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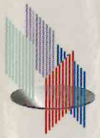

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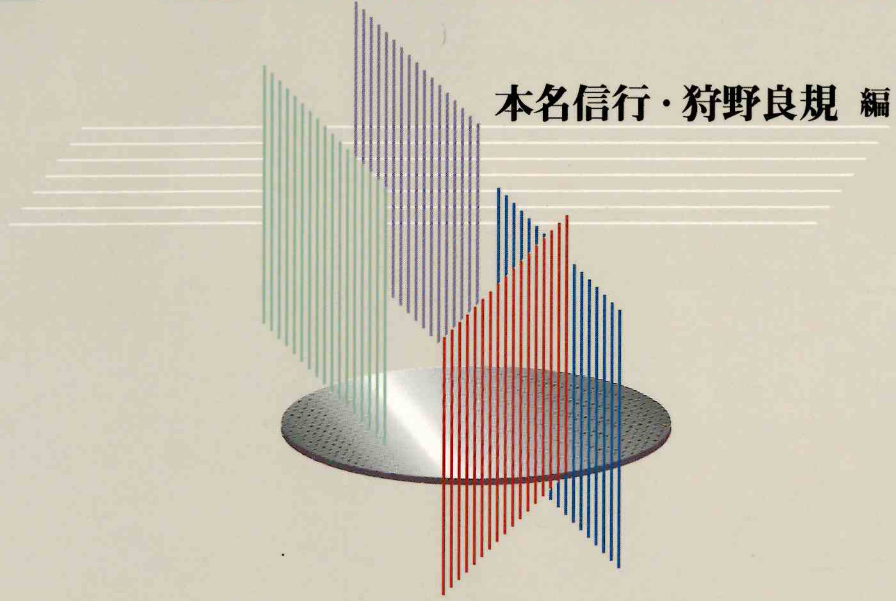
21世紀の国際コミュニケーション

International Communication in the 21st Century

——言語・文化論の研究課題と教育方法



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Towards a Constructivist Theory of Intercultural Dialogue

Richard Evanoff

Given the fact that different cultures think about and act in the world in different ways, how can dialogue across cultures be effectively conducted? This paper attempts to develop a constructivist theory of intercultural dialogue which in principle could be applied to any number of practical areas, including international political and business negotiations, debates on global environmental issues, problems connected with global economics and development, interpersonal interactions across cultures (including, for example, international marriages), international educational and cultural exchanges, interreligious dialogue, etc. The theory also hopes to inform current cross-cultural training practices and the development of specific communication skills related to making presentations at international gatherings, participating in international negotiations, engaging in cross-cultural conflict resolution, and so forth.

Essentials of constructivism

Constructivism is a philosophical outlook which informs a variety of specific disciplines in the social sciences, including social psychology (Gergen 1985a, 1985b; Burr 1995), cognitive psychology (Neisser 1976; Best 1995; Eysenck and Keane 1995), developmental psychology (Piaget 1967, 1970, 1971, 1982; Feffer 1988), personal construct psychology (Kelly 1963, 1969; Bonarious, Holland, and Rosenberg 1981; Adams-Webber and Mancuso 1983), communication theory (O'Keefe 1975; Delia 1977; Applegate and Sypher 1988), anthropology (Nencel 1991; Descola 1996), sociological theory (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Giddens 1984, 1991; Spector and Kitsuse 1987; Sarbin and Kitsuse 1994), and the sociology of science (Barnes 1974; Bloor 1976; Knorr-Cetina 1981; Cole 1992). It has also had an influence in the philosophy of mathematics (Brouwer 1964; Troelstra and Dalen 1988), the philosophy of science (Fraassen 1980; Hesse 1980), epistemology (Goodman 1978; Kitchener 1986; Smith 1993), feminist epistemology (Haraway 1988; Harding 1991), the philosophy of mind (Coulter 1979), ethics (Kohlberg 1981, 1984), and political philosophy (Rawls 1971, 1996; Habermas 1979, 1989, 1993). As a philosophical position constructivism has affinities with, and is informed by, both classical pragmatism (James 1910; Dewey 1910, 1929a, 1929b; Mead 1934, 1938) and various forms of post-Quinean neo-pragmatism (Quine 1960; Rorty 1991; Putnam 1995). To date, however, no unified constructivist theory has been proposed which would bring together all the disparate viewpoints currently being discussed under its banner. The most systematic position to be worked out to date is Glasersfeld's "radical constructivism" (1984, 1995), which advances a somewhat idealistic interpretation of Piaget and makes little effort to accommodate the views of social constructionists.

A key tenant of the constructivist outlook is that reality itself does not determine how the world should be thought about or acted in. In the words of Hollis and Lukes, "Experience underdetermines what it is rational to believe about the world: schemes of concepts provide grids on which to base belief" (1982, 7). While there are idealistic interpretations of constructivism (see, for example, Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter 1995) which hold that all reality is constructed by the human mind, the version defended here is consistent with what Searle (1995, 153) calls "external realism," namely the ontological position that there is a reality which exists independently of human consciousness. Parker (1992, chap. 2) makes a useful distinction between (1) an ontological realm which provides the material basis of thought; (2) an epistemological realm which conceptualizes and invests phenomena with meaning; and (3) a moral/political realm in which performative discourse constructs entirely new phenomena.

While it can be accepted that people everywhere, regardless of their mental dispositions or cultural backgrounds, interact with the same external reality, how the world is construed can differ both from individual to individual and from culture to culture. Kelly (1963, 14–15), the originator of personal construct psychology, developed a position he called "constructive alternativism" which suggests that there are in principle an infinite variety of ways in which the world can be construed. In Kelly's view it is impossible for any single set of constructs to account for the whole. Hence there can be no absolute or final conception of the universe; the best we can hope for are approximations. Constructs are cognitive maps or tools which help us to understand and grasp reality; they are not, however, the reality itself. While the world can be construed in different ways, some construals may nonetheless be better than others; the chief criteria is not whether they are "true" but rather their "predictive efficiency" and how well they help us to get along in the world.

Walzer contends, in a spirit reminiscent of Dewey's, that individuals do not approach objects as detached observers but rather with specific cognitive concerns (or interests) and prior conceptual schemes which are acquired both through direct experience and through socially mediated interaction with the world. Constructs are not simply arbitrary, however, but are constrained by how things actually stand in the world.

> The knowing subject shapes the object, but he cannot shape it however he likes; he cannot just decide that a table, say, has a circular or a square shape without reference to the table.... Obviously a table cannot be constructed as an intercontinental ballistics missile. But it can become a desk, a workbench, a butcher's block, or an altar, and each of these can take on meanings to which the 'mere' table gives us no positive clue (1993, 166).

It is conceivable that a table could in fact be construed as an intercontinental ballistics missile on occassion (as a joke or by a child at play), but to help Walzer make his point it can be agreed that it would not make much sense to place tables in silos as part of a national defense policy. The constructivist position discounts the essentialist view, however, that it makes sense to ask what the object designated by the terms "table," "desk," "workbench," "butcher's block," or "altar" *really* is. The phenomemon itself does not change according to how it is labeled, but our understanding of the phenomenon does indeed change depending on how it is cognitively construed. In the constructivist view meaning does not arise out of phenomena itself but rather must be negotiated through a process of dialogue aimed at reaching intersubjective agreement on how language should be used in any given situation.

The constructivist approach to communication can be contrasted with traditional linear theories. Linear theories of communication posit a relatively uncomplicated process in which meanings are (1) encoded by a sender, (2) sent through a channel as a message, and (3) decoded by a receiver (Bormann 1980, 31). Assuming that the message is not distorted by "noise" impacting upon the channel, the message that the receiver receives is thought to be exactly the same as the message the sender sent. "Noise" occurs when the attention of the receiver is directed not towards the message itself but rather towards the manner in which the message is conveyed. Examples include cultural differences related to paralanguage (e.g., tone, stress, and speed), kinesics (e.g., postures and body language), occulistics (e.g., degree and quality of eye contact), proxemics (e.g., physical distance between sender and receiver), haptics (e.g., amount of touching and physical contact), and so on. All of these areas are well-studied in the field of intercultural communication, and indeed pose problems which must be successfully resolved if adequate communication is to take place.

The linear model nonetheless assumes that once "noise" has been eliminated it is possible for the intended meaning of the sender to be received by the receiver in a pure and undistorted form. The linear model has been challenged by constructivist communication theorists who suggest that cultural influences can have an impact not only on communication channels but also on the messages themselves. Applegate and Sypher (1988), for example, contend that cultural influences can affect the logic of communication, the goals and strategic organization of action, and even cognitive schemes. Condon and Yousef (1975) similarly hold that there can be cross-cultural variances with regard to both "epistemic structures" (how arguments are constructed) and rhetorical patterns (how arguments are presented).

Barnlund has proposed a transactional model of communication which contends that meanings are not transmitted unproblematically between sender and receiver but rather must be negotiated. Barnlund sees communication essentially as an evolutionary process which invests the world with significance and order in order to enable individuals to act more effectively in it. Meaning, in Barnlund's words, "...is something 'invented,' 'assigned,' 'given,' rather that something 'received'" (1970, 7). Language enables individuals to express their intentions, but the meaning of any given word, phrase, or statement is never fixed. Communication is inherently ambiguous, and the goal of communication is to reduce uncertainty. Barnlund offers the case of a doctor asking a man in the waiting room, "How are you?" The meaning of the doctor's question is not apparent from the words themselves. The doctor may intend the question to be simply a greeting or it may be a genuine inquiry about the man's health. It can be noted that the problems of interpretation are exasperated when the communicators have different cultural assumptions. An American asking "What time is supper?" may construe the question simply as a neutral request for information. If the person cooking supper is Japanese, however, the question could easily be interpreted negatively to mean, "Why isn't supper ready yet?"

In the transactional view meaning does not reside in language itself but rather in the intentions of the speakers. If the speaker's intentions are not clear, the receiver must ask the speaker to clarify his meaning. The process, according to Barnlund, is one of constant feedback in which the responses of the receiver indicate whether the intended meaning of the sender has in fact been received. Scollon and Scollon write, "The meanings we exchange by speaking and by writing are not given in the words and sentences alone but are also constructed partly out of what our listeners and our readers interpret them to mean. To put this quite another way, meaning in language is jointly constructed by the participants in communication" (1995, 6). *Perfect* communication may be impossible; the receiver may never understand the message in exactly the same way that the sender does. But communication is *adequate* when enough of the intended message has gotten through to enable an effective response on the part of the receiver. The constructivist view of communication can thus be seen as adopting an essentially pragmatic criterion of adequacy.

Constructs can be either descriptive or evaluative. In the constructivist view facts and values can therefore be treated in much the same way. When I construe the bowl of fruit before me as "peaches," the construct is descriptive. When I construe the bowl of fruit before me as "delicious," the construct is evaluative. While Kelly never developed an explicit ethical position, the implication of constructive alternativism is that values, as much as facts, can be regarded as constructs. Husain comments,

> For Kelly, human cognitive activity is continuous throughout its entire range, from basic categorization up to moral evaluation. All human attempts to construe, to interpret, make sense, and evaluate are cognitive; all are empirical; all are personal; all make use of constructs, and all constructs are of the same type and hence continuous with one another.... [W]hat philosophy regards as falling into the domain of ethics is indeed cognitive and hence belongs to epistemology. Valuations and evaluations, whether in emotive or moral terms, serve an important cognitive function. An ought is a way of understanding an is (1983, 13–14).

Goodnow similarly writes, "In the course of socialization...we acquire not only interpretive frameworks—allowing us to assign meanings—but also evaluative frameworks, allowing us to categorize performances and areas of knowledge as 'better' or 'poorer' in a variety of ways" (1990, 265).

Putnam (1993) argues that sentences such as "Caligula was a mad tyrant" are simultaneously descriptive statements and value judgements. Value judgements can be regarded as cognitive in much the same way that factual judgements are. It can be agreed with Putnam, however, that value judgements, as much as descriptive statements, "...cannot be absolute. The world, as it is in itself, is *cold*. Values (like colours) are projected on to the world, not discovered in it" (147). In the constructivist view values are not in the world, but arise out of interaction with the world. The criteria for sorting phenomena into evaluative categories are also constructed. Fruit can just as easily be sorted evaluatively into the categories "good" and "bad" (based on, say, the degree of ripeness or rottenness) as it can be sorted conceptually into "apples," "bananas," and "oranges" (based on, say, color, size, and shape). The criteria is never absolute, of course, but is rather constructed in accordance with specific purposes. A fruit vendor may define "good" apples as ones that are spotless, whereas spotted apples may be considered "good" by someone making applesauce. Goodness, therefore, is not, as moral realists such as Moore (1971) claim, an intrinsic property of objects. It is rather dependent on humanly constructed criteria. Once a specific criteria has been decided upon, however, the act of evaluating a given phenomenon is just as cognitive as the act of describing it.

The view that all criteria is itself constructed is consistent with

Putnam's position:

> Standards and practices, pragmatists have always insisted, must be developed together and constantly revised by a process of delicate mutual adjustment. The standards by which we judge and compare our moral images are themselves creations as much as the moral images (1987, 79).

Nonetheless, even though both the criteria and the images are constructs and not what Putnam calls "The Universe's Own Moral Truths," this does not mean they are arbitrary. Knives, to use Putnam's own example, are literally human creations. Even though there are a variety of different ways in which knives can be designed, they must still meet certain functional requirements if they are to be useful. Putnam writes, "...we don't make them according to Nature's Own Blueprint, nor is there always one design which is forced upon all designers by Natural Law (when we make knives, we don't follow The Universe's Own Design for a Knife), but it doesn't follow that the knives we make don't satisfy real needs, and knives may certainly be better or worse" (Putnam 1987, 78; *cf*. [Ruth Anna] Putnam 1985). By extension, even though there can be a variety of different ways in which societies and cultures are "designed," social and cultural arrangements must nonetheless meet certain functional requirements if they are to be viable.

In the constructivist view a notion of viability replaces a notion of truth. The criterion for deciding which constructs are viable is not how well the constructs correspond to reality, but rather how well they help individuals and cultures to adapt themselves to the world. While we cannot expect our concepts to give us a completely accurate representation of the world, they must nonetheless be of sufficient adequacy to enable us to interact successfully with the world. Glasersfeld writes:

> Actions, concepts, and conceptual operations are viable if they fit the purposive or descriptive contexts in which we use them. Thus, in the constructivist way of thinking, the concept of viability in the domain of experience, takes the place of the traditional philosopher's concept of Truth, that was to indicate a "correct" representation of reality (1995, 14).

The concept of viability is linked to the notion shared by both pragmatists and evolutionary epistemologists (Campbell 1974, 1975) that concepts can have adaptive significance. James, for example, sees all theories as "...mental modes of *adaptation* to reality, rather than revelations or gnostic answers to some divinely instituted world enigma" (1910, 194). Cognition is not a matter of ahistorical reasoning processes, but rather a biological function which enables organisms to better adapt themselves to their environments; individuals do not passively experience the world but actively engage themselves in it, a perspective shared by Dewey (1929b, 3-24) in his arguments against a "spectator theory of knowledge."

This view does not imply that concepts are *truer* simply because they offer the organism greater adaptability. Constructs which are false may nonetheless prove to be "life-affirming" (Nietzsche 1968a, 201). In this view the concepts of modern industrial societies founded on scientific knowledge and regarded as "true" do not necessarily offer greater adaptability to our natural environments than the concepts of "primitive" societies founded on folk knowledge and myth, and regarded (from our scientific viewpoint) as "false." Moreover, whatever proves viable at a particular moment in evolutionary time does not indicate that it is the best possible adaptation or that it will hold under changing circumstances. Campbell writes, "...the wisdom produced by evolutionary processes (biological or social) is wisdom about past worlds. If there are grounds for believing that the relevant aspects of those worlds have changed, past adaptations may now be judged to be maladaptive" (1975, 1104). In light of our current environmental crisis it could be argued that modern industrial societies are unsustainable over the long term and in fact maladaptive.

The constructive alternative

The constructivist approach can be distinguished from both modern realism and postmodern idealism. The realist position contends that language gives us an accurate representation of reality. The early Wittgenstein's (1961) "picture theory of language" argued that it is possible for there to be an isomorphic relationship between states of affairs in the world and the language we use to describe them. In other words, there can in principle be one true way of describing the world. This position accords with the Enlightenment/modernist view that science is the sole method by which true knowledge about the world can be arrived at. Cultures which do not embrace Western science—those which, for example, construct meaning systems on the basis of myth or religion—are simply in error. Progress consists of bringing such "regressive" cultures into the fold of modern science. This perspective is premised on a universalistic view of truth which frequently presumes the historic superiority of Western culture. Whereas earlier forms of cultural imperialism sought to indoctrinate non-Western cultures into the dominant religion and morality of the West, more recent forms attempt to universalize Western values through the creation of a "global market" based on capitalism and a "new world order" based on representative forms of liberal democracy. Global communication systems create a "global village" (McLuhan 1960, 1964) in which people across cultures increasingly share the same thoughts and values. Social critics such as Peter Berg (1981) contend that we are witnessing the inception of a "global monoculture" based on a homogenizing consumerism.

Postmodernism can be largely understood as a reaction against such cultural homogenization. Wittgenstein (1958) eventually abandoned his "picture theory of language" in favor of the view that the meaning of language consists not in its supposed ability to make reference to objective phenomena but rather in how it is actually used. Suppose, for example, that someone says on a rainy day, "What fine weather we're having!" The remark is not a description of the actual state of affairs; rather it is a sarcastic comment that intentionally describes the opposite state of affairs. Can it be concluded, however, that the remark has no meaning simply because it does not correspond to objective reality? Obviously not. The later Wittgenstein contended that language is organized into discourses he labeled "language games" and that these discourses arise not out of an attempt to give a true description of the world but rather out of specific "forms of life" that address practical concerns.

Wittgenstein's work was used by anthropologists such as Winch (1958, 1979) to defend a strong version of cultural relativism. Winch contended that if native tribes such as the Azande believe that witchcraft is true, then within the framework of their particular worldview witches must in fact exist. It is wrong for Western anthropologists to impose their particular views of what is true and false, right and wrong, real and unreal on cultures which use conceptual schemes different from their own. Lyotard, also following the later Wittgenstein, argued that since discourses arise out of particular forms of life it is wrong to privilege one discourse over another. To say, for example, that science is closer to the truth than mythology is on a par with saying that chess is closer to the truth than checkers (Lyotard and Thébaud 1985, 60–61). Discourses which purport to be universal—"metanarratives" in Lyotard's terminology—are totalizing. They presume to embrace final, absolute truth and therefore seek to annihilate all dissenting opinions. Any attempt to arrive at a universal consensus is inherently oppressive because it does "...violence to the heterogeneity of language games" (Lyotard 1979, xxv). Metanarratives should accordingly be regarded with incredulity.

The implication of the postmodern position for intercultural communication is that since we all live in "different worlds" which are culturally constituted, it is impossible for there to be any universal claims regarding knowledge, values, or ethics. Postmodernism posits a radical relativism in which even the possibility of dialogue on such matters is denied. Postmodernism's cultural orientation is away from universalism towards particularism, while its political orientation is away from internationalism towards parochialism. At its most extreme postmodernism degenerates into racial, nationalist, and religious separatism.

In the postmodern view language does not reflect an external reality but rather calls that reality into being. Postmodernists give a one-sided emphasis to what, in Austins (1962) terms, would be called "performative" rather than "constative" (i.e., descriptive) uses of language. The sentence "You are now man and wife," for example, can be used to describe an actual state of affairs, i.e., the state of affairs in which a man and a woman are in fact married to each other, or it can be used in the context of a wedding ceremony to actually bring that state of affairs into being. The man and woman are in fact not married until the officiator has pronounced the words. It is the act of pronouncing the words which *makes* the marriage a reality. In this instance language does not describe but rather constitutes reality. A significant amount of social reality is constructed in similar fashion. The authority of a leader or the value of money is not intrinsic to either the person or the object but rather constructed on the basis of widely shared social meanings.

Austin by no means believed that everything normally regarded as "real" is socially constructed; this, nonetheless, is the idealistic conclusion that has been reached by some social constructionists. Sociologists who follow the view of Spector and Kitsuse (1987) that the aim of sociology is not to study the world as it is but rather the world as it is interpreted by various social groups may conclude, for example, that environmental problems as such do not really exist. All that can be discussed

sociologically are the claims of environmentalists that environmental problems are "real" vs. the claims of non-environmentalists that they are "not real." There are no objective means for deciding which side is right (*cf*. Hannigan 1995). This approach has its roots in Weber's *Verstehen* method of sociology, which holds that sociology should study not the ultimate meanings of actions but rather only how social actors define those meanings. The methodological adequacy of recent social constructionist approaches is increasingly being attacked, however, by writers such as Best (1993) who contend that sociology should adopt a more moderate, realist approach which acknowledges the role that objective circumstances play in defining social problems.

The idealist perspective comes out most strongly in poststructuralist philosophers, who simply draw out and make manifest the implicit idealism of structuralism. Saussure (1986), who pioneered the structuralist approach in linguistics, contended that language can be described solely in terms of differences between signifiers, i.e., the actual words and phrases which make up a language. Signifiers refer not to objects or states of affairs in the world (what Saussure called "referents") but rather to concepts and thoughts (what Saussure called the "signified"). Once referents are omitted, language can be seen as constituting reality, in the sense that it creates its own structures of thought which are not related to external events. Structuralism has had an enormous influence in both literary theory and anthropology. Texts can be analyzed solely in terms of the structure of their language without referring to any external reality. In anthropology (*cf*. Lévy-Strauss 1977) structuralism attempted to discern underlying cultural patterns while bracketing out any inquiry into their ultimate truth or adaptive adequacy.

The move from structuralism to poststructuralism occurred when Derrida (1976, 1982) pointed out that if words can be defined and distinguished only in relation to other words and not in relation to referents (the concept of *différance*), meaning can be no more grounded in the structure of language than it can be grounded in a theory of reference. Words can be defined only in relation to other words in an unending chain which has no ultimate starting point or center. There can be, then, no final meaning of any given text but merely differing interpretations of what the text might mean. A similar view had been expressed earlier by the poet Valéry: "... [T]here is no true meaning of a text. No author's authority. Whatever he may have wanted to say, he wrote what he wrote. Once published, a text is like an implement that everyone can use as he chooses and according to his means..." (quoted in Glasersfeld 1995, 49). Since language is nothing more than the interplay of signifiers, it is impossible to verify the ultimate truth of any given statement. All that we have are varying interpretations. Arguments over conflicting interpretations cannot be settled by appealing to the "evidence" because there is no reality outside of the interpretations themselves, i.e., there is no reality outside the text (*cf.* Barthes 1967).

The constructivist position differs from both the modernist and the postmodernist perspectives. Modernism fails to provide an adequate framework for cross-cultural dialogue because it assumes that everyone in the world should adopt the same ideas and values; "dialogue" is little more than the attempt to persuade (or at worst force) others to accept one's own standards of truth, goodness, and beauty. If someone thinks that they have already discovered universal truth, what is the point of discussion? Postmodernism fails to provide an adequate framework for cross-cultural dialogue because it assumes that discourses are "incommensurable" across cultures. You have your way of thinking and I have mine, and there is no method for deciding whose way of thinking is better. The best that we can do is to "respect each other's differences."

There are at least two problems with this latter view. First, cultural relativism can itself be an inherently reactionary and ethnocentric notion. Relativism implies the tyrannical notion that "...the code of any culture really does create moral obligations for its members, that we really *are* obligated by the code of culture—*whatever it may be*" (Cook 1978, 296). The ultimate effect of cultural relativism is to cut off debate both within and between cultures as to whether or not the norms actually adopted by a particular culture are worth endorsing. The status quo cannot be challenged and existing forms of power and authority are thereby legitimated. Cultural relativism ultimately absolves us from any responsibility to act in solidarity with victims in other cultures who suffer from oppression. Midgley (1988, 587) criticizes the "moral isolationism" that occurs when we think that the norms of another culture cannot be criticized. Midgley makes a distinction between crude opinions about another culture, based on an inadequate understanding of it, and considered opinions which presuppose a fairly high degree of familiarity with it. The solution is not, of course, for outsiders to attempt to *impose* their values on another culture (since this merely substitutes one set of culturally derived norms for another), but rather to encourage active reflection among everyone concerned on the basic questions of what should be done and why.

A second problem with cultural relativism is that it effectively precludes the possibility that persons from cultures with "incommensurable" ways of thinking can ever work together on mutual problems. (Global environmental problems and equity of resource consumption between North and South provide examples of issues which can only be resolved through intercultural dialogue; see Evanoff 1998.) If each culture has its own norms, with nothing in common between them, there is no basis for joint action, and hence no possibility for resolving shared problems. Such a view can only be maintained in the context of complete cultural isolation, however. When two or more cultures come into contact with each other a "contextual" approach which simply "respects cultural differences" is no longer adequate. Rather an entirely new context is created, i.e., one of cross-cultural interaction, in which the norms which will govern the relationships between the respective cultures, since they do not already exist, must be created. In Dower's words, "Where the lines of cause and effect run across nation-states, so do the lines of moral responsibility" (1984, 20).

The success of the dialogue process can be determined by whether the problems are eventually resolved to the satisfaction of the interacting groups or not. Sufficient convergence of opinion is necessary to insure that joint action can be taken to solve a particular problem, but sufficient divergence is also necessary to allow the emergence of new ideas. This process is facilitated by shifting the focus away from cultural norms themselves towards shared forms of action directed towards the resolution of common problems. The problems themselves often help to limit and define the range of solutions that are possible. Instead of simply comparing divergent (and perhaps incommensurable) theories with each other, we test them against the particular problems to be solved. While each of the cultures may have something to contribute to the resolution of the problem, each may also be lacking in certain conceptual and normative resources which would help them to solve it. Dialogue between cultures can help to overcome at least some of these deficiencies. Original thinking can make up for much of the rest. Cross-cultural dialogue thus provides an occasion for entirely new concepts and norms to emerge which may effectively integrate ideas that on the surface appear incommensurable. This dialectical approach to cross-cultural communication is neither monistic nor pluralistic. Rather, it calls for dialectical forms of integration which preserve a dynamic tension between unity and diversity, the global and the local.

The dialectical approach involves the creation of what might be called "third cultures" (the term comes from Useem, Useem, and Donoghue 1963). In the field of intercultural communication Yoshikawa has spoken of a state of "dynamic inbetweenness" in cross-cultural exchanges between Asians and Westerners, in which the "...sphere of 'between' does not represent exclusively either the Eastern perspective or the Western perspective" (1987, 329). Adler, quoting Tillich, contends that the development of a multicultural personality involves the creation of "...a third area beyond the bounded territories, an area where one can stand for a time without being enclosed in something tightly bounded" (1977, 26). The concept of "hybridity" has also gained currency in post-colonial cultural studies in Britain (Young 1995; Werbner and Modood 1997). In attempting to maintain nationalistic purity in the face of colonial domination, dominated groups often merely reproduced an "us-them" mentality which does not effectively challenge the source of their oppression. Bhabha (1994) contends, contra separatist theories, that the creation of a "third space," which hybridizes various aspects of both the dominating and the dominated culture, transforms those who were formerly colonized and disrupts the authority of those who were former colonizers.

Two principles can be proposed to govern the process of constructive dialogue. First, the communication process should include everyone who will be affected by the consequences of a particular decision or policy (the principle of *inclusion*). Second, the communication process should exclude those who will not be affected by a particular decision or policy (the principle of *exclusion*). In Habermas's (1989) conception of an "ideal speech situation" social norms are seen as having universal validity (i.e., being universally valid within a discursive community) if they are arrived at through a process of uncoerced consensus in which everyone concerned has had an equal chance to participate. The goal of constructive dialogue is not to harmonize the existing conceptions, positions, interests, and so forth individuals bring with them to the dialogue process (which in any event is probably an impossible task), but rather to engage in what Benhabib calls a process of "moral transformation" (1986, 316) in which entirely new shared conceptions, positions, and interests may emerge. We engage in dialogue both to change and to be changed.

Singer (1987), whose "perceptual approach" to intercultural communication draws on several theoretical perspectives, including constructivism, has identified six levels at which communication occurs: (1) intrapersonal communication involving understanding ourselves; (2) interpersonal communication involving understanding others; (3) intragroup communication involving understanding our goals and values as a group; (4) intergroup communication involving understanding the goals and values of other groups; (5) intranational communication involving understanding how our own society and culture works; (6) international communication involving understanding how other societies and cultures work.

In applying Singer's typology to cross-cultural dialogue, it is contended that norms can be constructed at each of these levels through a process of reflective activity and dialogue. There is the intrapersonal dialogue individuals carry on within themselves when they critically question their own values and reflect on the norms they will adopt as individuals, and the interpersonal dialogue carried on between two or more persons in which they negotiate the norms that will govern their specific relationship. There is the intragroup dialogue groups carry on among their members to define their goals and purposes, and the intergroup dialogue groups carry on with each other to find ways of working together on mutual projects. Finally, there is intranational dialogue among groups seeking to establish the norms they will live by as a political society, and international dialogue whereby various political societies attempt to formulate the norms that will govern their interaction.

Dialogue at each of these levels is constructive. There is no attempt to "discover" certain *a priori*, universal truths or values which all individuals, groups, and political communities must adhere to. Rather than formulate ethical norms and principles which are believed to hold at all times and places, norms and principles are constructed which suit the particular time and place of the persons concerned. This means that norms and principles must be flexible and adaptive; they can change as historical circumstances change and vary according to the specific relationships the participants have with each other. The degree of "universality" depends on which relationships a given set of norms is intended to govern. In some situations universal, or near-universal claims could legitimately be made (with regard to global warming, for example), whereas in other situations the norms may be purely local. There is no need, for example, to posit an essentialist definition of what constitutes a "good marriage" for all couples. Rather, different couples may construct different norms to govern their own specific relationships; there is no reason why these norms should be shared by other couples. Moreover, there is no need for norms to cover every aspect of a particular relationship. There can and should be a healthy respect for the individuality and autonomy of the partners in any relationship, whether it be at the individual, group, or political levels. Even when norms are "universal," they apply only in particular situations; their goal is not to completely homogenize differences or create monocultures.

Constructivist dialectics

Constructivist dialectics can be conceived along two separate axes which, we contend, are complementary rather than contradictory. Whereas Piagetian constructivists emphasize the dialectical interactions individuals have with their external environments, social constructionists emphasize the dialectical interactions individuals have with their social environments. In the Piagetian view both cognitive and moral experience is organized by the mind through schemas. The Piagetian perspective is essentially Kantian in the emphasis it places on the role of the mind in organizing experience (the term "schema" itself comes from Kant 1929, 180–187). Piaget calls the process by which experiences are fitted into existing schemas "assimilation." Experiences are interpreted in accordance with concepts already acquired by the individual. Schemas are not fixed, however, but can be changed in light of new experiences. The term "accommodation" is used to refer to the process by which schemas are altered or expanded when new experiences cannot be fitted into existing schemas. Human development in Piaget's view requires individuals to be continually constructing more highly differentiated sets of schemas through which the world can be perceived and interacted with.

Differentiation is the process by which individuals are able to make increasingly finer distinctions between various aspects of a given phenomenon. An expert auto mechanic, for example, can easily distinguish between the various parts of an engine. A novice, however, may have a relatively undifferentiated understanding of the same phenomenon—perhaps upon lifting the hood of a car, only a single concept comes to mind: "engine." While the novice has a limited set of schemas with which to understand a given phenomena, the expert's schemas are richer and more highly differentiated. Moreover, the expert knows how parts relate to wholes. The auto mechanic not only knows the separate parts of the engine but also how they function together to enable the car to move. The mechanic's view is thus not only highly differentiated but also highly integrated. Integration refers the process by which differentiated knowledge is organized into relatively coherent conceptual schemes. Differentiation roughly corresponds to empirical, factual knowledge about the world, while integration refers to rational, theoretical knowledge (*cf*. Hampden-Turner 1970).

Since the world is complex, the processes of differentiation and integration are in principle never-ending; finer empirical distinctions can always be made and new theories formulated on the basis of different sets of facts. There can never be a one-on-one correspondence between the schemas we use to understand the world and the world itself, nor can there be a single theory which comprehends the whole of reality. Constructs inevitably simplify experience, making it impossible to give an absolutely complete description of any given phenomenon. Consider this passage from Frayn:

> Hold up your hand in front of you. Now give me a complete description of it. And you can't. Nothing that you can ever say will wholly describe the one thing that now lies in front of your eyes. You could describe away until the crack of doom. You could describe it as a whole, millimetre by millimetre, cell by cell, molecule by molecule. You could pile statement upon statement, and just as many more statements would remain to be made (1974, §178).

Any description of a given object or narrative of a specific incident simplifies the reality it purports to communicate.

Such simplification is necessary for human understanding, however, and also accounts for how different cultures construct different accounts of the same phenomena. Fisher writes,

> ...[T]he ability to develop an efficient and coherent mental cross-referencing system is not only constructive, it is phenomenally productive when viewed from the perspective of human evolution. It would be a limited psyche indeed that would have to process each new stimulus as it came along without reference to past experience. The human mind simply cannot encompass the full complexity of all the events and stimuli which press upon it from even its own immediate, everyday environment, much less a radically expanded international environment. It must therefore have a means of efficiently screening, sorting, coding and storing sensory data. This need is met by structuring experience, for example, by establishing categories within which we can pigeon-hole given ranges of phenomena which concern us (1988, 22–23).

Cognitive and social psychologists regard schemas as short-hand devices which permit individuals to process more information in shorter periods of time (Best 1995; Sears, Peplau, and Taylor 1991, chaps. 2-3; Stotland

and Canon 1972, chaps. 3–4). Observers are usually attentive only to those features of a phenomenon which they regard as salient. Two individuals witnessing the same event may give different accounts of it, not only because they observe the event from different perspectives (*cf.* Nietzsche 1968b, 555), but also because they may regard some aspects of the event as more important than others. Features which are regarded as unimportant may simply be ignored. As schemas become more abstract they subsume a larger amount of information, but they also suffer from a loss of detail. As schemas become more specific, detail is recovered but only through a loss of scope. Distortions of the phenomenon occur in either case. This conclusion has profound implications, because it acknowledges that there can be no single, absolutely true account of any given phenomenon. Varying constructions of the same observed phenomenon are always possible. No worldview can presume itself to be final; all are partial and incomplete. This view accords with Rorty's (1979) contention that language does not mirror nature. Putnam similarly argues that "...the mind does not simply 'copy' a world which admits description by One True Theory" (1981, xi). The implication of this idea, when applied to intercultural communication, is that no culture can have a monopoly on truth.

Moral, as well as conceptual, development can be accounted for in Piagetian terms. Through increased interaction with the world individuals come to have a wider conception of what should be valued and a more richly differentiated view of how they should interact with others. In the basic Piagetian formulation (Piaget 1932) experiences come to be classified in rudimentary terms as "good" or "bad," that is, as experiences to be repeated or avoided. As development proceeds, the individual's moral schemas are enlarged, making it possible for the individual to evaluate and respond to increasingly complex types of experience. Evaluative constructs, as much as cognitive constructs, are either assimilated into existing schemas or accommodated through the reconfiguration of those schemas. The process yields ever higher states of equilibrium, comprised of increasingly differentiated and integrated schemas.

Kohlberg (1981, 1984) has expanded on Piaget's work and posited six major stages of ethical development, running from preconventional stages in which action is motivated primarily by the harms or benefits it causes oneself, to conventional stages in which individuals seek to bring their actions into accordance with accepted social norms, and finally to post-conventional stages in which an attempt is made to rationally construct universal ethical principles. In Kohlberg's view moral concepts, as much as logical concepts, are neither innate nor pregiven in one's immediate environment. Kohlberg's constructivism stands at odds with both a maturational theory which sees certain moral concepts as "naturally" emerging in the individual (ultimately making the individual the final arbiter of values) and a cultural transmission theory which reduces value formation to little more than a process of indoctrination (ultimately making culture the final arbiter of values). Kohlberg adopts a third perspective, derived from Dewey (1916), which he labels "progressive interactionism." In this view moral judgements are seen as emerging out of the interaction between individuals and their immediate environments: "...cognitive-developmental theories are 'interactional,' that is, they assume that basic mental structure is the product of the patterning of the interaction between the organism and the environment rather than a direct reflection of either innate patterns in the organism or patterns of events (stimulus contingencies) in the environment" (1984, 11). The task of the educator in this view is to present students with ethical dilemmas that stimulate thought. Such reflection results in "an active change in patterns of thinking" (1981, 54), i.e., an enlargement of one's moral schemas.

Kohlberg's view of moral development has been incorporated into Habermas's formulation of a "discourse ethics" (Habermas 1979, 1989, 1993). Habermas contends that ethical norms cannot be metaphysically grounded but can only arise out of a process of dialogical interaction based on a rational, post-conventional critique of existing cultural norms.

Rawls' political constructivism, which has many affinities with Habermas's position, similarly seeks to establish the means by which "...rational agents, as representatives of citizens and subject to reasonable conditions, select the public principles of justice to regulate the basic structure of society" (1996, 90). Rawls is critical of moral realism, the view that there is an independent moral order which is known intuitively and "...does not depend on, nor is it to be explained by, the activity of any actual (human) minds, including the activity of reason" (1991). Ethical principles are not to be found in nature nor are they merely to be accepted as part of one's cultural tradition. This view is shared by the neo-Kantian philosopher Onora O'Neill (1989, chap. 11) who sees constructivism as offering a third alternative to both realism and relativism.

The notion of a reflective equilibrium (*cf.* Rawls 1971, 20; 1993, 8) can be broadly defined as any attempt to bring consistency to our various, and sometimes contradictory, convictions (moral or otherwise). Once a measure of consistency has been obtained, however, the equilibrium can still be upset as new problems emerge which we do not have ready answers for or when we learn (either from people within or outside of our own culture) of different solutions that seem to solve a given problem better. In contrast with absolutist theories of ethics, the concept of a reflective equilibrium is essentially flexible and adaptive to varying environmental and social conditions; it can never regard the positions it arrives at as "fixed and unchanging" but is rather in a state of constant dynamic development.

One contentious aspect of the Piagetian perspective is the notion that schema development proceeds in stages which move in a unilinear direction. Researchers in the field of cross-cultural psychology increasingly find this view problematic. Empirical tests of Piaget's theory across cultures are inconclusive, leading some to conclude that Piaget gave insufficient attention to the role that cultural factors play in development (for a summary see Dasen and Heron 1981). Kohlberg's work has likewise been criticized on the grounds that it does not hold for all cultures and ethnic groups (Simpson 1974; Cortese 1990) and incorporates a Western liberal bias (Sullivan 1977; Shweder, Mahapatra, and Miller 1990). While such criticisms call into question the viability of the idea that cognitive development proceeds in well-defined stages, they do not necessarily refute the general idea of conceptual development. Development can be seen not as a unilinear progression towards a predetermined goal but rather as an enlargement of possible modes of experience. Schemas become increasingly differentiated over time—improving in both quantity and quality—even if they are not moving towards a single end-goal or *telos*. Stages are simply heuristic devices which illustrate the various forms of differentiation and integration that are possible.

Schemas can thus be judged in part on the basis of their comprehensiveness. Taylor (1993) argues that it is possible on the basis of practical reason alone to evaluate the adequacy of competing moral claims, even when common ground is lacking (as in cross-cultural disputes). He offers three argument forms which do not appeal to foundational criteria: Position *B* is superior to position *A* if: (1) *B* accounts for more facts than *A* and thus represents a gain in understanding; (2) *A* cannot account for why there was a need for *B* to arise as an alternative; or (3) *B* reduces errors by pointing out contradictions, clearing up confusions, or drawing attention to significant considerations which *A* neglected. Cast in constructivist terms, *B* can be said to be superior to *A* if the schemas it employs are more highly differentiated and integrated.

Another approach which results in more highly differentiated and integrated schemas involves working towards what Pruitt calls "integrative agreements," defined as agreements "...that reconcile (i.e., integrate) the parties' interests and hence yield high joint benefit." Traditional theories of negotiation focus on finding preexisting "common ground" between the disputants and achieving compromises on points not held in common. Integrative agreements, on the other hand, rely on what we would regard as a fundamentally dialectical approach which takes neither the initial conditions of the dispute nor the initial positions of the negotiators as fixed. The point can be illustrated with an example offered by Pruitt. If a husband and wife are trying to decide whether to spend their two-week vacation in the mountains (the husband's choice) or the sea (the wife's choice) they might consider the following options: asking their employers for a four-week vacation so they can do both (expanding the pie); giving the husband his vacation in the mountains and buying the wife a fur coat (nonspecific compensation); going to a hotel in the mountains since the wife doesn't care where the vacation is spent but is afraid that a trip to the mountains will involve sleeping in a tent, while the husband doesn't care whether they stay in a tent or a hotel but he does want to spend time hiking and fishing in the mountains (logrolling); renting a house near the sea with a large quiet courtyard where the husband can read—while the husband doesn't get everything he'd wanted, he at least gets some of the peace and quiet he'd hoped for (cost-cutting); not going to either the mountains or the sea but to a lakeside resort with a woods nearby for the husband to hunt and fish while the wife swims and sunbathes (bridging). At times compromise may be the best that can be hoped for, of course, but these alternatives are interesting from a constructivist perspective because they each involve reconstruing the problem (instead of simply taking the original positions as they are, they give a more highly differentiated account of the possibilities) as well as dialectical integration (instead of seeing the two positions as "incommensurable," they look for ways in which certain aspects of the original positions can be dropped and others combined).

The sort of creative brainstorming found in the integrative approach involves moving outside what Simon (1985) calls "bounded rationality" towards what might be called an "unbounded rationality." Bounded rationality refers to the ability of decision-makers to make rational decisions within a given conceptual framework; unbounded rationality can be defined as the ability to make decisions that take other conceptual frameworks into account and critically synthesize them with one's own. Unbounded rationality, it can be suggested, involves going beyond one's present understanding of a situation and seeking out a more objective and holistic view. It involves, that is, a wider understanding of both the situation itself and the opponent's perception of that situation. In the process of seeking out such an understanding lower-order schemas are replaced by higher-order schemas. Whereas the original perception of a problem may be fairly narrow in scope and simplistic in its analysis, the new perception is both more comprehensive and more complex. Whereas it is not necessary to assimilate everything one's opponent holds into this higher-order schema, it may nonetheless be possible to assimilate those features deemed most important. The opponent as well is capable of moving from lower-level to higher-level schemas and a more highly differentiated understanding of the situation. The perspective which emerges is in essence an entirely new one, which critically incorporates elements of the original perspectives but also transcends them. Suedfeld and Tetlock (1977) refer to the end result as a state of "integrative complexity." Integrative complexity involves a more highly differentiated conception of the problem at hand and a more highly integrated view of how the problem can best be solved.

The integrated approach moves beyond a purely ethnocentric form of criticism which is based primarily on cultural stereotypes and simply pits one culture against another to see which is "superior." Integration requires, first of all, a critique of one's own cultural norms and assumptions in an effort to identify both positive and negative aspects of one's own cultural tradition (a process I refer to elsewhere as "intracultural criticism"; see Evanoff 1996). Once internal criticism has been carried out by both of the participants it is possible to compare what are regarded as the positive features of one culture with the negative features of the other ("cross-cultural criticism") and to work towards a new framework which integrates positive aspects of both traditions ("integrative criticism"). For example, at the ethnocentric stage Japanese might contend that Japanese "groupism" is superior to Western individualism and vice versa. At the stage of intracultural criticism it may be recognized that Japanese groupism can be broken down into both a positive side ("cooperation") and a negative side ("conformity") and that American individualism similarly has a positive side ("self-reliance") and a negative side ("self-indulgence"). At the stage of cross-cultural criticism it may be concluded that the value of "cooperation" is indeed superior to the value of "self-indulgence" and the value of "self-reliance" is superior to the value of "conformity." At the integrative stage an effort would be made to combine the American value of "self-reliance" with the Japanese value of "cooperation." Whereas the original opposition between Japanese groupism and American individualism was cast in dichotomous terms (i.e., the two perspectives are "incommensurable"), a constructivist approach to intercultural dialogue shows how the two can be effectively integrated. It should be noted that the account given here describes merely the dialectical logic that underlies constructive dialogue and not the process by which initial evaluative judgements are arrived at (i.e., what is to be regarded as "positive" and "negative"). The process of arriving at shared evaluative judgements involves both making individual judgements about what is "good" based on direct interactions with one's environment and achieving intersubjective agreement about what is "good" through social interactions with others.

The cultural dimension

A second criticism of Piagetian constructivism lies in the accusation that it underemphasizes the cultural dimension of conceptual development. The cultural psychologist Richard Shweder claims, for example, that "[t]he Piagetian child is a faint copy of the abstract ideal of the logician and empirical scientist" and therefore "...devoid of temperament, tradition, custom, or convention" (1984, 53-54). Shweder has questioned whether we can simply assume a principle of the "psychic unity" of humankind. In Shweder's view, the chief fault with much contemporary theorizing in psychology is that it posits "a central processing mechanism...presumed to be a transcendent, abstract, fixed, and universal property of the human psyche" (1990, 4). At the surface level there are obvious differences in how people think, but it is assumed that by filtering out cultural and environmental influences one eventually arrives at a "pure" processing mechanism which is essentially the same for all people and governed by the same rules of rationality. Similar criticisms have arisen in the field of cognitive psychology, where the idea that cognitive development can be thought of as an essentially acultural/ahistorical process involving interactions between brain and environment is increasingly under attack by those who argue that social influences play a much larger role in cognitive development than has been previously acknowledged (see Resnick, Levine, and Teasley 1991; Still and Costall 1991). The received view of mind is essentially Cartesian in that it sees rationality, if not specific ideas, as innate and relatively unaffected by the "world outside"—take away the external world and the mind we are left with will be essentially the same (*cf.* Markovā 1991). Accordingly, environmental and cultural factors are seen as have no bearing on how people think (although they may have some bearing on what they think about). Pushed to the limit this idea results in the reductionist view that all human thought can be explained in terms of neurophysical processes.

A framework for seeing how the cognitive psychology/Piagetian constructivist view and the cultural psychology/social constructionist view might be reconciled is provided in Arbib and Hesse's *The Construction of Reality* (1986, chap. 7). Arbib and Hesse reject the idea that cognitive development proceeds in stages but accept the view that concepts are always organized by the mind into cognitive structures. New experiences must be reconciled with existing schemas through the standard Piagetian processes of assimilation and accommodation. It is acknowledged, however, that schemas are acquired not only through direct interaction with reality but also through cultural transmission. Schemas are organized holistically into larger interdependent cognitive networks. Arbib and Hesse use the term "social schema" (which they compare with Durkheim's "collective representations") to designate any network of concepts which are only imperfectly represented in the minds of any individual in a given society. The paradigm case is language which, while forming a normative system, is never completely represented in any one individual. Ideologies and religions are further examples. Social schemas may be temporarily formalized or reconstructed as ideal types, or they may exist implicitly in the social relations individuals have with one another. Through social interaction such schemas come to influence the construction of individual schemas as much as external objects and events do. In this framework much of what we know is indeed learned from others, although it is still possible to arrive at knowledge independently through direct experience. Knowledge acquired through direct experience transforms the stock of socially shared knowledge. The relationship between direct and socially mediated knowledge is thus reciprocal. Social knowledge influences how individuals perceive the world, but direct experience also enables individuals to challenge what is accepted as social knowledge.

Schemas thus exist not only in individual minds but also in social relations, a view which is very similar to the philosophy of mind espoused by Mead (1934). The mind is not, in Mead's view, something individuals *have*, but rather something that *emerges* out of social interaction and communication with others. Language is essential to this process because it enables us to reflect not only on past experiences, but also on possible future courses of action. The growth of self-consciousness depends upon such reflection. Mind is constituted by the particular interactions it has with both its natural and its social environments and does not exist apart from them. In Putnam's metaphor, "the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world" (1981, xi). Stigler, Shweder, and Herdt similarly write, "The dialectical co-construction of a cultural psychology may be more complex, a three-body problem in which self, society, and nature jointly make up self, society, and nature" (1990, viii). Mind should be seen not as transcendent to, but rather as immanent in, specific historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. On this view we do not need the metaphysical assumption that "all minds are the same" to account for whatever similiarities might be observed across cultures. To the extent that individuals share similar biological and psychological constitutions, cultural settings, and natural environments their thought-processes will tend to be similar. To the extent that such factors differ their thought-processes will also tend to differ. Certain "universal" similarities can no doubt be noted across cultures but a multitude of differences can also be observed. Determining the extent to which people are similar or different is thus an empirical, not a metaphysical question.

In the constructivist view human behavior is not determined by either nature or culture nor can we look to either for an infallible set of ethical guidelines. Rather, there are choices to be made with regard to how we will act in relation to our natural and cultural environments. The fact that there are choices indicates that there must also be scope for what Mead calls a "process of reflection" (1934, 354–378; 1938, 79–91; see also Dewey 1910, 72) in which possible courses of action are both imaginatively proposed and critically evaluated (the term "reflection" is preferred to "rationality" precisely because it encompasses not only rational but also affective and imaginative modes of thought). Mead allows for the fact that humans are biological organisms which respond to external stimuli; they are also socially conditioned to behave in certain ways. It is the imaginative side of human experience, however, which allows individuals to reflect back on their situation, formulate alternatives, and engage in behavior that leads to both significant personal and social change. This reflective process is situated in specific environmental and cultural contexts. It does not seek to transcend those contexts in the hope of formulating universal "truths" based on foundational, apodeictic forms of rationality, but rather to simply reflect back on them and, if necessary, to change them.

From a constructivist perspective there is nothing inevitable about the particular social relationships we happen to find ourselves in, and when they prove unsatisfactory we can make efforts to change them. It is always possible for individuals to reflect on their respective cultures and decide whether to maintain, modify, or abandon altogether the ideas and values which are dominant. Nonetheless, societies can exert powerful pressures on individuals to think and act in certain ways, either by suppressing innovation or by not making other alternatives available. Even when individuals recognize that the social system they live in is evil or unjust, the socialization process can sometimes be so powerful that change is inconceivable. Reclaiming our ability to challenge existing cultural norms and create new ones can be difficult because of the tremendous pressure society exerts to keep itself in a relatively stable state. A major part of the problem, of course, is that power relations serve to maintain the legitimacy of certain schemas. Powerful groups in every society (elites) have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Opposition to the dominant power structures also becomes problematic when non-elites come to see their own interests as being best fulfilled by conforming to those schemas. Folb (1991) has suggested that the field of intercultural communication must concern itself more than it has in the past with issues of hierarchy, power, and dominance both within and between cultures.

Arbib and Hesse regard social schemas, particularly ideologies, as tending toward "inertia" (1986, 133ff.). Kelly (1963, 9) as well acknowledges that constructs can be tenacious. Some people may have such a personal investment in their present constructs that they resist any change whatsoever. Human freedom demands, however, being able to reconstrue our present situation and to work for something better. Constructivism rejects both determinism (characteristic of structuralism and Marxism) and voluntarism (characteristic of poststructuralism and Western liberalism) as theories of action. In the structuralist view social structures are essentially seen as determining individual thought and behavior. In Marxist versions of structuralism, history is seen as a "process without a Subject" (Althusser 1976, 99). Marx himself contended, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness" (1970, 21). The Western liberal view, by contrast, reverses the direction of causation and sees social structures as arising solely out of individuals acting in their own self-interests. In its crudest form liberalism holds that society is nothing more than a collection of atomistic individuals.

A third alternative posits a dialectical relationship between the individual and society which avoids the one-way causality of both Marxism and liberalism. On the one hand, humans create culture; on the other, humans are created by culture. In the constructivist view the direction of influence runs not only from culture to individual but also from individual to culture; ideas are not only the *product* of historical forces, as they are in Marx, but also their *cause*, as in Hegel. This dialectical view of human agency can be found in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) sociology of knowledge, Giddens' (1984, 1991) structuration theory, and Bhaskar's (1979) transformation model of social activity. It is the possibility of redefining culture that makes the constructivist position dynamic and progressive. The voluntarist claim that individuals are always "free" to do whatever they want ignores the extent to which social forces shape and constrain the choices individuals are able to make. The determinist claim that individuals cannot initiate social change ignores the extent to which the basic structures of society are susceptible to personal and collective influence. Neither side is exclusively right. Humans do not act totally in accordance with cultural norms nor totally apart from them; in the same way that cultural norms influence human behavior, so too does human behavior influence the construction of cultural norms. It is largely through the process of reflection that prevailing social schemas can be broken down and reconfigured.

In the constructivist view all cultural arrangements are regarded as contingent rather than necessary and thus subject not only to historical, but also to cultural variation. Different cultures develop different standards of truth, goodness, and beauty, or, as Bennett puts it, "... cultures differ fundamentally from one another in the way they maintain patterns of differentiation" (1993, 22). Merely recognizing the *fact* of cultural relativity need not commit us to the *norm* of cultural relativism, of course. As Hatch writes, "The fact of moral diversity no more compels our approval of other ways of life than the existence of cancer compels us to value ill-health" (1983, 67-68; see also Evanoff 1997). We need only approve of those cultural norms which have been arrived at through a process of reflection and are, minimally, not maladaptive.

Nature offers innumerable possibilities for human action and there is an almost bewildering variety of factors which can influence how people think about and act in the world (*cf.* Berry's "ecological model" of cross-cultural psychology in Berry *et al.* 1992, 12). Humans have the capacity to develop themselves in any number of different directions, but out of the innumerable options available certain possible ways of thinking and behaving will be selected to the exclusion of others. No culture can choose all viable options; cultural experience is therefore *always* partial and incomplete. Child defines socialization as "... the whole process by which an individual, born with behavioral potentialities of enormously wide range, is led to develop actual behavior which is confined within a much narrower range—the range of what is customary and acceptable for him according to the standards of his group" (quoted in Segall 1979, 13-14). Since all cultures simplify the range of potential human experience, none can regard itself as "universal." The normative counterpart of this observation is that each culture should be free to pursue its own unique trajectory of development, at least to the extent that it does not have a negative impact on other cultures. There is no reason to suppose that these trajectories will ultimately converge on a single body of truth or set of ethical principles (as Christian, Hegelian, Marxist, and modernist views contend). Cultural evolution can be regarded as multilinear rather unilinear (*cf.* Steward 1955). Norgaard suggests that the world should be viewed as "...a patchwork quilt of loosely interconnected, coevolving social and ecological systems" (1994, 90).

If all cultures place limits on the range of human experience, this means that other possibilities are in fact always open to them. There is no reason why a particular set of options has to be pursued to the exclusion of all others. The purpose of cross-cultural dialogue is not to arrive at "universal" ways of thinking or behaving but rather to show that all ways of thinking and behaving are contingent, that alternatives are always available, and, moreover, that it is often possible to give persuasive reasons why some alternatives might be better than others. It is not about "respecting cultural differences" but about the potentially subversive act of asking cultures to justify why they do things the way they do.

In short, among the myriad possibilities open to us both as individuals and as societies, qualitative judgements must be made. By engaging in cross-cultural dialogue we are able to extend the range of our own potential experience. Holenstein writes, "Foreign cultures give us access to possibilities of development which are apparently at our disposal by nature and which only circumstances prevent from appearing in our own culture. Different cultures develop different human skills to varying degrees" (1995, 76). It is neither necessary nor desirable for cultures to converge with each other in all respects; different cultural trajectories allow space for humans to experiment with different modes of living. The constructivist model both helps different cultures to arrive at common solutions to shared problems and preserves a healthy measure of cultural diversity in the face of a rapacious global monoculture.

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