Second nature

Abstract: Are ontological meanings somehow sacrosanct in arguments concerning psychology – particularly those scored by discursive accounts of human being? Or is the purposeful deferment of ontological concerns in discursive psychology (DP) another instance of method-fetishism (Koch, 1981)? Shotter's (1995) understanding of joint action and Chouliaraki's (2002) critical realist account of social action combine to support an alternate position to the predominant discursive psychological approach informed by epistemological constructionism (DPEC). The DPEC position is here contrasted with a discursive psychological approach informed by ontological constructionism (DPOC). Via this distinction, a path for future discursive psychological studies is charted, one which values understanding the kinds of practical-moral knowledges (Shotter, 1993) available to people in accounting for themselves and their actions as psychosocial agents. Contrary to claims that the DPEC/DPOC distinction is supercilious (Edley, 2001) or oxymoronic (Drewery, 2000), the importance of debating what ontology can mean for psychology is herein seen as central to the pursuit of personal, relational and collective wellness in contemporary life.

Introduction

In English the idiom 'second nature' is commonly used in reference to practices or tasks occurring in daily life that seem straightforward, easy to accomplish or for which we seem to have an uncanny affinity. In this paper the idiom is employed in two ways to argue a necessary and rightful place for ontological concerns in psychological accounts of personhood. To start, second nature accounts are situated next to dominant versions of human nature presently available in psychological discourse. The most enduring and pervasive forms of psychological knowledge (such as behaviourist or cognitive theories) have historically been explained using objectivism and reductionism and can be notionally understood as attempts to account for humanity's 'first' nature - at least in the realist and essentialist ways they have been portrayed to date. I then turn to discursive psychology (DP) to consider how this approach provides alternate ways of understanding human being. Difficulties do however arise in DP with the separation of epistemic and ontological forms in social constructionism – a crucial theoretical distinction informing this work (Edwards, 1997). For brevity these accounts will be referred to here as DPEC (discursive psychology epistemological constructionism) and DPOC (discursive psychology ontological constructionism). To contrast these strands of DP input from both camps will be sought. The consequences of committing to either position, both for the discipline and with regard the possible influence these psychological discourses may have in contemporary society, will also be compared.

First nature accounts

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines ontology as "(t)he science or study of being; that department of metaphysics which relates to the being or essence of things" (Onion, 1973, p. 1449). This standard definition probably sets off alarm bells with many discourse analysts because of its essentialist overtone. But prior to drawing any hasty conclusions this definition offers some indication as to how meanings connected with questions of ontology have been conflated. A prima-facie case is made via the way in which first nature psychological accounts uncritically limit questions of human being to essentialist discourse as per the OED definition (cf. Bandura, 1986; Erikson, 1950; Seligman, 2004). Current discipline-based activities positioned under the banner of positive psychology provide further illustration. Whilst some might consider this version of psychology to be vastly different from other first nature accounts, particularly in how it approaches the study of human being, such thought is emphatically quashed by one of its own. Positive psychology's principal architect, Martin Seligman, admits that "much has been accomplished, enough to call it [positive psychology] a movement (but not, please, a paradigm shift since it uses the same tried and true methods of mainstream science to merely shed light on the relatively uninvestigated realm of happiness)" (ibid, p. xi).

Two concerning issues present with the continued privileging of first nature accounts in contemporary societies. First, that ethical issues (e.g. political influence upon social determinants of health) are often ignored via projections of personhood as a closed system of atomistic events (e.g. neural pathways or psychopathological traits) and

second, that the appearance of systematicity confines psychological descriptions to discourses of constraint (e.g. deficit-based reductionisms concerning people's potentials). For example, historically psychology has been interested in the production of knowledge made using observational procedures directed at phenomena assumed to be explicable in causal terms (Franken, 1988). Such knowledge is said to be available to generalisation such that discernable patterns of events, obtained via empirical methods, could be used to support universal theoretical claims (Foley, Lockhart & Messick, 1970). Acknowledging the intended purpose and values supporting first nature accounts will contribute to exposing the 'tried and true' means through which these presume their supremacy in mainstream psychological discourse. These issues are vitally important to consider in accounting for the nature of human being because discursive processes like these continue to play an influential role in generating universal accounts of personhood (Gergen, 1991).

Making room for second nature accounts

Following Wittgenstein (1953), the language games in which communicative action takes place occur through the use of tools (e.g. words) and actions (e.g. speech/conversation/utterances) and within our many 'forms of life', including psychological practices, their use is understood as contestable and open to negotiation. The implications are pronounced, as Shotter points out:

…the 'grounds' for our claims to knowledge ultimately are to be found in who we 'are', in our forms of life. For it is in our socialisation into a certain way of being that we learn how to do such things as making claims, raising questions, conducting arguments, sensing disagreements, recognising agreements, and so on. These *ontological skills* – these ways of being a certain kind of socially competent, first-person member of our society – are necessary for there to be any questions, or arguments, at all (1993, p. 78; emphasis in original).

Shotter (1995) talks about social practices or joint action as responsive activities in which practical-moral psychological knowledge directs what goes on for those involved. Put simply, human beings answer (i.e. we act) in response to the calls made within our dialogically structured contexts. As stated above, this intricate bond between who we ontologically 'are, in our forms of life' and how knowledge of this is understood exists in the language practices facilitated in discipline-based work and everyday activities. But if personhood – not just yours or mine but humanity as it is known - is always in process, always under construction, the tendering of conclusive first nature accounts not only limits availabilities for description in the here-and-now but also restricts constitutive potentials for future being. Wittgenstein, acknowledging this concern, issued this warning: "We feel as if we have to penetrate phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but, as one might say, towards the 'possibilities' of phenomena" (1953, no. 90).

Wittgenstein directs psychological considerations to the provision of analytical frameworks that remain open to the potentials and possibilities of human being. But attempts to make room for reflections like these have met with determined resistance within the academy by both writers/teachers and readers/students alike. The way in which arguments in the realism/relativism debate (Edwards, Ashmore & Potter, 1995; McLennan, 2001) have occurred serve to highlight that the more strongly a certain belief is held, the wider the chasm between alternate - *not* opposing - views. In fact, in deference to the moderate position being forwarded here, what this debate tells us is that when understandings are made in unconditional terms (e.g. in the realism/relativism debate as opposing uninterpreted versus interpreted realities) such action undermines earnest dialogues about psychological being.

This situation may even affect students within the discipline. In a review of Edwards' *Discourse and Cognition*, Drewery (2000) reflects upon her hopes for the book: "I needed someone to do the painstaking work of convincing my constructionist students that they did not need to worry about losing these concepts and to show them how the project of cognitive psychology is repositioned by discursive psychology" (p. 79). According to the review the work failed to meet the mark. Whilst I concur with Drewery and will momentarily discuss several shared concerns regarding the DPEC approach, I do not agree with her contention that ontological constructionism is an oxymoron. As Drewery stated in the review, "Edwards gives no account of 'natural phenomena'" (ibid) and this recognition pre-empts the possible contributions of DPOC. The worry (as highlighted by the teacher and on behalf of the students) was that sufficient work had not

been done to meaningfully engage discourses concerning cognition. Seemingly absent were theoretical options to facilitate this task. One option which I believe steps up to the mark comes in the form of Shotter's (1993) account of knowledge of the third kind and I will turn to discuss this further after outlining my concerns with epistemological constructionism.

Discursive Psychology Epistemological Constructionism (DPEC)

At this juncture more needs to be said regarding the theoretical links connecting discursive psychology and social constructionism. In their efforts to remain provisional, many discursive psychologists refrain from making an ontological commitment arguing that their epistemological principles disallow them from doing so. To this end Potter states that his critique of psychology "comes less from developing an alternative model of the actor, as would be the traditional psychological way, than through developing an alternative understanding of language and its role in the machineries of psychological research and assessment" (2003, p. 791). Curiously, discursive psychologists have nevertheless gone on record regarding the existence of psychological phenomena, as the following accounts demonstrate:

> Clearly language, or discourse, is not all that there is in the world, not all that psychology and society are made of, and not the same thing as experience, or reality, or feelings, or knowledge…[b]ut it is the primary work of language to make all those 'other' phenomena accountable (Edwards, 2006, p. 42).

…this focus on psychological phenomena does not require that psychological states and processes of some kind do not exist. Rather it suggests that the study of such things is likely to benefit from careful attention to the specific practices that people are involved in and the sorts of 'competences' that those practices require (Potter, 2005, p.34).

Quite so. But whilst DPEC research emphasises the importance of accountabilities in discursive practice, that is, those relative to the relationships involving speakers and listeners in dialogue, one must wonder what else could be said by DP regarding participants' 'competences' and their responsibilities to an "overhearing moral world" (Auburn, Drake & Willig, 1995, p. 364).

Perhaps an example would be helpful here. In a DPEC-oriented study Auburn et al. (1995) analysed police interviews involving suspects accused of committing a violent act. From this work the authors discerned "a basic grammar of violent accusations" (ibid, p. 353). One example cites how speakers use the discursive concept of footing whereby "speakers make it clear that they are not the authors of the utterance, but merely its animator. They thereby can present the hearer with a version for which the perpetrator is accountable, without necessarily aligning themselves with that version" (ibid, p. 363). In this instance, to achieve such distancing, Auburn et al. refer to an example in which a police officer directly acknowledges the unsubstantiated nature of allegations made against the suspect (Extract 5: "um and he alleges…"). Auburn et al. go on to make a

telling statement: "A variation on this footing device is to generalise the author of the accusation so that it is not a specific person but *a generalised moral voice*" (op. cit, p. 364; my emphasis). In the example offered, the police officer suggests that their line of questioning 'needs' to take place (Extract 6: "the first thing I think needs to be asked…"). Auburn et al. contend the officer invokes this particular grammar in a defensive manner for to do otherwise would mean that "the participants would be failing in their responsibilities to the overhearing moral world if this accusation were not put and heard" (ibid, p. 364). Could it not be suggested that to be considered a legitimate participant in the action taking place each person, police officer and suspect, speaker and listener, must enact their ethical responsibilities to the process by appropriately utilising basic grammars such as person-oriented discourses (Harré, 1998)? And that if the moral voice Auburn et al. so directly point to can be understood as a supporting member of the existing joint action then the action invokes a 'living impulse' (Bakhtin, 1981) particular to human action and ways of being?

It is worth highlighting that Auburn et al. personify this aspect of joint action by describing it is a voice able to contribute to the discourse at hand. To this end the Bakhtinian idea of the relational Other offers much to DP and social constructionism. Holquist, elaborating from Bakhtin, states that "the event of existence is 'unified'; for although it occurs in sites that are unique, those sites are never complete in themselves. They are never in any sense of the word *alone*" (1990, p. 24; emphasis in original). He goes on to suggest that for Bakhtin, human being is "not just an event, but an event that is shared. Being is simultaneity; it is always *co*-being" (ibid, p. 25; emphasis in original).

The commitment that I have been referring to in this article is one that we share, whatever our walk of life, in and to the construction of who we are from within our various forms of life. It is not enough to point to our basic grammars and refrain from positioning oneself in relation to these as per the DPEC position. As psychologists we, along with other professions that form and inform available discourses pertaining to human being, share a responsibility to acknowledge our belonging to and existence in language. It will be from this acknowledgement that psychology can chart the means to create, in a proactive sense, a language of potentials, enablement and respect that serve as alternatives to the more historically dominant languages of constraint, disablement and disrespect.

Bakhtin (1986) speaks directly to this idea in his deliberations regarding a third party pre-existing and always present in dialogic activity. He does so by situating discourse in an interindividual realm:

> The word (or in general any sign) is interindividual. Everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the 'soul' of the speaker and does not belong only to him. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no one). The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is not a duet, but a trio) (ibid, p. 121-122).

In acknowledging this third participant, the relational Other, not only is it suggested that a speaker address a listener, as in the police and suspect research cited above, but Bakhtin also suggests that "the author of the utterance, with greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee*…whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time" (1986, p. 126; emphasis in original). Shotter too has acknowledged the importance of reciprocity and responsiveness to an Other in joint action. On this matter he states: "And what is crucial about…'relationally-responsive' understandings, as I will call them in a moment – is not that you 'get the picture', so to speak, but that as *gestures*, as expressive movement, they spontaneously 'call' us or 'move' us immediately to respond in certain ways" (2003, p. 5; emphasis in original). Most importantly, for the DPOC distinction to be made below, is that this background can be personified and positioned as existent. Shotter explains: "…although invisible, the real presences generated in our active relations with our surroundings have *agency* and, like another person, can exert that kind of personal force upon us" (op. cit., p. 5; emphasis in original).

The importance of acknowledging and incorporating discursive action as (no less than) tripartite serves two purposes. Its most important achievement moves accepted wisdom regarding human action beyond the confines of individualism and physicalism. Within an ideology of individualism, context/situation/background is often cursorily considered (usually as an after-thought) when attempting to understand the action taking place. First and foremost, the agency of the individual (and typically their psychobiology), will be

questioned when/if a person is held to account for their actions. This prevailing movement supports Foucault's notion of governmentality. Foucault drew attention to the fact that as the psy-disciplines developed they did so in support of the ruling power – in most cases in the Western world, a democratically elected government. In Foucault's words, a "formal ontology of truth" (2000b, p. 403) is directed at a "political technology of the body" (1977, p. 26). Consequently, the background of our lives, including its discursive practices e.g. legislation, are not held in parallel responsibility to the human agent for what transpires.

A second advantage, made possible via an acknowledgement of the relational Other, is a potential commitment DPEC research avoids by bringing into play the (historical) existence of our moral worlds. As Bakhtin states:

> The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines (1981, p. 276-277).

Whilst some may be concerned with Bakhtin's use of a metaphysical parameter, he nullifies such concerns stating that the relational Other "is not a mystical or metaphysical

being (although, given certain understanding of the world, he can be expressed as such) – he [sic] is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance, who, under deep analysis, can be revealed in it" (op. cit, p. 126-127). This, I believe, is the point Auburn et al. were trying to make. In their article they recognise (by footnote) differences between applications of discourse analysis in social psychological study: "One difference between these approaches is the extent to which they either confine themselves to a functional analysis or link the action orientation of discourse to an ideological or social structural framework" (1995, p. 385). Even with this divulgence a critical question remains: is dichotomising (as opposed to say directly acknowledging) the relationship between synchronic and diachronic aspects of discourse the most useful way of engaging with the issue?

Coates and Wade (2004) touch on this concern in their discursive study of Canadian sexual assault trial judgments. The primary objective of their research was to consider ways in which judges used psychological concepts to account for a perpetrator's act of sexual assault. The authors concluded that judges' causal attributions, used in their sentencing remarks, often systematically reframe the sexual assault into an unintentional act of non-violence thus obscuring the offender's responsibility for the assault. A telling comment made by Coates and Wade suggested that "it is not essential to take up an ideological position to produce and reproduce social injustice. The simple act of participating in everyday, taken-for-granted discursive practices…directly and indirectly reproduces social injustices and impedes effective intervention" (ibid, p. 522). Their study and this comment specifically are critically important, for they pinpoint two

important issues: firstly, they underscore a person's involvement in various forms of life by their participation in discursive processes and secondly, they remind us of the duty of care particular to the work of psychologists and health care professionals. Psychological work, be it situated in the academy, in the field or in any other context, needs to be constantly aware of the ways in which its own discourse can be appropriated. Auburn et al., like Potter, Edwards and other DPEC researchers, can attempt to limit discussion of discursive action to a particular situation at hand but in doing so they may risk (in)directly reproducing ideological positions dominant in certain forms of life. As Holquist suggested above, human being is a unified performance, the study of which should enhance our connectedness to each other and our world. To this end – for where else (other than first nature individually focussed accounts) should psychology place its support? - DPEC informed work must acknowledge firstly, that the discursive positions they create are constitutive of human being and secondly, standing behind epistemology does more to disconnect our ways of being than responsibly advance a pro-active moral and socio-political psychology of the twenty-first century.

Again, my concern here is not to diminish the worth of DPEC research. My intent is to pose questions regarding what, if anything else, might be appreciated were DP to engage beyond the proximate context of the act? The Auburn et al. study concluded that "a functional approach was most appropriate since we were chiefly concerned to illustrate the highly situated construction of guilt" (1995, p. 385). Such an admission would be satisfactory had they not earlier in their paper made this puzzling statement in relation to standard pathologically-oriented disciplinary descriptions. They said: "One consequence

which seems to flow from such constructions…is that the wider social meaning of the act of violence can become suppressed" (ibid, p. 383). Well yes. So too, I argue, does a richer understanding of our forms of life, ways of being, cultural order, and so on, struggle for recognition under the psychological program promoted by DPEC. Ultimately, we are left wondering what results might be achieved by DP drawing attention to 'the wider social meaning of the act'?

Discursive Psychology Ontological Constructionism (DPOC)

A good friend once told me: "Any words before the word 'but' in a sentence are usually bullshit". This unequivocal observation echoes the concerns I have raised regarding how the DPEC approach is laid out. To confirm, as many DPEC researchers do (see above), that there is more to human being than discourse alone, only then to disallow an ontological commitment in the psychological study of human being, is circumscribed to say the least. Mine is not a call to reify accounts of human being in a similar manner to first nature psychologies. Rather, I point to the advantages of psychologists discussing their own positions concerning ethical matters, admitting to the context and history of human being and committing (if they so choose) to accepting or changing what constitutive potentials (i.e. discursive resources) are available. The DPEC/DPOC distinction is not supercilious (Edley, 2001) nor is the pursuit of ontological constructionism oxymoronic (Drewery, 2000) because inquiries, particularly in psychology, can and should discuss these possibilities beyond the constraints of

buttressed method fetishisms. So, other than by reification or refrain, how could constructionism accommodate humanity's ontology?

Shotter

Shotter calls for us to acknowledge that our ways of knowing are situated within our ways of being. As he puts it:

> It is this kind of knowledge – of the provisions and resources we make available to ourselves for the realisation of our different possible next forms of social behaviour – that is the special kind of knowledge embodied in the world of a civil society. And it is this that we must try and understand: both the nature of these socio-historical resources, and the nature of the social activities in which they are produced (1993, p. 3).

I attempted to do just this in a study concerning discursive practices supporting State sanctioned exclusion in the Australian State of Queensland (Corcoran, 2006). In this research two data sets, legislation and psychological questionnaires, were analysed and compared with semi-structured interviews to explore the kinds of discursive resources made available to and used by young males who had been either formally excluded from school or incarcerated for the first time. The study's conclusion drew attention to the dialogic relationships engaged between the way institutional practices talk about those they exclude and how recipients of exclusion speak about themselves (see Corcoran,

2003 or 2005, for more detailed analysis). I argued that first nature accounts of personhood, prevalent in legislative and clinical discourse, do little more than pathologise and morally denigrate people under sanction. As a result, institutional and disciplinary practices often fail to attend to the ways in which they are responsible to the joint action taking place and consequently, these practices overlook valuable opportunities to contribute to the promotion of people's psychosocial wellbeing. I will return to the latter point in the final section below.

Shotter's (1993) ideas regarding knowledge of the third kind are central to the present discussion. Critical of first nature attempts at knowledge production, Shotter contends that there are neglected forms of knowledge that speak to what it is to act as socially dexterous human beings. The difficulty, according to Shotter, is that our use of restrictive methods (e.g. statistical regression) obfuscates our appreciation of what exists between us in the living moments of our everyday lives. To counter this he rallies behind an appeal for method as tool-and-result (Vygotsky, 1978) suggesting that knowledges of the third kind, these practical-moral forms of knowledge, may become accessible from within our daily practices through alternate means. As he says:

> Usually, if asked to reflect upon the process of speaking, we 'see through' the
> speech we use, that is, we see 'from' what we say 'to' either its effects, or 'to'
> its meanings; its prosthetic functioning remains 'invisible' to us. We fail to
> notice it because, in speaking, we act 'through' our utterances in 'making
> sense'. But clearly, if this account is correct, as a very special form of

"psychological instrument", linguistic signs possess what might be called a 'prosthetic-tool-text ambiguity', the three different aspects each becoming visible according to the different 'direction' of our view: Acting towards the future, prospectively and creatively, in the *saying* of an utterance, we attempt to use it both prosthetically, as a device 'through' which to begin to express our meanings, and, as a tool-like means to 'move' other people (1993, p. 117-118; emphasis in original).

Note that Shotter emphasises the act, in this instance 'saying', as vital to the process of understanding human being and thus requiring our particular attention. This is because in attempting to access such knowledge understanding must take place 'from within' the act itself. As he puts it: "a shift away from knowing by 'looking at' to a way of knowing by being 'in contact, or in touch with' " (ibid, p. 20). In historical terms, psychology moves from first nature observations and more recent ontologically distanced explanations to DPOC accounts situated within and explicitly committed to the form of life under construction.

Chouliaraki

Chouliaraki, like Shotter, draws on the constructionist argument that discourse is constitutive of social practice including practices involving personhood. Knowledge products accordingly are understood to be discursively developed and historically provisional in what she labels a 'post-positivist' epistemology. Paralleling Foucault

(2000a), critical importance is granted to the appearance and influence of power within meaning-making processes. As Chouliaraki states:

> …discourse sets up a constitutive relationship between meaning and power within social practice: every move to signification comes about from a position of power – power both structuring and structured by the social positions available within a practice. And every move to signification makes a claim to truth precisely from that power position that enunciates it – this is not the 'truth', but always a truth effect, a truth that seeks to re-constitute and re-establish power through meaning (2002, p. 84).

Chouliaraki directly warns us that one-size-fits-all scientific methods can not account for our socially situated and ethically constituted ways of being. This issue, as I have argued, is of no greater import to psychological studies than when accounts of human being are usurped by method fetishisms. If, as Hepburn (2006) suggests, critical psychology's aim is to 'disrupt rather than destroy' the sense of security that comes with method fetishisms, pronouncements like those tendered by DPEC practitioners evidently lack an awareness of their own power and the effects of their own discourse.

Chouliaraki marries constructionist ontology with a critical realist epistemological position and the union is achieved in a particularly interesting way. The crux of her argument relies on a pretext which avoids compulsion to a singular, definitively specified reality. It does so by leaning considerably on Derrida's account of signification and how

his theory extends to questions of epistemology. Chouliaraki puts it this way: "If every object is constituted through reiteration of the semiotic (its capacity for repeated performative acts), then we cannot talk about the 'real' outside its inscription within the regimes of signification that discourse establishes" (op. cit., p. 92). Immediately, a link is established with Shotter's account of knowing from within. Chouliaraki goes on to state that whilst our worlds may phenomenologically appear to us as real objects these may be better understood as 'truth effects'. She says: "…although the social world is constituted in articulations of meaning and power, our ways of knowing about it (our meta-languages) construe social practice 'as if' it were 'real' – which means provisionally accepting the 'immediate givenness' of the various dimensions that are at play within a practice" (ibid, p. 97). The second part of this statement returns us to Bakhtin (1981) who warned that isolating discourse from 'the impulse that reaches out beyond it' inevitably offers less than what could otherwise have been understood from the action taking place. Thus, if dedicated to the pursuit of personal, relational and collective wellness in contemporary societies psychological knowledges must firstly be aware of and then secondly reconstruct the boundaries of what is discursively available as situated provisions and resources i.e. person-oriented grammars, in human activity. These discursive resources directly enable (or disable) possibilities for enacted futures and in social practices such possibilities invariably constrain prospective action.

Perhaps a perspective from professional practice is relevant here. In the course of therapeutic relationships I believe every effort should be made by the therapist not to get ahead, in a dialogic sense, of the client. To advance beyond what is collaboratively and

dialogically meaningful often distances the client from the present conversation and potentially impedes future therapeutic developments. Similarly, Potter and others have developed (and continue to develop) an important challenge to psychology but the value of DP may be fatigued by the disparity between where we, as a discipline and society are situated at present, and where DPEC wishes to take us. As stated above, I hold a sincere appreciation of many of the precepts maintained by DP but I believe DPEC has moved at a pace detrimental to its acceptability both inside and outside the academy. In an effort to remain on message, DPEC's methodological commitment, in lieu of an ontological one, leaves it notionally impoverished. Here is one example:

> While opposing the cognitivist assumption that talk is driven by the workings of an inner life of the mind, that is not the end of the matter. The status of it as a poor general theory of language and mind does not prevent people from making use of it as a way of talking. This is not merely a matter of people making false theoretical assertions such as 'I think in my head', but of talking *as if* that were the case, as part of talk's everyday practices. There are practical, common sense uses of such a notion, that a person's words may be produced or taken on occasions, *to be* expressions of a private and prior realm of mental life. This can be a practical basis for talking and doing things with words, whose *investigation* requires no commitment to mentalism on the analyst's part (Edwards & Potter, 2005, p. 244, emphasis in original).

The most significant impression left by this account is the recognition, matching Chouliaraki's above, that people talk about psychological phenomena using an *as if* or metaphorical premise. This sense of the imaginary facilitates an understanding of the constitutive potentials of language in the construction of our psychosocial worlds. But whilst Edwards and Potter acknowledge this, they restate their position suggesting that it is possible to investigate such discourse without committing to a belief in mentalism. The problem is this: the commitment to mentalism that people employ in their own accounts of everyday activity is, whether psychologists agree with it or not, a commitment regarding how they understand themselves to be. It is, to most people, simply a way of being. As I have been arguing, an ethical void is created (and ensues) because DPEC fails to offer *any* ontological premise (metaphoric or otherwise) with which people may connect. Wetherell puts the case of DPEC emphatically:

> Our approach instead has been to go empirical and turn attention to describing the ways in which 'agency' and 'structure' become practical issues for people engaged in their local moral orders. We analyse agency as a discursive resource rather than a state or an essence (2005, p. 170).

It is all very well 'to go empirical' but for such theory to mean something to the people it is supposedly about it must make some effort to engage with them in a language which can be potentially shared. Psychology can discuss person-oriented discourse without essentialising or depersonalising such ideas - the challenge directly facing DPEC is to do so without leaving its humanity behind. This call, I am disappointed to say, is not too

dissimilar to the disgruntled complaints laid against first nature accounts by social psychologists in the 1970s and 1980s (see e.g. Gergen, 1985; Parker, 1989; Shotter, 1975).

Resourcing joint action for wellbeing

I have already outlined how movement toward specification (or stabilisation as Chouliaraki put it) in psychological research has generally prefaced first nature accounts to understand human being. Whilst these reductionist accounts continue to be employed by the discipline, as in deficit or pathology-based psychological explanation, it is questionable whether these actively promote health and well being in our communities (Gergen, 1991; Prilleltensky, 1994). Could a similar criticism be made of DPEC approaches on account of their failure to provide an ontological commitment to the people they study? Contributions from critical health psychology (CHP) add significantly to this discussion providing criterion by which to compare second nature accounts. Murray (2004) has outlined four associated areas of activity for CHP. The first involves the use of reflexive, moral and relational kinds of psychological theory. He also endorses the view that meanings within cultures should be understood as mediated and constantly changing. Secondly, a focus on context is maintained via advocacy for social justice concerns. The third aspect highlighted looks to research methods that are ethical, critical and qualitative. Finally, the practice of CHP is intended to be community based and aimed at providing conditions that enable psychological health. I now turn to contrast DPOC and DPEC along these dimensions to further differentiate their positions.

The main argument laid out here suggests that whilst some versions of constructionism acknowledge the forms of life within which claims to understanding are made others choose to side step or devalue the issue by placing epistemology before ontology. It is a step, as Wittgenstein said, that at times escapes our notice:

> How does the philosophical problem about mental processes and states and about behaviourism arise? – The first step is the one that altogether escapes notice. We talk of processes and states and leave their *nature* undecided. Sometimes perhaps we shall know more about them – we think. But that is just what commits us to a particular way of looking at the matter. For we have a definite concept of what it means to learn to know a process better. (The decisive movement in the conjuring trick has been made, and it was the very one that we thought quite innocent.) – And now the analogy which was to make us understand our thoughts falls to pieces. So we have to deny the yet uncomprehended process in the yet unexplored medium. And now it looks as if we had denied mental processes. And naturally we don't want to deny them (1953, no. 308; my emphasis).

In relation to CHP's first criteria, most DPEC research goes some way to acknowledging the situatedness of local moral orders in the action under analytic attention (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1992) and as such is not, in Wittgenstein's terms, an entirely unexplored medium. But whilst DPEC holds onto its A-ontological position it

remains caught within an epistemologically directed form of nescience. This point was clearly made by Drewery: "…analysing how descriptions are interactionally managed simply cannot be done without reflexivity. Such analysis of discourse cannot be undertaken without some form of engagement in the context of the discursive production. The 'epistemic constructionist' cannot hide from the fact that his [sic] practice is also positioned" (2000, p. 80). In other words, it is not only research participant's orientations that are meaningful to the practice of psychology but equally the researcher's as well.

Potter, in response to criticisms such as these, asks us to consider whether data would present as is or whether it would in fact exist at all if something life-threatening (e.g. being hit by a car) happened to a researcher on their way to work. The crux of his argument is in "highlighting the researcher's central place in the production of conventional research data, and highlighting the virtue of material where the researcher's active role is minimised" (2002, p. 539). Potter's position is a fair response to the supposed objectivity of positivism and the limited accountability most researchers assume in influencing the outcomes of experimental studies (Danziger, 1990; Howard, 1985). However, DPEC research, with its dedication to 'naturalistic' data and conversation analysis (CA) methodology, can not evade criticism. As Stokoe and Smithson point out:

Typically, when analysts talk about members, they refer only to participants in the fragments of transcript they analyse. They rarely include the analyst as a member. We argue that analysts are *also* members and bring to bear their

common-sense knowledge in the process of analysis. In order to make any leap from what speakers say (a simple paraphrase) to *analytic* commentary, researchers must draw upon their own interpretive resources. This is left unacknowledged and implicit in CA…[and] if analysts draw upon their member's knowledge, then their own position and agenda is necessarily woven into analysis (2001, p. 226; emphasis in original).

By the very act of selection the researcher lays their own imprint upon the data to be analysed. Likewise, the process of analysis itself cannot be portrayed as untouched by a reliance on the commonly used DPEC argument that states: "when it comes to analysing 'accounts', there is a significant distinction to be made, between treating these as the ways participants see things, and treating them as forms of social action" (Edwards, 1997, p. 79). I agree with Edwards that "the task is to examine and *explicate* the bases on which social life is made recognisable and intelligible to, and by, *participants*" (ibid, p. 79; emphasis in original). But as psychologists surely we can sensitively discuss how forms of life, available for analysis in our use of certain discourses, are enacted in our ethical socio-political relational engagements – research practices included. As I have been arguing, is this not what Shotter suggested to be knowing from within joint action? This kind of community-based (and potentially globally relevant) action explicitly commits psychology to look for ways toward critical health promotion.

Conclusion

The pragmatic benefits stimulated by Shotter's constructionist account and Chouliaraki's version of critical realism allow for reflexive consideration of the nature of embodied and discursive contexts and opens options divergent to dominant disciplinary explanations and DPEC positions. It is within these actions that a selection of ontological skills (Shotter, 1993) relative to the indexicals of personhood may be engaged and explored for the ways in which they support or resist specification and enable (or disable) the pursuit of wellness in our communities. Whether a community, its institutions and peoples reflexively acknowledge the forms of life they create will be testament to their willingness to perceive and act on the need and potential for change. Whether DPEC can and is willing to work with DPOC to provide an alternative to first nature accounts may foreshadow DP's own existence in the language games of human being. As Drewery suggests: "Once we understand how different forms of subjective experience are produced, it seems to me that we have a responsibility to move forward to thinking about what forms of subjectivity would be preferred, and how different ways of speaking produce more and less preferred subjectivities" (2005, p. 306). As practicing psychologists each of us work under explicit ethical arrangements in our relationships with people and communities. In this work – for we are all practitioners – we must responsibly favour our duty of care by writing and/or speaking about preferred ways of being as if they were second nature.

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