratives of absolute truth and social policies of conquest. Clearly then, the social effects of modernity are disputed, and so an argument that the humanistic rational empiricism of modernity has proven itself by "making the world a better place" is not convincing. The totalising assumption that "the world" is something about which Western intellectuals can speak with authority is easily challenged by asking, "whose world?", and pointing out that a better world for one group can be very much worse for another.

A reasonably straightforward example of social injustice[87] in this context is the imprisonment of indigenous peoples[88]: in countries that have been colonised by

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86 (p. 66): "Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must thus arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus. A recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games is a first step in that direction. This obviously implies a renunciation of terror, which assumes that they are isomorphic and tries to make them so."

87 "Social injustice" here is—in terms of the relativist account discussed earlier—a rhetorical construction: the "reality" of the injustice can be and is contested, typically in terms of accounts of individual responsibility. We can attempt to exclude such accounts by asserting that the situation simply *is* unjust, with reference to one or another metanarrative. Alternately, we can call attention to what people are *doing* by contesting the account of injustice; how they profit from the status quo.

88 In Canada—a nation with an overall imprisonment rate similar to New Zealand's—native Canadians are imprisoned at six times the non-indigenous rates (Kauffman, 2003, p. 6). In Australia, aboriginal Australians are imprisoned at thirteen times the non-indigenous rate (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2005). In the United States, native Americans are imprisoned at "only" a 40% higher rate than non-indigenous Americans. Kauffman (2003, p. 6) notes that this smaller difference reflects the fact that the United States imprisons *all* people at a much higher rate than other nations. Also, "non-indigenous Americans" includes *black* Americans; descendants of people who were captured and forcibly taken to the United States to work as slaves. Department of Justice data predict that approximately *one out of every three* black American males born today will be imprisoned (Mauer, 2003, p. 3). This injustice is compounded by the existence in nearly all states of laws that can strip felons of voting rights, sometimes for life: as a result of these policies, an estimated 13% of black men are currently disenfranchised (Mauer, 2003, p. 15).

European nations, indigenous people are imprisoned at a much higher rate than people with European ancestry. In New Zealand, Māori are imprisoned at eight times the rate of non-Polynesian New Zealanders (Ministry of Justice, 1998). Psychological theories of criminal behaviour that do not account for this discrepancy are not merely flawed by empirical standards, but by ethical standards: their models are not just incomplete, but missing precisely those elements that would call attention to social injustice, while retaining elements that are useful to its perpetuation.

The same can be said of theories that do not account for the gender gap in criminal behaviour. Males are over ten times more likely to be in prison than females (Ministry of Justice, 2004). Psychological theory that treats violent behaviour as if it were not clearly linked to masculine gender[89] is, again, incomplete in a very selective way. To call attention to these patterns of race and gender in criminal behaviour is to call attention to social injustices that extend far beyond the walls of our prisons and into the psychologically generative structures of society, from families through to governments.

Threats to the order of modernity, then, are not necessarily nihilistic, Dionysian expressions of the "adversary culture" that Habermas (1981/1996, p. 42) presents as characteristic of postmodernity. Habermas's account positions postmodernism as imitating modernism by being hostile to convention, but without modernity's good intentions of establishing a better order. This returns us to the question of *postmodernity's* "intentions": in the terms of a discursive, performative analysis, what does postmodern discourse *do*? Given its hostility toward grand narratives, it bears some of the marks of a radical emancipatory critique, but how can such a

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89 "Linked" is rather weak in this context. Engaging in violent behaviour of various sorts is one of the most convincing ways to practise masculinity in our culture: a "real man" plays contact sports, fights back when bullied, and so on. Scholarship that treats gender as *performance* (Butler, 1996) is consistent with social constructionist accounts of subjectivity. This is in contrast with accounts that treat gender as behaviours that somehow arise spontaneously from biological sex characteristics, with intrinsic social meaning.

thoroughgoing relativistic criticism—one that deconstructs *all* values—be of value to any emancipatory social agenda?

With regard to what postmodern discourse does, Jameson (2000) argues that it furthers the interests of postindustrial capitalism. According to Jameson (2000, p. 190), postmodern discourse is so effective at this that it does not even matter whether postmodernity itself is being celebrated or denounced: in either case, the implication that we have moved beyond the structural social conditions analysed by Marx means that postmodern discourses "have the obvious ideological mission of demonstrating, to their own relief, that the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical capitalism"; for this reason, "every position on postmodernism in culture—whether apologia or stigmatization—is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (p. 190). Where the industrial capitalism of modernity produced alienated subjects who were "vulnerable" (from the perspective of capitalism) to the liberating discursive effects of a Marxist metanarrative, the decentred, fragmented subjects of postmodernity are "immune" to the truth: there is no stable self to be alienated, liberated or touched in any way. The body simply continues to get up and go to work for multinational capitalism, because the mind—or at least, the subjectivity that once existed as part of a meaningful social context (i.e. metanarrative)—no longer exists.

Parker's (2002) case against postmodernism involves similar arguments. "Postmodernism has been one of the most recent attempts to persuade us to give up on our old bad ways and to become, instead more realistic 'post-marxists' (or 'Marxist postmodernists')" (p. 53). In addition to "know-nothing relativism and its Wittgensteinian warrant . . . shifting people from radical politics onto the terrain of academic debate about language", "postmodernism is a cultural formation . . . which provokes . . . outright hostility to Marxism . . . in the claim that all forms of knowledge are now levelled out to the extent that no knowledge claim could ever be thought better than any other" (p. 53). Once again, the key issue—although articulated somewhat differently than in the Jameson (2000) text—is that the

relativising effects of postmodernism undermine progressive political discourse, leaving people defenceless against the power structures of the status quo.

Norris (1994, p. 4) gives voice to this criticism when he describes the movement toward relativism as, "a route that branched off from anything meriting the name 'critical theory' at precisely the point where poststructuralism and its allied movements promoted the linguistic (or textualist) turn into a kind of wholesale negative ontology." This kind of scholarship "blithely abandon[s] all the arguments and values required of any critical project worthy [of] the name" (p. 4). A "worthy" critical project is therefore one with a *positive* ontology; one that holds at least something up above the sea of relativist discourse as "objectively right" or "objectively true".

Critical scholars who do not condemn relativist discourse (e.g. Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995) are often accused of nihilism, and not only by the mainstream, but by other critical scholars: Parker (2002, p. 41) says (in reference to Nietzsche's assertion—cited by relativists—that we should transcend notions of good and evil), "once the grounds for distinguishing between good and evil have been eaten away, then there is no reason why one should not opt for one or the other". These are very serious concerns. A critical theory that "eats away" the discursive grounds upon which oppressed people may defend themselves is an ethically repugnant endeavour; in the context of discursive psychology, it threatens to advance a situation in which those subjects with the greatest access to social power will be able—unchecked by discourses of objective evils—to propagate the discourse that serves their interests, and further silence the voices of those with less access to power. It opens the field to a kind of social Darwinism, or an application of Nietzsche as he is understood by his most unsympathetic (e.g. Russell, 1961) interpreters: discourse that furthers the ends of the powerful will triumph, as is natural and appropriate, while discourse that furthers the ends of the weak will, just as naturally and appropriately, diminish; irrespective of our "snivelling because trivial people suffer" (Russell, 1961, p. 738).

There is a lot more to postmodernity than this brief outline has touched upon, but the key debates in critical psychological theory that Parker (2002) identifies (around postmodernism, epistemological relativism and the later philosophy of Wittgenstein) can be discussed in relation to the ideas outlined so far. While Parker (2002) articulates his position (in a broad introductory section that deals with other material too) in three separate essays—*Against Postmodernism* (pp. 21-45), *Against Relativism in Psychology, On Balance* (pp. 57-72), and *Against Wittgenstein* (pp. 85-107) —relativism, the central issue in this oppositional exposition, is also central in a sense of theoretical relevance: it is largely due to the relativistic implications of postmodernism and Wittgensteinian philosophy that they have provoked such varied responses in critical psychological theory.

Relativism

There is a kind of ultimatum—common in some religious and political discourse— that says, "you are either for us or against us". The world is divided into "us and them", and we must choose a side. When presented with such choices, I am inclined to want to be counted among "them", rather than the group who are trying to force me into a position that opposes "them". Of course, "they" may also attempt to pressure me into skipping the decision about whether to fight by rushing straight to the decision about which side to be on. Logocentrism[90]—by insisting that we define our positions against a stable, objective background—insists also that we position others against that background. To say, "that person is beautiful" as a subjective account is to give voice to a personal reaction to someone; but to say "that person is beautiful" and give objective criteria for that beauty is immediately to say "that person is ugly" to everyone who fails to meet those criteria. Logocentrism likes to dichotomise society: so does violence.

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90 As described on p. 58 of the present text. The spatial metaphor (centrism) is a useful guide to interpretation. If a word (logos) is imagined as a scatter-plot or cloud of meanings, "spread out" in discursive space, logocentrism is the assumption that we can therefore locate the precise centre of this cloud as the "best" meaning of the word; meanings at the edges of the cloud are the "worst". This ranking of privilege begins by arbitrarily dividing discourse into a dichotomous "inside" and "outside" of the concept.

In this context, relativism is not so much a position as a *refusal* to take up a position in a rigid, logocentric order of meaning, in which the acceptance of a position is also a collaboration in the positioning of others. It is perhaps a wariness that comes from much experience of noble and well-intentioned emancipatory discourses being put to the most vile uses. If the very idea of the "good"—that which we are trying to become—carries with it the idea of the "bad"—that which we once were, and so in a diverse world must find in people all around us—then we are better to ditch the good with the bad than retain the good and thereby position others as "bad", and treat them accordingly. Newman and Holzman (2002) hint at this idea in the phrase, "against against-ism":

> Parker is our good friend and a very bright one. We are postmodernists.
> Parker is "Against Postmodernism". Is he therefore against us? We think not.
> We are surely not against him. We are . . . "Against Against-ism". (p. 47)

In some respects, the whole issue of "realism versus relativism" is already logocentric, inasmuch as it assumes fixed and present meanings for these terms. Thus, to be drawn into the fight is already to be a "realist" in the sense that it is to imagine that there is *a realism* or *a relativism* to defend, rather than particular usages of these terms in particular contexts. Because this is—for a realist—a "relativist" account, I find myself positioned as a "relativist" in realist discourse, but the whole point of the account is to resist such a positioning.

I consider relativist discourse to have value in the context of critical psychological theory. This does not make me "a relativist": I do not value *every* use to which relativist discourse is put, nor do I dislike *every* use to which realist discourse is put. Nevertheless, I take seriously Wittgenstein's claim that meaning is determined through social usage. In this context, relativist discourse is effectively saying to me, "you may find it unsettling that you cannot legitimately force your meaning on me, but consider this: I cannot legitimately force my meaning on you either," whereas realist discourse seems to be saying, "it may disturb you that I can legitimately force my meaning on you, but consider this: you can legitimately force your meaning on

me, too. *En garde!*". Any theory of legitimation beyond the relativistic account of legitimation by social agreement seems—if not inherently violent—at least to have a congruence with violence that relativist discourse does not share.

Having stated my intention to defend relativist discourse in critical psychology, this remains to be done with respect to the specific criticisms of it that have been mentioned so far. These can be addressed now, with the (relativist) proviso that such a defence is not a (realist) positioning of relativist accounts as "right" and realist accounts as "wrong": it is an effort to show that the usefulness of relativism may be underestimated in some accounts, and the dangers overestimated.

According to Potter, Edwards, and Ashmore (2002, p. 73), much of the construction of relativism as dangerous comes from "a systematic and persistent misreading of the nature of relativism". Relativism is equated with nihilism, because the removal of objectivity or universality from value is said to rob it of meaning. To me it is a strange idea—akin to arguing that a beautiful, moving work of art is "worthless" if it has no "value" in the art market—but for some, subjective value is not value at all: relativism therefore strips value of its value.

Some of this confusion of relativism with nihilism may arise simply from the rhetorical or performative function of strong denotative statements to voice strong personal values. As a concrete example, consider an ethical debate around the "absolute evil", or otherwise, of torture. The denotative content of, for example, "torture is an absolute moral evil" includes a rejection of relativism, but the various performative or rhetorical effects include an implied assertion: "I strongly disapprove of torture". By challenging relativists[91] with questions like, "So, you're saying torture is not an absolute evil?", realists are able to maneuvre relativists into a position where, in order to concisely state their truth (that the idea of an "absolute evil" in the traditional ethical sense is consistent with positivist discourse but

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91 That relativism is not a *position* has been noted; from now on the term "relativist" will be used because it is less clumsy than "a person employing relativist discourse".

inconsistent with contemporary understandings of the way language works, and so to agree that torture is an "absolute evil" is also to implicitly support a positivist epistemology—and possibly the very epistemology that has been associated with more torture than any other epistemology in world history) relativists must reply, "That's right, torture is not an absolute evil", which *seems* therefore to be saying, "My disapproval of torture is not as strong as yours", although of course it is entirely possible that the relativist is even more repelled by torture than the realist. In their (1995) article, *Death and Furniture*, Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter summarise these rhetorical techniques that work to position relativists as less passionate about their values, or as having no values at all, under the heading "Death". These align with the criticism that relativist discourse is unethical.

Another criticism that more consciously supports elements of positivist discourse is the assertion that relativism is simply "false": we can appeal directly to an extralinguistic reality to legitimate[92] our truth claims. In *Death and Furniture* (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995), "Furniture" summarises the various attempts to show how we can "step outside language" in this way. Slapping a table is a wonderfully concise argument—rhetorically powerful for this reason—and it certainly demonstrates that *something* is there; but a table remains part of a socially constructed order of meanings, despite the slap's implicit suggestion, "I didn't say, 'table', so this thing has nothing to do with language". As has been discussed at length, the world of phenomena that we as subjects experience ourselves sharing is not "objectively real" in the traditional sense, because it is infused with our (inter)subjectivity: to imagine that an objective "side" can somehow be peeled off the fusion of subjectivity and objectivity is analogous to imagining that we can remove one side from a line.

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92 Note that—for relativism to be "false" in this context—it is not sufficient to argue that there *is* an extralinguistic reality (something with which only the rare linguistic idealist would disagree). Relativist discourse does not dispute a reality beyond language: it disputes the claim that we can construct truth claims that appeal directly to this extralinguistic reality, because this is to deny the linguistic (social) nature of the production of the meaning of these truth claims.

Both of these criticisms, then—which presuppose the wrongness or falsehood of relativism by appealing to objective standards of rightness or truth to refute it—are much more consistent with positivist discourse than with the social constructionist epistemology that has been argued in the present text. They can be understood as functioning to justify a refusal to negotiate.

> When relativists talk about the social construction of reality, truth, cognition, scientific knowledge, technical capacity, social structure and so on, their realist opponents sooner or later start hitting the furniture, invoking the Holocaust, talking about rocks, guns, killings, human misery, tables and chairs. The force of these objections is to introduce a bottom line, a bedrock of reality that places limits on what may be treated as epistemologically constructed or deconstructible. (Edwards, Ashmore, & Potter, 1995, p. 26)

While these "absolutist" rejections of relativism ("relativism is ethically wrong" and "relativism is demonstrably false") are easily positioned as being more consistent with positivist than with social constructionist accounts, the most common criticism from critical psychologists aligns less with these than with the claim that relativism is rhetorically dangerous.

Norris (1993, p. 303) argues for "the need to maintain a due sense of the difference between private modes of conviction and belief . . . and the public sphere of openly accountable reasons, arguments, principles and values." (p. 303). He warns of "the dangers courted by any interest-group or creed, like the current postmodern-pragmatist trend, that set out to blur the line between these disparate orders of truth-claim, and which thus [end] up by effectively endorsing a wholesale reduction of truth to what is presently and contingently 'good in the way of belief'." (p. 303). According to this account, there is a kind of truth claim that transcends the present and contingent, since it can be reduced to these by "any interest-group or creed" if the line between this transcendent truth and mere local truth is blurred. Furthermore, such a blurring is dangerous.

Parker (2002, p. 45) gives similar warnings: postmodernism "is particularly pernicious in its embrace of relativism and amoralism", and "as a movement of sustained playful theoretical reflection" has "now outlived [its] usefulness". It is "already now inciting and encouraging some dangerous tendencies in psychology" and, if we are not careful, "the 'postmodern' turn in psychology will turn into something worse".

Such accounts—in relation to the literature around discourse and legitimation— give voice to genuine and important anxieties about the vulnerability of traditional ideas of justice in a relativistic society, but they still do not address what relativists present as the issue around which the debate turns. In terms of the distinction that Norris (1993, p. 303) makes between the public and private "orders of truth-claim", they do not make it clear what it is about a general, political or "public" truth that makes it inherently superior to a specific, personal or "private" truth. If these accounts are meant to suggest that consensus itself legitimates public truths, then they give their seal of approval to any attrocity of which the majority approves: yet if they acknowledge that the truth of a tiny minority may nevertheless be "right", how is it that we know it to be so? Reason? Whose reason? These accounts neglect to address the circularity of an argument that effectively says, "we of this language community know that the truth we give voice to is not merely ours, but yours too, and we know this—despite your protests—because this objective Truth to which we are privy tells us that this is the case."

Billig (1991, p. 23) says, "It is Habermas's contention that postmodernism has abandoned the radical project of modernism because it subjects all propositions to equal doubt." The suggestion here is that "equal doubt" of all propositions will somehow produce "equal support" for all propositions. However, as Billig points out, the very fact that relativists *argue* for relativism refutes this claim:

> On every issue, on which opinions are put forward, a counter-opinion can be formulated with equal rhetorical force as the original view. This psychological observation does not commit observers to the position that they personally

must consider both the opinion and the counter-opinion always to be equally reasonable. In fact, it forbids it; the observation itself is part of an argument, which makes claims for its own superior reasonableness. (pp. 24-25)

In other words, "The argumentative act itself constitues a denial of [this] sort of strict relativism, which precludes moral and critical stances." (p. 25).

Parker (2002) argues that Wittgenstein "represents a danger for radicals" (p. 92), and constitutes the danger as a particular omission. Parker (2002) says:

> Wittgenstein, like Marx and Foucault, draws attention to the cultural and historical specificity of psychological verities, but he misses issues of power. It would not be satisfactory to 'solve' this problem by simply adding to Wittgenstein's descriptions the point that social actors enjoy certain rights to speak and that these are given by institutional and discursive structures. Rather, we need to draw upon the historical materialist view of structures of power being tied to economic class interests. (p. 87)

Because Wittgenstein "draws attention to the cultural and historical specificity" *even of*, for example, Marxist discourse concerning "structures of power", he disrupts *all* attempts to impose the language of one community—the meaning of which has been arrived at by its use within that community—upon the lived experience of another community. By this very disruption, whether intentional or not, he may not "hit" upon issues of power, but neither does he "miss" them: rather he exposes them all as targets for criticism[93]. It is true that even if well-intentioned social critics try to exempt a favoured account from such criticism—a Marxist metanarrative, for example—Wittgensteinian discourse is potentially disruptive to their project.

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93 O'Connor, in her (2002) feminist development of Wittgensteinian ideas, says that "a Wittgensteinian approach to intelligible criticism does not fall onto one side or the other of the objectivist/relativist debate" (p. 25). Relativism itself can be a target for such criticism.

However, it is possible that our projects could benefit from some revision if we are unable to convince others of our projects' usefulness to *them*. To present the truths of our emancipatory discourses as so universally applicable that it is dangerous to open them to debate supports a traditional approach to ensuring that our efforts to promote justice are legitimated. As an alternative, we could invite the objects of our emancipatory desires to participate in this legitimation.

That absolutist discourse is not necessary for ethical debate can be further illustrated by making the point that one does not need to talk about absolute truths in order to tell stories: narrative accounts do not derive their power from connections with abstract philosophical assertions, but rather with people's lived experiences[94]. If we are unable to tell stories that move people to act in their own interests, how can we claim to be acting in *their* interests at all?

Jameson's (2000) criticism that a discourse undermining absolute truth claims is *more* threatening to Marxism than to capitalism assumes that Marxists are (or were) going to *win* the battle of absolute truths, and I do not think that we can assume this, despite how much it may seem to be so in some language communities. Added to this, even the great political "victories" for Marxists have not been the victories for humanity that Marx envisioned. As has already been noted, we have a long history of the noblest and most well-intentioned emancipatory metanarratives being put to use in the service of oppressive power; their usefulness in this regard is related to the kind of logocentric "pinning down" of meaning[95] that relativists oppose. After Wittgenstein, it could be said that to deny people their authority over their language is to deny them their authority over their lives[96].

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94 The "powerful role for narrative is realized by the linking of personal memories to present conditions and future hopes, by organizing, translating, and providing continuity and coherence to experience." (Fireman, McVay, & Flanagan, 2003, p. 4).

95 So a statement that was true for a particular revolutionary group must still be true for another revolutionary group, in another context, with another set of aims.

96 In this context, the gradual but increasingly noticeable revitilisation of te reo Māori—the indigenous language of New Zealand—is perhaps the single most promising sign of the *self*-development of a strong post-colonial Māori culture.

Wittgenstein has fused language and social activity together, so that we can no longer pretend that the involuntary imposition of one community's discourse upon another is not necessarily an act of domination. In this context, why should any discourse be exempt from criticism? This applies, of course, to relativist discourse as well. The elevation of any metanarrative[97]—even that of the most well-intentioned community—to the status of Holy Writ is an attempt to elevate the social *actions* of that community to a realm of transcendent legitimacy. I do not think benevolent dictators can be relied upon to stay benevolent, and so I prefer to employ relativist discourse that allows criticism and debate of *all* propositions. To take up a rigid theoretical position in opposition to a text's rigid theoretical position is to deny certain propositions while accepting other important and implicit propositions concerning the best way to understand and respond to each other. The turn to language, and to a performative understanding of language, and so to an active, fluid, contextual, *social* understanding of psychology, offers more to me as a theoretical context for the present study.

Postexistentialism

A final point with regard to social constructionism, relativism, postmodernism, and the lack of an essential self or "human nature" is that these ideas overlap to some degree with the existentialist ideas of Sartre (1943/1995), and even more so with those of Beauvoir (1947/1996), whose *Ethics of Ambiguity* is an early attempt at applying the radically ambiguous freedom of existentialism to the social world. As well as valuing ambiguity in a way that is echoed in Derrida's writing, her account in *The Second Sex* (1949/1989) of woman as socially constructed[98] is echoed in social constructionist psychologies. Existentialism is sometimes constructed as "a bleak doctrine that proclaims that man is not at home in the world but thrown into it" (Kauffman, 1980, p. 2). Of course, it can be; but—in traditional, individualistic

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97 Discourses of postmodernity—and of its relativism—can function as metanarratives, when they seek to position themselves as providing an overview of other discourses.
98 "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (p. 267).

existentialism—the individual who interpreted the world in this way, and thereby chose to live in such a world, would have no-one but his or herself to blame. The point of Sartre's "to be is to choose oneself" (1995, p. 40) is that the difference between the authentic subjectivity of human being and the passive being of an object is that the human subject is free to create meaning: to actively interpret experience that might otherwise be regarded as passively "received". Bergoffen (1997), writing about Beauvoir's existentialism, says:

> As we all begin as children, we all begin by experiencing ourselves as dominated by our situation. We experience this domination as natural. We come to know ourselves as free in the existential sense only through the crisis of adolescence. Now we must assume our subjectivity. (p. 83)

If we consider philosophies as strategies for living, then existentialism is to many earlier philosophies much like adolescence is to childhood: the child is immersed in linguistic and social power relationships of various kinds, but has limited means of understanding them, because she or he has had very limited exposure to alternate accounts of his or her existence. In the terms of narrative therapy[99] (e.g. Payne, 2000; White & Epston, 1990), the family's accounts are *thin description*[100]. Entering adolescence, the child encounters many new interpretive contexts and must suddenly choose which of these apply—or rather, which of these *to* apply—to her or his life. Much as with (individualist) existentialism, the response can be an excited sense of new freedom, or a despairing sense of meaningless solitude.

Extending this metaphor, an adult is one who has accepted rather than feared to confront the responsibility that comes with this interpretive freedom, and chooses a

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99 Narrative therapy tries to develop, with clients, richer and more varied accounts of the events of their lives, so that a limited range of possible subjectivities is extended through a greater interpretive freedom. (Payne, 2000, pp. 6-7).

100 Alasuutari (1995, p. 99) gives the origins of the terms "thin description" and "thick description" as having been "borrowed from Gilbert Ryle and introduced by Clifford Geertz". They are now expressions that are used both in the contexts of qualitative research and of narrative approaches to counselling.

way of being in the world—immersed in linguistic and power relationships, like the child—only now conscious of those relationships, in the sense that the subject's power to interpret and act in the world is experienced through an awareness of *alternate* interpretations and actions. Thus, "it is the apprehension of a revolution as possible which gives to the workman's suffering its value as a motive" (Sartre, 1943/1995, p. 437). Thick description is not, however, merely an exposure to alternate accounts from which the subject is to "choose one". Rather, the *practice* of thick description—a kind of celebration of (as opposed to fear of) ambiguity— enables the subject at all times to be "free".

"Given the stress on subjectivity and self-creation, [existentialism] inevitably conjures up the spectre of solipsism or at least the peril of human self-centredness." (Dallmayr, 1981, p. 19). However, the existentialism that spoke to the autonomous modern individuals of the twentieth century may have something different to say to the socially constructed subjects of the twenty-first. While it is beyond the scope of the present study to consider a possible dialogue between postmodern and existentialist accounts of the human condition, the theoretical position from which I read Andrews and Bonta (2003) is informed especially by certain elements of both discourses. These are an acceptance of responsibility for action in the world, a consequent rejection of any conception of the world as something separate from us to which we must simply adapt, and a consequent *decision* to construct the world in hopeful, even optimistic[101] terms.

Given the intersubjectivity constructed by critical accounts of psychology, these practices are social practices, and the context in which this psychological freedom can best be realised is likely to be a context of freedom from violation by each other.

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101 Optimism is foolish if the "real world" is not really as good as we imagine it to be. However, the term *optimism* takes on more of the meaning of *optimise* if we are part of, and contribute to, the world, so that our constructions of its nature really do construct its nature to some degree. Thus, it is possible that the "realistic" appraisal of people as untrustworthy *affects* people and proves its own "realism" to be accurate: a more optimistic account of human nature might also "find" that the world confirms the account.

Non-violence can therefore be understood as an enabling condition for a postexistentialism in which subjectivities—in the diverse, heterogenous forms associated with "thick description" in the sense described above—"choose themselves", rather than accepting as human nature one of the many thin accounts on offer.

A postmodern or postexistentialist ethics may therefore be much richer and more complex than the legalistic ethical systems that the Western intellectual tradition has typically produced. "In a pluralistic cultural universe, there cannot be a 'good life': there are 'good lives'." (Weeks, 1993, p. 206). Paradoxically, a general description of such an ethics may be much simpler: perhaps it could even be constructed as simply as being the embodiment or enactment of the desires of our multiple subjectivities, interacting with each other and the world from moment to moment, in the absence of violence. In the *face* of violence, such activity is "the multiplicity of local struggles against the burdens of history and the various forms of domination and subordination." (Weeks, 1993, p. 209).

Critical Psychology as Non-violent Praxis

"Violence is one of the most elusive and most difficult concepts in the social sciences." (Imbusch, 2003, p. 13). Searching for a suitable definition, I found almost as many definitions as texts, and none that I was happy to take up. Given the theoretical assumptions that I have outlined to this point, this is likely to be a good thing: a single, widely agreed upon definition of violence would probably construct "violence" in a way that privileged some group or groups over others, since people vary in their capacity to engage in different kinds of violence.

Böttger and Strobl (2003), discussing "the advantages of a theoretically driven approach to qualitative research on violence" (p. 1210), say that "the demand for the greatest possible openness finds its echo in some representatives of a 'genuine sociology of violence' . . . [who] consider the production of a context-rich descriptive text in the sense of a 'thick description' . . . the only appropriate method

for analyzing phenomena of violence" (p. 1210). It is therefore perhaps more useful to consider accounts of violence that obscure its operation than to attempt to construct an all-inclusive definition[102].

The problem of violence has typically been constructed in alignment with the subject/object dichotomy[103] as existing (as a *problem*) when the subject experiences the violence of the other (that is, the subject experiences violation), but not when the subject uses force to control the other, who is in this dichotomy another "object" in the subject's phenomenological world. Although the "us and them" dichotomy does not map precisely to that of subject and object (because "us" encompasses more than just the subjectivity of the speaker) it is still very congruent with the psychological distinction between the speaker's experience and that of a foreign other; in this case, "them".

Accordingly, violence is often constructed as *their* problem: some other group needs to take responsibility for their violence, and until that happens, *our violence is their responsibility*. Thus in mainstream journalism, terrorists are not only responsible for their violence; they are also responsible for our response, in the sense that our violence is not described as the attrocity it would be if *we* were its object, but rather

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102 Thereby defining violations not covered by the account as "not violence".

103 Often also in alignment with Hegel's (1807/1977) Master/Slave dialectic, in which a primal, fundamental negotiation of subjectivity consists of people taking one or the other role. According to this account—and in this one respect as something of a precursor to social constructionist ideas—we form our subjective experience of self through recognition in others. We are in a sense mirrors for each other. The problem with this, according to accounts of the Master/Slave dialectic, is that if we are *all* mirrors, there is no substantial subjectivity to be reflected. So, when two subjects meet, each tries to make an object of the other: to become a Master, thereby becoming real by seeing his or her self reflected in the "slavish consciousness" (Kojève, 1947/1986, p. 112) of the other. In its fullest expression, the dialectic stands for a fight to the death, in which the Slave—fearing death—surrenders to the one who is willing to die rather than be a slave. With human interaction framed in this way, violence—far from being a problem in any general sense—is a necessary potentiality underlying human subjectivity: it is only a "problem" from the perspective of the people who are enslaved by the fear of it. While Kojève (1947/1986, p. 120) argues that "in the long run, all slavish work realizes not the Master's will, but the will . . . of the Slave, who . . . succeeds where the Master . . . fails", this twist still leaves an account in which domination and subordination are essential to human subjectivity.

as a necessary consequence of the violence of the other. Similarly in mainstream psychological texts, our violent response to criminal violence is seldom acknowledged as such; instead—and despite evidence that its effects are, if anything, to *increase* the probability of future offending (Andrews & Bonta, 2003, p. 334)—imprisonment is constructed as a humane and more or less inevitable response to the violence of criminal others. Mainstream psychological texts give much attention to psychological interventions that may take place within prison; they give less attention to imprisonment as a psychological intervention in itself.

This highly selective interpretation of violence (in which, for example, a Māori youth taking money from a service station at gunpoint is an instance of "violent offending" that needs to be "addressed" by subjecting him to years of further violence, whereas the British soldiers who took his ancestors' homes and livelihoods from them at gunpoint were not "offending", and so their violence need not be addressed) is incongruent with positivist discourse concerning "objectivity", but the incongruity—starkly obvious when a relativistic framework permits a hearing of alternate accounts—is smoothed over by a metanarrative that privileges the accounts of certain parties (and the violence that keeps them privileged).

However, as has been noted (on p. 77), to imagine that there is a "relativistic position" from which to hear all accounts impartially is to return to metanarrative. Any account of violence is infused with the particular desires of a particular speaking position. Although we can "thicken" our descriptions, in the present study this approach is impractical because—unfortunately—people violate each other in so many different ways that several dozen pages of description would still be rather thin. I have decided therefore to give my own account which—although I have tried to construct it in a way that makes it congruent with other accounts of which I am aware—is very limited; not only in the sense that it is only mine, but also in the sense that it is an account produced for the purposes of the present study: it does not claim to be a "definition".

Violence then, for the purposes of the present study, is any behaviour that treats another subject(ivity) as if "it" were an object: instead of negotiating with that subject(ivity) so as to produce states of affairs that are desirable or acceptable to both, the desires of the violent subject make of the other an object[104]. By this definition, a word, a glance, even *in*action may be violent, but action upon the body of another who has tried to resist or who has articulated (or indicated in some way) an aversion to that action is almost certainly violent. Behaviour likely to result in these circumstances is also violent, as for example when the subject assumes consent in cases where the objectified person cannot give consent, or cannot safely refuse the objectifying desires. This account recognises accounts of warfare, institutional violence, domestic violence, street crime, sexual violence, psychological violence, and the lasting effects of historical violence as examples of violence.

Critical psychology has been constructed as concerned with social justice. Justice itself can be constructed in many different ways: in the present text—in the context of a postmodern ethics—justice is not the imposition through violence of one privileged group's values upon the lives of other groups, but rather something that can arise from collective human action when violence is removed from that interaction.

As a psychology that recognises the importance of language, discourse is a field of practice for critical psychologists. If critical psychology is a non-violent praxis, then the articulation of critical psychological theory must attend carefully to the way this

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104 Possibly although not necessarily in the sense of "a desired object". The other is an object because the subject acts to achieve effects upon objects: action *with* another subject achieves effects upon other objects. Action upon the other as an object is violent. The "other" is an objectified *subject*: action upon the body of the other—including the brain of the other—is violent to the extent that it objectifies the other's subjectivity. For this reason "rough play" is not necessarily violent, whereas a lie almost certainly is. If lies and other forms of psychological violence seem "less violent" than physical violence, consider that an ineffective stabbing can be survived, whereas an effective lie can kill (through the physical consequences of the violated person's acting upon the misinformation).

theory positions the people upon whose lives it may impact. Positionings that "other"[105] groups and enable violence against them are especially inconsistent with a non-violent praxis. A non-violent critical psychology is also willing to advocate for groups who may already suffer violence as a result of psychological discourse that is less careful in this respect.

Criminal justice systems like that of New Zealand actually embody an othering, violence-enabling discourse to some extent. While the Corrections Department's motto of "reducing re-offending" constructs its purpose as the reduction of crime, even mainstream accounts and empirical studies concede that imprisonment does not actually have a positive effect on crime rates. Indeed, Andrews and Bonta (2003) suggest that longer prison terms may actually *increase* offending rates (pp. 334-335), and Fagan (2004, p. 38) reports an empirical study of incarceration and offending rates in the state of New York over a 12-year period, in which it was found that "law enforcement produces the supply of persons for incarceration in a process independent of crime". In other words, crime rates go up and down due to various social factors, but imprisonment is not one of them. In this context, why are millions of dollars spent on building and maintaining prisons?

It is sometimes difficult to determine whether punishment is intended as a deterrent, or as vengeance, or both. Any antisocial behaviour can be constructed as "punishment" if it is presented as a response to another's behaviour that has been positioned as sufficiently undesirable to merit such a response. Physical abuse of a child can be constructed as punishment for the child's misbehaviour; a child's violence against a parent can be constructed as punishment for such abuse; a community's violence against the violent child can be constructed as punishment for the child's violence against the parent; and so on indefinitely. Depending on whose account is privileged, these accounts differ in terms of who is positioned as "deserving" violence; in every case however, the party behaving violently toward another constructs the violence as being in some sense a "punishment".

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105 Other as a verb.

An ethic of vengeance serves as a flexible rhetorical justification for violence. It is a familiar discursive game; perhaps most familiar in the context of international conflict, as between Israel and Palestine. Each attrocity is positioned as a punishment for some other attrocity. In a broad sense, the political effect of such discourse—whether in the home, the local community or the international community—is the legitimation of violence. While "freedom fighters" in any of these contexts may feel that such discourse is helpful to them (inasmuch as it justifies the violence they use in their efforts to maintain or establish some autonomy), discourse that justifies violence is more empowering for those in a position to more easily inflict violence. This includes, most obviously, men; but also colonising powers, or any party with access to weaponry or other technological resources that can be put to violent use. In addition, whoever is positioned most favourably in dominant systems of discourse will more likely be able to use violence to maintain an advantageous social disparity, because the discourse of ethical retribution makes it possible to position such violence as acceptable—even noble—behaviour. In other words, we can expect to find discourses that justify violence in cultures that sustain privileges for groups with more capacity to inflict violence (disparities in physical size, technological resources and so on are transformed by such discourse into social inequities in other domains).

Since the problem of violence as argued here will not be addressed until violence *per se* is problematised and rhetoric that justifies violence is understood as such, my position with regard to "punishment" is that it is, at best, an expedient but ethically dubious way to modify behaviour: expedient because it is often much easier to inflict suffering for undesired behaviour than to make the effort to produce rewards for desired behaviour; ethically dubious because expediency is a poor excuse for the infliction of suffering. At worst, punishment is not even behaviour modification, and does not even claim to be: the ethic of vengeance is so passionately upheld that deterrence becomes irrelevant, and satisfaction is obtained directly from the infliction of suffering. Nevertheless, such acts retain a discursive function inasmuch as a spectacle of violence has a coercive effect. Thus for example the murder of a

gay man may indirectly serve as "behaviour modification" for other gay men who become aware of it.

Discourses that justify violence are all of concern to a non-violent critical psychology. Discourses of punishment are of particular concern because they are widespread and they play an important role in the justification of large scale violence, like that of states and institutions.

Summary of Theoretical Position

The reading position that I have developed in response to Andrews and Bonta's (2003) text attends to critical scholarship around the psychological significance of texts and their interpretation. This reading position can be summarised as follows.

The problem of violence is a major orienting concern. A broad understanding of violence as the objectification of others and the effects of this objectification informs an account in which violence is currently a major contributor to the production of subjectivity.

A critical discursive psychology recognises discourse as an important field in which subjectivities and power relations are constructed and act upon each other. A Foucauldian, post-structuralist approach to the analysis of discourse—informed by a Wittgensteinian understanding of meaning as use—foregrounds performativity as a context within which narrative can be assessed. Metanarrative is resisted as thin description, or the efforts of a single language community to impose its vision of the world upon other groups.

Accounts—including those of the present text—are constructions that *act* upon the world, rather than merely "reporting" it. Such action cannot be definitively assessed against a universal or objective set of assessment criteria; the resulting ambiguity or interpretive freedom is an opportunity to work with discourse in ways that are non-violent, and that open spaces for others to develop their own freedoms.

In this context, texts can be read with a sensitivity to discourse that legitimates violence. Such discourse can then be examined in relation to the social practices that inform and are informed by it.

Close Reading

It is now possible to analyse specific passages of the text from the reading position that has been established above. From this perspective, the text is contributing to the social production of subjectivities. A Foucauldian attention to the close relationships between discourse and social power can foreground the political implications of this activity. This attention to discourse, power and subjectivity is oriented toward a concern with the problem of violence, and the way violence is constructed, addressed or perpetuated in discourse.

As discussed in the *Methodological Strategy* (pp. 9-13), I have selected excerpts for analysis that align with my response to the text after the first reading, in terms of three features that were prominent to me. These were: a rigorous and substantial empirical scholarship; a pro-treatment/anti-punishment position; and an ongoing theme of conflict between the text and a hostile critical academia.

Rational Empiricism

Examining how the text conveyed an impression[106] of strong empirical scholarship also helps to demonstrate its use of positivist discourse. Although the text explicitly identifies itself as representative of "rational empiricism" (e.g. Andrews & Bonta, 2003, p. 14), some of my impression probably arose from stylistic cues.

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106 That some of the text functioned to establish its own legitimacy is in no way unusual; in fact it is expected of many texts. For example, the practice of citing reference sources serves not only to assist readers in following up points of interest, but also to offer an assurance that claims are supported by other texts.

The text's first "resource note", for example, is a helpful refresher on the measurement of covariation that also works to remind the reader that the psychology of criminal conduct involves precise calculations. It is entitled:

> Resource Note 1.1: Measurement of Level of Covariation: The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Rosenthal's Binomial Effect Size Display (p. 5)

Another simple cue to the text's empirical base was the quantity of citations offered in support of the text's substantive claims. Arguments are frequently interspersed with references, as in the following paragraph:

> Substance abuse has been found associated with violent crimes among adults (Valdez et al., 1995) and young offenders (Cookson, 1992). In a longitudinal study of 1,265 children followed to the age of 21, alcohol abuse was associated with both violent and property crime (Fergusson & Horwood, 2000). Substance abuse has been especially implicated in murders (Smith & Zahn, 1999). For example, in a study of 251 homicides committed in Copenhagen, 55 percent of the murderers were intoxicated at the time of the offense (Gottlieb & Gabrielsen, 1992). Victimization surveys that include victim reports on the condition of the offender find intoxication a factor in 30 percent of violent crimes (U.S. Department of Justice, 1995). Finally, substance abuse is a predictor of recidivism among general offenders (Bonta, Law, & Hanson, 1998). Whether we examine the results from cross-sectional surveys or longitudinal studies, it is indisputable that substance abuse is a correlate of criminal behavior that is more important than class and race. (p. 411)

The *indisputable* nature of the claim that substance abuse is a more important correlate of violent crime than class and race is explicitly tied to the results of the empirical studies cited. Also explicit throughout the text is the importance of empiricism itself: "PCC [the Psychology of Criminal Conduct] seeks out the

evidence." (p. 8), or more succinctly, "psychology is empirical" (p. 14). The
objectivity and universality of such knowledge is just as explicit:

> "Let our bias be clear: We believe that a major way in which psychology may
> contribute to the greater good is by systematically and ethically pursuing the
> development of empirically based knowledge. We are saying that the pursuit
> of a quantitative and empirically based psychology of crime is not only
> possible but is also highly desirable. The knowledge gained may be of value
> to all people, regardless of their personal, social, and political goals." (p. 23)

This construction of knowledge as universal and value-free is classically positivistic;
the endorsement of *quantitative* (as opposed—implicitly—to *qualitative*, since in this
context "quantitative" can be contrasted to little else) also accords with the positivist
tendency to favour quantitative research (discussed on p. 20 of the present text).
Also classically positivistic is the denial of subjective bias, here achieved
rhetorically through the device of a frank disclosure ("Let our bias be clear:") that
proceeds to construct this "bias" as a rational belief in the universal value of
scientific knowledge, rather than in terms of the personal positionality—the
embodied existence as part of a specific community with specific interests—with
which the notion of "bias" might otherwise be associated.

Not only is the text's empiricism positioned as value-free, and indeed universally
valuable, but other less empirically grounded disciplines are constructed as reliant
upon this knowledge: "Certainly, the most intellectually serious and solid elements
of current criminology may be directly attributed to the rational empiricism of a
psychology of criminal conduct." (p. 36). More often, such disciplines are positioned
negatively as the irrational opponents of empiricism: this theme is discussed on pp.
97-112 of the present text.

The repeated alignment of the text with rational empiricism—for example, "The
psychology of criminal conduct (PCC) seeks a rational and empirical understanding
of variation in the occurrence of criminal acts and, in particular, a rational empirical

understanding of individual differences in criminal activity." (p. 2)—and the care taken to support important claims with references to empirical research—work together to establish the text's legitimacy as an exemplar of positivistic psychology.

As has been discussed (on pp. 20-21 of the present text), the employment of positivist discourse positions the text as giving voice to the knowledge of a powerfully authoritative community: it delivers "the facts" and these facts are universally applicable. Implicit in this assumption of access to objective truth is the assumption that it is ethical to translate this truth into action, even when such action impacts upon groups who contest its legitimacy. This is because the facts attested to by such groups do not merely "differ" from those of positivistic science; they are *wrong*: there is an objective standard of truth by which the claims of positivistic science are validated, while those of other language communities are not. We can now examine what the facts of the psychology of criminal conduct are, and what kinds of action they may inform.

Treatment or Punishment

My position with regard to violence and punishment—as discussed on pp. 85-87 of the present text—meant that Andrews and Bonta's (2003) pro-treatment stance made a strong impression at the first reading of the text. Numerous references to the "rehabilitation or punishment" debate—including an entire chapter of more than fifty pages devoted to the issue—articulated a position of firm support for treatment over punishment[107].

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107 The text defines a punishment as "*Any* consequence to a behavior, obviously painful or not, that reduces the probability of the behavior" (p. 341). Therefore punishment is not necessarily to be equated with the violence of corporal punishment or imprisonment. Nevertheless, other discourse in the text (discussed in the present section) around the "retributive aspects of justice" makes an impartial behaviourist account of "punishment" incongruent with the wider terms of the debate: punishment is at times constructed as the deliberate infliction of harm.

The statement that "treatment . . . remains the most promising form of reducing recidivism" (p. 356) summarises this position. "Reducing recidivism" is the issue of primary concern[108], and the criticism of punishment is mostly in these terms. After a five-page discussion of the conditions that make punishment effective ("maximum intensity", "immediacy", "consistency", "no escape or reinforced alternatives", "the density of punishment must outweigh the density of reinforcement", and "the effectiveness of punishment interacts with person variables", pp. 342-346) the text continues:

> Even if we could replicate the conditions for effective punishment in the real world, we are still faced with what Skinner . . .[109] referred to as the "unfortunate by-products of punishment." Punishment may suppress behavior, but it can also lead to unintended and undesirable behaviors. A brief review of the "side effects" of punishment . . . should give us further reasons to consider non-punishment alternatives to deal with antisocial behavior. (p. 347)

The opposition to punishment is not constructed as a purely instrumental concern with recidivism rates. Although there are passages in which a shift away from the infliction of suffering and toward rewards for prosocial behaviour *is* constructed in starkly behaviouristic terms ("A multi-pronged attack involving a shifting of the rewards and costs for both criminal and prosocial behavior rather than a one-sided attack would more likely produce the desirable result.", p. 350), there are suggestions of a moral disapproval of "getting tough" (p. 330) as well:

> The United States went on a spree of adding sanctions and increasing the severity of sanctions. Limits were placed on judicial discretion with the introduction of sentencing guidelines and minimum mandatory penalties . . . .

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108 Concordant with New Zealand's Corrections Department's motto, "Reducing Re-offending" (see p. 4).

109 Reference citations that occur in the text are omitted henceforth; the Andrews & Bonta (2003) text would still be required to look them up, and they are somewhat distracting.

The state of Washington introduced a "three strikes and you're out" law in 1993, making life imprisonment mandatory for a third felony conviction. Three-strikes laws follwed in California and 24 other states . . . . Not to be outdone, a number of states made two strikes sufficient to merit life in prison without parole . . . . Discretion at the "back end" of the criminal justice system was also curtailed by the abolishment of parole boards and the introduction of "truth-in-sentencing" laws. A "penal harm movement" . . . emerged with little consideration as to whether the promise of safer communities and a fairer system was achieved. (p. 331)

The employment of the phrase, "went on a spree"—instead of, for example, "implemented a policy"—suggests that legislators were motivated by emotional factors rather than rationality. In the same vein, "not to be outdone" positions the states as competitors in a political game, rather than as pursuing justice, and most importantly the description of these policies as having been put in place "with little consideration as to whether the promise of safer communities and a fairer system was achieved" is clearly attributing aims other than justice (fairness) to the "penal harm movement". Overall the text positions the "penal harm movement" as driven by dubious political aims rather than a sincere (or at least, thoughtful) pursuit of social justice.

There is also a discussion of restorative justice—"Maori tradition" (p. 352) is acknowledged as one of the influences on the *family group conference* as a restorative approach—and the text gives voice to restorative views—*as* "the values forwarded by restorative justice advocates" (p. 352)—when it says, "Crime hurts many people, and punishing the offender does not make the hurt go away for the victim and others who have been affected by the crime. What is needed is a healing and a restoration of relationships within the community." (p. 352).

However, there are clear indications that these views are not fully endorsed by Andrews and Bonta (2003). The value of restorative justice is positioned—consistent with the general thrust of the text's approach to the issue—as largely dependent on

whether "restorative justice may be associated with significant reductions in recidivism" (p. 352). To say "We adopt the position that if restorative justice is to play more than a marginal role in the current criminal justice system, then demonstrating an effect on recidivism is vital" (p. 354) is not necessarily to *endorse* "the current criminal justice system", but other statements are notably inconsistent with restorative discourse. As exceptional (in that they involved serious crimes) examples of "restorative justice programs" (p. 353), the text notes a pair of cases in which the "offenders were on death row" (p. 353). It is a worrying construction of healthy human relationships if the "healing and restoration of relationships" is something that can be said to have taken place in a community in which some members still desire and intend to kill others.

More disturbingly, there are places in which the text seems to endorse retribution itself, as distinct from punishment that deters. "Hurts are to be punished, but not unduly so." (p. 329). "A punishment should not be overly harsh or too lenient; it must be fair and just." (p. 329). "We are faced with a need to discourage inappropriate behaviors *and express dissatisfaction with violation of law* [italics added]" (p. 350). The deterrent function—that of discouraging inappropriate behaviours—is distinguished from a "need" to "express dissatisfaction" via punishment[110]. In the introductory chapter: "PCC does not deny the retributive and restorative aspects of justice, but, as will be seen (and with a concern for reduced victimization), PCC seeks ethical, legal, decent, and humane ways of introducing human service into the justice context of sanctioning." (p. 27). After "not denying" retribution[111], the text returns to the criterion of recidivism rates as the main issue: "It is through correctional treatment that re-offending is reduced." (p. 27).

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110 That there are ways to "express dissatisfaction" without inflicting harm upon others is a suggestion that one can imagine making to violent offenders participating in an anger management programme in prison: it would be interesting to explore the impact upon the effectiveness of such programmes of their being conducted in an environment that embodies the claim that we *do* "need" to inflict harm in order to "express dissatisfaction".

111 An ambiguous statement: it can be read as a value judgement ("PCC does not deny the [validity of] retributive . . .") or, perhaps, merely as an observation of the status quo ("PCC does not deny the [existence of] retributive . . .").

I described my initial impression of the text's position on this issue as "pro-treatment, anti-punishment" (p. 5). After a closer reading however, it is better described as simply, "pro-treatment". Certainly it voices a strong disapproval of "getting tough", which it describes as having "failed miserably in achieving the goals of fairness, cost-effectiveness, and enhancing public safety" (p. 356). "In the new millennium, we are seeing a shift away from an obsession with punishing offenders to more humane approaches for dealing with offenders." (p. 356). It also voices a strong disapproval of the politics around this issue: "It is understandable that the public cannot be informed on all facts related to public policy. However, it appears inexcusable to us that so many political leaders are neither well informed nor interested in educating their constituents." (p. 333). With respect to the problem of violence, this construction of "get tough" policies—as inflicting harm with no constructive results—contributes to a professional discourse around the issue of harsh retributive criminal justice policy that positions violence in this context unfavourably.

However, this disapproval of "getting tough" is not voiced in such a way as to construct violence itself as something to be discouraged; instead, "Formalized systems of criminal justice try to follow a principle of proportionality (match level of punishment to the severity of the crime)." (p. 343). Injustice is constructed not as a result of violence (i.e. there is injustice in the deliberate infliction of suffering when there are no demonstrable positive social effects, and this injustice is compounded by considerations of race, socioeconomic status, etc.) but rather as the result of *excessive* violence (i.e. there is injustice in the deliberate infliction of "too much" suffering). In other words, we should use just the right amount of violence to satisfy the "principle of proportionality". Discourses of proportionality in punishment are nothing new: "if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth" (Lev 24:19-20). It may well be that the function of such discourse is—in extremely violent societies—to *constrain* an otherwise gratuitous retributive violence: nevertheless its articulation in a psychological text without aggression of this kind being clearly positioned as socially destructive serves to propagate rather than

challenge it. To the extent that prisons are themselves an embodiment of this discourse[112], its articulation in the text further legitimates its use in this context.

This is not to say that the Andrews and Bonta (2003) text does not make a connection between vengeance and broadly socially destructive effects: it does, in terms of an "unsettling finding" (p. 336). A study "found that murders by strangers actually increased following the resumption of executions in Oklahoma after 25 years of no executions in that state" (p. 336). According to the study cited, "the reactivation of capital punishment produces an abrupt and permanent increase in the likelihood that citizens of Oklahoma will die at the hands of a stranger" (p. 336). This increased violence is interpreted—again by the study cited—in terms of a "brutalization effect" (p. 336) in which the state's approved killings brutalise society "by legitimating lethal violence" (p. 336). In this instance the text is prepared to establish a connection between the official legitimation of *lethal* violence and an increase in such violence in the community; it does not, however, consider the official legitimation of violence generally in the same way.

Overall the text is ambivalent in its construction of punishment; it is against "harsh" punishment but in favour of "fair" punishment. While it does not clearly endorse the construction of justice as retribution[113], neither does it clearly construct it otherwise.

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112 That is to say, prisons are not therapeutic retreats to which people who behave antisocially are removed from the wider population while they are taught ways of behaving toward others with respect and non-violence: they are places to which offenders are sent as punishment (Pratt, 2002), and are taught—both by other prisoners and by the guards—that the way to address situations in which others do not comply with requests is to use force. That years of this are not only unproductive but also unpleasant is, of course, the point of prison: the more serious the crime, the longer the time, in accordance with the principle of retributive proportionality.

113 As distinct from deterrence: note that "retribution" valued for its own sake, regardless of deterrent effects, is essentially the principle of "two wrongs make a right", inasmuch as the infliction of retaliatory harm is regarded as a desirable end in itself. There are, of course, many other possible interpretations of the desire for vengeance—perhaps an inability to conceive of a subject position beyond the victimiser/victim dichotomy compels victims to victimise in order to assert an identity other than "victim"—but such explanations make room for non-violent resolutions, whereas the function of "just desserts" discourse is to *justify* such violence.

What it *is* very clear about, is that "To us, the ineffectiveness of get-tough policies reveals the need for a psychology of criminal conduct in the formulation of criminal justice policy." (p. 341). While citing empirical evidence that such things as capital punishment and longer prison sentences do not reduce crime rates—even that they slightly *increase* them (pp. 334-335)—it does not suggest that "treatment" in the interests of addressing possible future violence by the groups in prison might perhaps include advocacy and political action to address the violence that is currently being done to them. Instead, the political status quo is "challenged" by constructing it as currently embodying the undesirable "harsh" retribution of the get-tough crowd, as opposed to the desirable "fair" retribution of the reasonable populace. Thus, while this challenge makes a conscious effort to reduce violence—both in terms of offender recidivism (by arguing for treatment informed by empirical research) and legal violence (by condemning harsh punitive policy)—it also contributes to a psychology in which violence is normalised. Recalling Foucault's understanding of the transition from public torture to imprisonment, the function of this discourse is not to condemn violence: rather, it is to carefully control its action so as to manage its effects upon the actions of others. So long as it is used by the right people—and just the right amount to get the job done—violence is not noticeably problematised: it is constructed as normal human behaviour.

Sociology as Antipsychology

The most striking feature of the text at the first reading was its construction of an opposition between its own rational empiricist "PCC"[114] and an irresponsible sociological criminology bent on sabotaging its scientific progress. The introductory chapter explicitly addresses "the systematic challenges to a PCC that exist within mainstream sociological criminology" by discussing how "the rational empiricism of PCC has been under severe attack for years by criminologists who placed higher value on social theory and political ideology than on rationality and/or respect for evidence." (p. 2).

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114 Psychology of Criminal Conduct, usually abbreviated to "PCC" from page 1 of the text.

In a subsection entitled, "The death of positivism and the rise of theoreticism" (p. 32), the text describes the nature of the opposition:

> The essence of *theoreticism*, which is the alternative to a rational empiricism, is to adopt and discard knowledge insofar as it is personally rewarding to do so, and to do so without regard for evidence. (p. 33)

Of note here is the construction of "theoreticism" as *the* alternative to a rational empiricism: one is either a "rational empiricist" or a "theoreticist". With regard to who these theoreticists are, the text says:

> The search for these nonrational and nonemprical [sic] paths to knowledge is evident currently in some feminist approaches, in some transformative movements, in some aboriginal studies, in some restorative justice scholarship, and in some mainstream psychological studies of crime. (p. 33)

Even if these "nonrational" (irrational) and nonempirical approaches were not necessarily destructive, describing the "essence" of this approach as to "adopt and discard knowledge insofar as it is personally rewarding to do so . . . without regard for evidence" positions opponents of PCC's rational empiricism as irresponsible and selfish, the combination of which makes them dangerously antisocial. Sometimes this construction of the dangerous, antisocial nature of PCC's opponents is softened with humour:

> They are not evil and they are not stupid. They merely suffer from "socially constructed repression" or "motivated not seeing." Their training, attitudes, and differential association patterns make it difficult for them to recognize the evidence. (However, all but the highest-risk authoritarian among them can be rehabilitated.) (p. 438)

The phrase, "all but the highest-risk . . . can be rehabilitated" is a facetious reference to the treatment of dangerous offenders. This is particularly rhetorically effective

after "they are not evil": like the antisocial offenders, antipsychology theorists require treatment, not punishment. In other places, there is less humour in the construction of PCC's opponents as behaving offensively:

> As if the denial of human diversity apart from social location was not
> sufficiently dehumanizing, the labeling theorists . . . even denied people their
> criminal behavior. "Criminal" was not an aspect of the behavior of people but
> a status conferred upon the actor by the more powerful. Indeed, there are no
> "true criminals" beyond those created by the criminal justice system. These
> "true criminals" were allowed a criminal sense of self, but that self grew out of
> their interaction with the official control agents of the state. . . . The
> psychology underlying the bold outlines of class-based theories reveals
> contempt for human diversity and contempt for the complexity of human
> behavior. The social locationists were only minimally interested in the
> criminal behavior of individuals. They were primarily interested in promoting
> their visions and building an ideologically and professionally acceptable
> social theory. (pp. 142-143)

Of interest in this passage is the way in which labelling theory is constructed as being dehumanising: it denies people their criminal behaviour. Presumably this is to suggest that a sense of autonomous power (even a destructive "power" to offend against society) is more human than a sense of one's subjectivity being dependent upon other people and their language. Such an idea is perhaps congruent with mainstream psychology's esteem of the autonomous individual. Thus, to be "allowed" a criminal sense of self is at least to be allowed a sense of self: labelling theory—and to a much greater degree, social constructionist theory in critical psychology—threatens the sense of separate individuality so prized by the modern Western "self" with a disorienting sense of immersion in the social world. The text does not clearly specify how the denial of criminal behaviour is dehumanising, but whether we interpret it as a rejection of social subjectivity or in some other way, it is remarkable that a theory that attempts to remove the stigma of criminality from an

individual is positioned as thereby removing some of his or her humanity. "True criminals", the text suggests, *benefit* from being recognised as such.

Note also that they are *recognised*, not socially constructed: the phrase "were *allowed* [italics added] a criminal sense of self" positions this as a concession to their humanity, so that the phrase "*but* [italics added] that self grew out of their interaction with the official control agents of the state" positions the social construction of this "self" as part of the dehumanising effects of labelling theory[115]. The rational empiricist alternative is an individualistic psychology in which the causes of crime with which we are to be concerned are "cognitive-emotional states" (p. 430). As well as being congruent with positivist discourse—and with capitalist discourse—this individualistic conception of society is congruent with the discourse of retributive justice discussed earlier.

For example, if a parent realises that she or he has unconsciously *taught* a child to whine by rewarding such whining in the past, then the parent may still punish the child in order to deter the behaviour, but she or he is unlikely to do so with a vengeful fury, because the parent's social contribution to the behaviour is understood. The parent—as a human being in relationship with the child—accepts some measure of responsibility for the child's behaviour, and therefore acts to modify that behaviour, rather than to objectify and harm the child. On the other hand, if the parent imagines that the child's behaviour comes "from the child" in some autonomous sense—so that the child is an utterly separate object from the

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115 Labelling theory (Scheff, 1974)—which some researchers continue to support (e.g. Davies & Tanner, 2003)—has some overlap with social constructionist theory, inasmuch as it proposes that individuals take up the roles and identities offered them by their language communities. It contributed to the more recent *reintegrative shaming theory* (Braithwaite, 2000) in which a distinction is made between shaming and stigmatisation. Society "will have a lot of violence if violent behaviour is not shameful" (Braithwaite, 2000, p. 281) but at the same time, "there are ways of communicating the shamefulness of crime that increase crime. These are called stigmatization." (Braithwaite, 2000, p. 282). Although empirical support remains as inconclusive as for labelling theory (unsurprisingly, considering the range of possible operationalisations of the constructs "reintegrative shame" and "stigmatisation"), it often informs restorative justice scholarship (e.g. McAlinden, 2005).

parent—then the parent may experience no sense of responsibility for the child's behaviour, and an element of retributive "justice" may enter into the punishment. The same logic can be applied to criminal justice. A social psychology that constructs agency in social terms is compatible with a system of punishment that aims to deter, while an individualistic psychology that constructs agency in individual terms is compatible with a system of punishment that aims to harm[116]. In this way, a social account of agency is an articulation of social responsibility.

Later we are told again that class-based theories show contempt for *human diversity*. This is an expression that is often used in this context (as a value under threat by the opponents of PCC). It occurs in the first two sentences of the text:

> The psychology of criminal behavior outlined in this book has certain values at its base. These values include a respect for *human diversity* [italics added] and a respect for the complexity of human behavior. (p. 1)

This "respect for human diversity" is immediately defined (i.e. in the third sentence of the text):

> Respect for human diversity entails a respect for individual differences that extends well beyond the socially or biologically defined categories of ethnicity, race, gender, social class of origin, social class of achievement, or any other broader or more narrow definitions of social arrangements. (p. 1)

It is an interesting construct. "Diversity" has positive—or at least, for many, politically correct—connotations. Uniformity is associated with totalitarian social

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116 Hybrid systems that aim to deter *and* harm—like the criminal justice system of most Western societies—are likely always to be much less successful at deterrence than systems that are actually designed to deter, because human beings are not objects that respond simply to aversive and pleasurable stimuli: they are social beings who learn about themselves from the behaviour modelled to them. Thus, when people experience harm at the hands of others, it can actually encourage them to harm others (the retributive ethic itself being evidence of this). This last possibility is discussed among the "side-effects of punishment" in the text (Andrews & Bonta, 2003, pp. 347-348).

orders; diversity with tolerance and democracy. "Respect for human diversity" therefore has a positive ring to it, like "respect for human life". However, in this passage—and throughout the text—its use lends it a particular meaning: it refers to a concern with the *individual differences* that "extend well beyond" the categories ("ethnicity, race, gender, social class of origin") that the term "diversity" usually suggests that we attend to. Instead of diverse *kinds* of people, "diversity" refers to diverse *individuals*: all, however, best understood in terms of a universal "human science of criminal conduct" (p. 437).

In this way, theories that speak about criminal behaviour in terms of gender, race and so forth are positioned as *not* respecting human diversity, whereas a theory that speaks about criminal behaviour in terms of individual differences *is* respecting human diversity. Rhetorically, it is remarkable because it positions an essentialist, individualist Western psychology as respecting "human diversity" while positioning theories that try to call attention to—for example—the enormous gender and racial disparities in criminal justice statistics as *dis*respecting human diversity.

Where this individualistic bias is explicitly acknowledged, the construction of sociological criticism changes accordingly. A subsection entitled "PCC and Criminology" (p. 16) begins with the common (in the text) construction of sociology as antipsychology: "textbook or official criminology has tended to be sociological. Until very recently, this sociological bent has tended to be explicitly antipsychological." Here, the sociological focus—or rather, "bent", suggesting deviation—of criminology is positioned as antipsychological. However, "The outline and boundaries of the field of criminology have shifted somewhat over the last two decades." (p. 16). According to the text, the field has changed so that a social focus and an individual focus need not oppose each other: they are "not totally isolated from each other either rationally or empirically." (p. 16).

> The defining element of PCC is the focus on individual criminal conduct,
> whereas the defining element of a social science of crime is a focus on

aggregated crime rates. These focal concerns are not conflicting but simply different. Moreover, from a logical perspective, aggregated crime rates are direct reflections of individual differences in criminal conduct. (p. 16)

Here, it is acknowledged that an understanding of crime in terms of individual differences is an incomplete portion of a wider understanding: however, rather than conclude that the sociological "bent" may have some merit despite conflicting with PCC, it is repositioned as "not conflicting but simply different". What is more, from a "logical" perspective, aggregated crime rates are direct reflections of individual differences in criminal conduct. It is difficult to argue with this logic—the same logic by which we know that the movement of a human body is a direct reflection of the movements of the individual cells in that body—however, it is important to note that this logic, like all language, gives voice to a particular perspective: in this case, the reductionistic perspective of an individualistic positivism.

Just as we can argue from the opposite direction that the movements of the individual cells in a human body are "reflections" of the movement of the body as a whole, so we can argue that individual criminal behaviour "reflects" broad social trends. It is, as the text acknowledges, simply a matter of focus. If we are interested in why a human body is moving its limbs in a particular way—perhaps in order to strike them against another human body—we can ask questions at this level, or we can focus on the activity of muscle cells for an explanation at that level. They are indeed "not conflicting but simply different" accounts.

A radically individualistic psychology might disagree: it might claim that both the arm and the cells of which it is composed can be considered as merely responding to neural signals from the brain—a causal factor common to both levels of analysis —whereas the actions of individual human beings and those of a society collectively do not share any common causal factors. However, such a claim assumes a situation in which the individual subject is radically alienated from the world: his or her mental activity is truly autonomous, in the sense of "uncaused". Otherwise—if we acknowledge a *social* psychology, in which the psyche is caused

by social factors as well as being a social agent—the analogy holds: cells are indeed the agents of limb movement, but this does not mean that it is always best to construct our accounts in these terms. Causation is a continuous "flow"; where our language isolates agents and effects is arbitrary[117]: only the use to which we are putting the language will determine what is a "cause" and what an "effect".

Thus, if we are concerned with the reason why one individual is striking another, then explanations that give their accounts in terms of those individuals and their concerns might be more important than explanations that give their accounts in terms of cellular activity. Similarly, if we are concerned with crime and violence as social problems—rather than as the specific problems of a particular individual— then it might be better to construct our accounts in social terms. The implication that the text's "logical perspective" is somehow a *better* perspective from which to account for crime is an articulation of the reductionism that characterises much of the discourse of positivism.

The function of such discourse can be, as in the example above, to shift the focus of inquiry; to alter its terms. Miriam Van Waters—one of the first women admitted to graduate studies in psychology (Furumoto, 1998)—voiced her frustration at the dominance of reductionism. A dissertation in psychology depended upon "one's ability to dissect thoroughly one inch of reality": as a consequence of this analytic focus, "a trained psychologist measuring heartbeats in a laboratory experiment in attention, memory, fatigue etc. is rated higher in the modern academic world than the most oracular of living philosophers" (Freedman, 1996, cited in Furumoto, 1998). Reductionism aims to constrain the free play of meaning and establish components as the definitive units of analysis. By aiming to establish the "individual" as the

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117 Heisenberg (1928/1930) makes the same point in terms of where we draw the line between observer and observed (see pp. 26-27 of the present text). Language's division of the universe into discrete entities is arbitrary, whatever the nature of these entities (material, causal, temporal, etc.). One illustration of the arbitrary isolation of "causes" and "effects" from the continuous flow of causation is the familiar riddle, "Which comes first, the chicken or the egg?".

definitive unit of social analysis, positivistic psychological discourse works to limit social criticism.

The decision not to focus upon individuals is constructed as "an example of the irrationality within left-wing sociological criminology once the process of discounting PCC began." (p. 30).

> At the same time, portions of criminology and criminal justice are struggling openly with PCC and continue to advance the anti-prediction, anti-treatment, and anti-PCC themes. Some Marxist/critical criminologists, including even some "left realists," continue to assert that inequality in the distribution of social wealth and power is the major cause of crime. (p. 30)

The description of these groups as struggling "openly" with PCC works rhetorically to evoke "struggling in secret" (since this is what "open" struggle contrasts with). Thus the struggle is positioned as brazen or shameless. That the opponents of PCC ought to be *ashamed* of their position is reinforced in the following account of their efforts at "exoneration":

> The authors of this text and our students and colleagues cannot help but be amused when we are told by so many criminological scholars that they personally were never anti-prediction, anti-treatment, ideological, or blindly sociological ("not me"). The personal exoneration is often paired with the idea that . . . critics of sociological criminology . . . were exaggerating the anti-psychological bias within criminology. Indeed, those who argue for PCC are sometimes accused of being "zealots," of making use of "smoke and mirrors," or of being "cult" members. There is a long history of negative labeling when criminologists are confronted with the evidence overwhelmingly favorable to PCC. (pp. 30-31)

When "confronted with the evidence", scholars with a sociological bent are constructed as being inclined to stoop to *ad hominem* criticisms. The discussion in

the present text of reductionism functioning to obscure social criticism could probably be constructed as an example of PCC being accused of the use of "smoke". Perhaps the following criticism could be constructed as an accusation of the use of "mirrors". The text continues:

> Some critical post-modern feminist scholars go further and suggest that applications of PCC do not care enough about gender, race, ethnicity, and inequality . . . . Moreover, the construction of risk "evokes a white, middle-class male norm" and risk is "gendered and racialized." Moreover, it has been said that "nothing is a risk in itself: there is no risk in reality" and yet "anything can be a risk; it all depends on how one analyses the danger, considers the event." Moreover, "risk and the enterprise of risk management appears on the surface to be moral, efficient, objective, and non-discriminatory, but they are not" . . . . (Racist, sexist, unreal, immoral, inefficient, and discriminatory! Dear reader, do you dare to proceed any further in this text?) (p. 31)

Here, the decontextualised juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory elements of critical discourse, "mirroring" each other in a disorienting display of theoreticist irrationality, serves a similar function to that of the earlier "smoke": it deflects attention from important social criticisms, in this case by positioning the critics as foolish. Not all criticism is addressed in this way, however.

Some is flatly refuted with empirical research: the criticism that lower socioeconomic groups are over-represented in prison (as they are according to Blackburn, 1993; Findlay, 1999; Bhavnani & Davis, 2000; Welch, 2005; and data from the New Zealand Corrections Department's 2003 Census of Prison Inmates) is addressed over several pages in which gamma coefficients are examined (p. 71), meta-analyses of Pearson correlation coefficients are reviewed (p. 73), and surveys of self-reported delinquency are analysed (p. 77). It then continues:

For some readers, the introduction of so many technical terms may appear to represent an unnecessary glorification of jargon. However, by the end of this text, we think the value of these differentiations among types of covariates will be appreciated. The failure to distinguish among them has caused many problems in criminology—problems that could easily have been avoided had more careful attention been given to the details of research design. Now we can turn to theory, and then to policy and practical prediction and intervention in justice settings. (p. 99)

This passage connects the text's construction of its sociological critics to the function of this construction. The display of quantitative precision in the analysis of the relationship between the constructs "social class" and "delinquency" is positioned as too technically complex for the sociological criminologists: their "failure" to grasp the certainties of quantitative science invalidates their account. "Now we can turn to theory, and then to policy and practical prediction and intervention in justice settings": having decisively shown—to several decimal places—that there is no strong relationship between crime and social class, treatment of the individual factors that *are* strongly related to offending can proceed.

The text summarises "the current state of empirical knowledge" in a table that ranks "major and minor risk factors". The top ranking major risk factor is "antisocial/procriminal attitudes, values, beliefs" and "personal cognitive supports for crime" (p. 430). Given the construction of social location theories as irrelevant to crime—"the association between measures of inequality and individual criminal conduct is too slight to give the theories any serious consideration" (Andrews & Bonta, 2003, p. 9)—it is difficult to know what to make of the fact that these *individual* personality flaws appear so overwhelmingly often in men (whose social location as a group differs markedly from that of women). Perhaps we are to conclude that "antisocial/procriminal attitudes, values" and "beliefs" arise from testosterone or some other non-social factor associated with male gender.

Also in New Zealand, it is perplexing that these "procriminal attitudes" appear so often among Māori. Elsewhere, other indigenous peoples are similarly plagued by individuals with antisocial attitudes in their heads. Perhaps we should be thankful that PCC exists to treat these people, correcting such attitudes in accordance with the latest research, and also—if we are Caucasian males—that we have no collective responsibility for our violence, since such behaviour arises from individual cognitive states; and that we have no responsibility for the grossly disproportionate numbers of Māori in our prisons[118] either. In this world of psychologically separate individuals, each person is an island of agency and responsibility.

If the Andrews and Bonta (2003) text employs discourse that seems to describe such a world, this does not mean that psychologists who work in criminal justice settings —including the text's authors—are unquestioning agents of social control. Blackburn (1993) gives an account of the mainstream/critical distinction in this context as a *continuum*, rather than a conflict between entrenched positions. The ends of this continuum correspond to the *system professional* and the *system challenger*. "The system professional accepts offender compliance and self-control as the primary target of intervention, does not question that treatment is in the service of society, and seeks to work with the system" (Blackburn, 1993, p. 412). By contrast, "The system challenger sees offender problems in the context of social deprivation and discrimination [and] views both professional and agency goals as potentially inimical to inmates" (p. 412). However, "These roles are not mutually exclusive, and many psychologists struggle to maintain a balance between them." (p. 412). The practice of working very much toward the "system professional" end of the continuum has been called *correctionalism* (McNeill, 2004). The Andrews and Bonta (2003) text discusses the term.

In its discussion of correctionalism, the text notes that there is a "cultural relativism" (p. 41) implicit in the idea that PCC could be acting in the interests of a particular

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118 Or in our health system (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2000) and welfare system (Te Puni Kōkiri, 1998); as with the prison system, these may be indicators of socioeconomic disadvantage rather than "cultural" differences.

group, rather than the interests of all humanity. It says that, "As early as the mid-1970s, Wellford (1975) showed that cultural relativism, the possibility that crime is defined differently from one culture to the next, was not a threat to the study of individual criminal conduct." (p. 41).

> Anthropological inquiry suggests that some ethical principles are universal and that the cross-cultural differences are relatively trivial. Accepting the fact of cultural relativism at the levels of customs and traditions, Wellford concluded that universal condemnation was characteristic of those acts that have been the prime concern of criminology. (p. 41)

There could hardly be a clearer articulation of the positivist discourse of the essential and universal nature of its values: "anthropological inquiry suggests" that other cultures have the same underlying values as ours (their disproportionate numbers in our prisons only demonstrating, presumably, that they lack the maturity to live by these shared values). The only differences between cultures are the "relatively trivial" differences "at the levels of customs and traditions".

The strength of this universalism is remarkable: among the "universally condemned acts" (p. 41) that an individualistic psychology can study in general terms are such things as "violations of property rights" (p. 41). Even to position such things as "rape" and "murder" (p. 41) as universal crimes is to suggest that, for example, the rape of a woman by her husband has always been recognised as rape, and is universally recognised as such, or that the murder of civilians by dropping bombs on them in times of war has always been recognised as murder, and is universally recognised as such. The notion of "universally condemned acts" fits only with the discourse of an extreme ethnocentric positivism[119].

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119 Even a "radical" belief in the existence of an objective reality is preferred over any hint of subjectivity: "Given the choice of choosing causal variables through consideration of evidence as opposed to professional and ideological interests, rational empiricism within PCC prefers even a radical empiricism over theoreticism." (p. 160).

Having addressed the issue of cultural relativism, the issue of "correctionalism" seems also to have been addressed. The text acknowledges its own unfavourable position in critical discourse around "correctionalism" when it says, ironically, "We will be looking well beyond inequality in the distribution of property and privilege in the search for an understanding of variations in criminal behavior": "Readers are warned that they are at risk of catching the disease of 'correctionalism' should they proceed any further." (p. 44).

However, "correctionalism" appears again, at the text's conclusion. The final paragraph reads:

> Finally, perhaps (as the conflict/Marxist theorists claimed), a psychology of crime does inevitably lead to "correctionalism." But we ask: What is wrong with working toward increased knowledge that may speak to reduced harm to self and others?

The theme of conflict with sociological theorists—so prominent throughout the text —is evident in its closing. After many pages of text positioning sociological critics of PCC as antipsychological, irrational, ideological, incompetent, dehumanising, and motivated by selfish personal goals, it is an extraordinary change of rhetorical style to make a concession—as a closing remark—that perhaps, in addition to all these things, the critical theorists were *right*! While it does not function to position the "antipsychological" end of the dichotomy as unfavourably as before, it is however consistent with other passages that work to position the text favourably. It has two rhetorical functions.

Firstly, it presents the text's position as more reasonable, by softening its dramatic edge—in which, for example, its critics are engaged in "knowledge destruction" (p. 267)—by leaving the reader with a gentler last impression. PCC is positioned as an account that does take into consideration—and more than just a hostile "consideration"—the accounts of other communities. Secondly, it works to set up the rhetorical question that closes the text. Its final sentence is an invitation to the

reader to take the "side" of PCC: "What is wrong with working toward increased knowledge that may speak to reduced harm to self and others?". It invites the response, "Nothing!", since "working toward increased knowledge that may speak to reduced harm to self and others" is hardly something that a reasonable person would criticise. It is therefore also an invitation for the reader to take a side in the debate: specifically, the side of "rational empiricism" against the "theoreticism" of sociological criminology.

The same invitation is given in a similar, stronger version of this rhetorical question earlier in the text. Opening the final chapter with, "There exists now an empirically defensible general psychology of criminal conduct (PCC) that is of practical value in prevention, judicial processing, and corrections" (p. 423), it describes the general applicability of PCC, and then continues:

> Moreover, it should speak to policy advisors, policymakers, and legislators who must come to see that respect for human diversity, human service, and human science is not just a relic of a positivistic past (as asserted by critical/Marxist criminology). Politically, PCC asks, who is against promoting an understanding of the criminal behavior of individuals that may contribute to reduced victimization and reduced costs of public protection? (p. 423)

Who indeed? "Scoundrels!" is an answer that seems to fit the question: "who is against promoting an understanding of the criminal behaviour of individuals that may contribute to reduced victimisation and reduced costs of public protection?" reads very much like, "who is against reduced vicitimisation and reduced costs of public protection?". They are, however, two very different questions.

We can be sure that there were differences between the individuals who supervised the Nazi concentration camps. No doubt some were sadists, others were "just following orders", and so on. No doubt also that psychology would gain from the study of these individual differences between Nazis. But to elevate such study to the dominant academic voice in the context of discussion of the camps, and ignore

or even vilify those voices who claimed that the entire social phenomenon of Naziism had to be addressed, would be a strange thing to do. It is something that would only make sense in a social context in which the violence of the Nazi regime was something to which we were resigned: an unfortunate but "empirically evident" reality, the parameters of which we must move within, rather than challenge.

There are glaringly obvious demographics of crime—a huge gender disparity, grossly disproportionate numbers of imprisoned ethnic minorities, and so on—that demand our attention. To claim that an individualistic psychology of criminal conduct is more worthy of study than an exploration of the reasons for these demographics is an expression of a will not to address our social problems in any way that might seriously upset the status quo.

I would like to conclude my analysis—a long response to the text—by responding directly to the text's rhetorical question. "What is wrong with working toward increased knowledge that may speak to reduced harm to self and others?".

My reply is that there may be a great deal wrong with this work, if it distracts us from knowledge and action that may "speak to" far greater reduction in harm to "self and others". Correctionalism amputates the individual criminal from the social context of which he or she is a part, and by locating the problem in the individual, it enables our social institutions to pretend to address the problem of crime by treating these problematic individuals. Violence and the discourses that enable violence are all around us—in our child-rearing practices, our constructions of gender, our treatment of colonised peoples, our policing of sexual norms, our international politics, our justice systems, our religions, our film and television heroes—and only violence is served by our pretending otherwise.

Discussion

The opposition between critical and mainstream discourse discussed in the present text is—like its analogue in Andrews and Bonta (2003)—not merely an articulation of disparate theoretical accounts, but an articulation of tensions between differing sets of practices. Inevitably, the debate is infused with personal interests of various kinds.

Andrews and Bonta's (2003) construction of critical theorists as putting their personal and professional goals before responsible scholarship is, of course, mirrored by similar constructions of the mainstream by critical commentators; not only in the context of criminal justice, but in psychology generally. Kirk and Kutchins (1992), in their account of the DSM[120] and its dominance of the mainstream, note that "major institutions and professional associations have a stake in the conventional view" (p. 16). To challenge the assumptions of mainstream psychology is to challenge the professional livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people[121]. Although they do so in far smaller numbers, critical psychologists also build careers upon their theoretical assumptions, and their concerns with social justice can seldom be neatly untangled from personal and professional interests. Personal investments in the discourses with which they work are therefore common to mainstream and critical psychologists. They are also likely to have in common a sincere desire to be acting in the interests of their communities, and behaving in ways that are ethical and socially useful.

I think it is important to acknowledge—given the critical stance of the present study —that the few psychologists I have met who work or have worked as mainstream

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120 The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which for the Kirk & Kutchins (1992) text was DSM-III. Kirk & Kutchins (1992, p. 1) describe the DSM as "The New Bible"; certainly for clinical psychology, the DSM is the principal text.

121 The American Psychological Association alone has more than 150,000 professional members (American Psychological Association, 2005).

practitioners in criminal justice settings (including the lecturer who introduced me
to the Andrews & Bonta text) have been intelligent, thoughtful, well-informed,
pleasant and sincere. They undoubtedly enrich and contribute positively to the lives
of the people with whom they work. Discourse exceeds us; I know that the
language I use with the best intentions in one context may be harmful in another
context: however hard I work to control the effects of the discourse I employ, the
complexity of the social world and the interpretive freedom of individuals and
communities ensures that there will be effects I cannot predict. What I can do is
listen when representatives of other communities give accounts of these effects, and
be sensitive to these accounts when producing my own.

Andrews and Bonta (2003) advise people working in criminal justice settings not to
"become trapped in arguments with primary prevention advocates who believe that
a society-wide focus on unemployment, sexism or racism will eliminate crime. Be
against inequality, but recognize the value of direct service." (p 438). In an
appropriate discursive context, this is good advice.

There is a familiar metaphor that describes the neglect of primary prevention as
"putting an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff". This positions direct service as a
foolish enterprise: rather than waiting for casualties, efforts and resources should be
put into "building a fence at the top of the cliff", thus removing the need for the
ambulance. However—as Andrews and Bonta (2003) suggest—the fence has not yet
been completed, and until it is, someone has to tend to the shattered people who
have already fallen through the gaps.

Critical scholars might argue that this metaphor could be improved by the addition
of the ambulance crew's employers at the top of the cliff, pushing people off it, and
mainstream scholars might claim that surveying the carnage from the high moral
ground is a lot easier than picking up the pieces, let alone trying to put them back
together. The important point, however, is that the ambulance crews and the fence
builders are all trying to help as best they can from their particular positions. What
is not helpful to anyone is a mud-slinging match, the upward-flying mud

accompanied by jeers at the fence-builders' misguided idealism, the downward flying mud accompanied by fenceposts. Unfortunately, it is difficult to talk about the dangers of a particular approach without simultaneously positioning its advocates as dangerous.

The "antipsychology" theme in the Andrews and Bonta (2003) text positions critical scholarship negatively. The general thrust of this criticism is that critical scholars ignore the empirical evidence concerning "what works". There is, however, a very pronounced leaning toward the status quo in such arguments: the construction of the social world as being "out there" so that we can build psychological theories and treatments upon the evidence of its "nature" is implicitly a denial that the social world can be significantly *changed*. More importantly, it is a denial that we *do* change the social world every time we act in it, and that we might therefore have cause to consider—when our "solutions" have, after many years of continual application, failed to ease the problems—if perhaps the solutions are contributing to the problems they claim to solve. Perhaps the people "falling" over the cliff are trying to land on certain people at the base of it. Perhaps the whole town should just pack up and move to level ground.

Of course, if violence is the cliff, moving away from it is easier said than done. Prilleltensky and Fox (1997, p. 12) cite a United States judge as saying to a group of psychologists working in prisons, "In considering our motives for offering you a role, I think you would do well to consider how much less expensive it is to hire a thousand psychologists than to make even a minuscule change in the social and economic structure." There is something approaching cynicism in this construction of injustice as so disproportionate to resources that we are better to put them all into direct service than waste them on primary prevention. Discourses that contribute to violence can be contested: resourcing this may be far less costly, in the long run, than continually resourcing attempts to address the destructive effects of violence.

The cliff metaphor as described above works to position prisons as "ambulances". Perhaps the best cliff metaphor for the criminal justice system would be one in

which a criminal tosses someone over the cliff, and is then thrown over himself or herself as an action of "justice" that demonstrates to everyone—including the next generation of criminals who are watching—the legitimacy of tossing people over cliffs. If prisons really were intended to rehabilitate rather than to punish, the effect on convicted offenders might be insignificant next to the effect on potential future offenders of witnessing their community's intolerance of violence. A parent who gives his or her child a beating for being violent is not demonstrating an intolerance of violence: on the contrary, she or he is modelling the use of violence as a legitimate option in situations where such violence may be instrumental to achieving some aim. Discourses and other social practices that legitimate violence are contributing to the problem of violence, even when they position themselves as combatting it.

A "respect for human diversity" is important; as the Andrews and Bonta (2003) text says, but not as the surrounding discourse constructs it. To consider two individual prisoners' offending in the same cognitive behavioural terms when one is from a heavily imprisoned population of indigenous people is not "respect for human diversity". The same is true—on an even greater scale—for theories of crime that "respect" human diversity by ignoring gender. No doubt psychologies of individual difference are useful: especially for work with individuals. The effective modification of individual behaviour, however, needs to be guided by an intelligent account of the relationship of individual subjectivities to the social whole. If psychology is to inform social policy and practices, it must come to terms with sociological theory: if it cannot do so, it might be better to leave society to the sociologists. Sociology is only "antipsychology" when psychology forgets that one cannot study an individual without studying society, any more than one can study a word without studying the language.

Einstein (1912/2003, p. 11) said, "I do not know with what weapons World War 3 will be fought, but World War 4 will be fought with sticks and stones." At least since the invention of nuclear weapons, our own violence toward each other has been not only the principal cause of suffering in the world, but also a major threat to

our continued existence in it. Discourse that contributes to violence is not trivial. If the enormous range and depth of theoretical developments that have grown from the turn to language are too much for the mainstream to accommodate, it could at least acknowledge that its discourse is important, and take care to ensure that people are at all times treated—in language as well as in person—with dignity, compassion and respect.

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