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A Presuppositional Critique of Constructivism

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Abstract

Educational theories have roots. They have roots in broader philosophies, conceptions of the nature of reality, and the theories utilized in classrooms to teach have implications for broader society. Specifically, this paper discusses the problems of constructivist theory in the classroom.

The author takes a presuppostitional view and shows that all systems have most basic beliefs which are un-provable. So at the heart of any form of interpretive schema is faith in that schema. The author discusses ontological and epistemological options and how shifts in philosophy change the order of the most basic beliefs, but not the fact that they are beliefs, nonetheless. The author discusses the role of theories of truth, and how a fact-constructivism embraces a relativist position that is self-refuting and ultimately untenable absent a suspension of laws of logic. The author argues in favor of *revelation* from God as axiomatic and demonstrates how logic can exist on that basis, whereas on a secular basis, philosophy cannot generate any True facts whatsoever. The author then looks at the educational theory of constructivism and examines the theory and the classroom practices it endorses it in light of the presuppositional critique.

When a "theory of everything" or a meta-narrative is set forth, an author stands in one paradigm while wishing to destroy that one while creating a new one. Constructivist theorists do this very thing when they stand on the shoulders of traditional theorists with regard to logical argumentation, the notion of the value of persuasion, and purposiveness (writing a book to inform others, make money, and arguably believing themselves correct) but in doing so, essentially knock their own foundations out from beneath themselves. Their own theory does not give them impetus to say anything about the theory.

When philosophical constructivism is extended into the realm of education (yielding the educational theory called constructivism) the philosophy sets forth specific practices. While these are ideologically supported, they seem to have less research based support.

The argument that set forth is a presuppositional one. Specifically, that it is one's presuppositions that characterize and even constrains acceptance of one meta-narrative or another. Everyone accepts some form of meta-narrative (even those who rail against meta-narratives have one of their own). It is vital to think on the level of presuppositions (or axioms) because these always play an important, yet often hidden role in discourse. Schlossberg clearly illustrates the importance of understanding assumptions and their role:

> Assumptions, in fact, are more powerful than assertions, because they bypass the critical faculty and thereby create prejudice. If someone argues the proposition that modern intellectual people do not believe in religious dogmas, I am able to judge whether his arguments are persuasive. The simple act of listening to an argument is almost enough to engage it. But if I listen to someone discourse on a related subject in a way that only *assumes* that modern intellectual people do not believe religious dogmas, my mind tends to accept the assumption

and bypasses it in order to engage the argument which, in fact, depends on it. That

bypassed assumption is the pocket of enemy soldiers that was ignored in an effort

to engage the main body of the adversary, and it lies in wait to strike from the

rear. A false assumption can be combined with an unassailable argument, which

then proves the truth of what is false. The false assumption is additionally

beguiling because it often appeals to one of the worst instincts – the desire to be

fashionable or at least to avoid being associated with the unfashionable or the

unpopular (1990, pp. 210-211).

   A priori human mental endowments must exist for learning to take place (Clark, 1968, p.

57). If, as the empiricists argue, even the *law of non-contradiction* is empirically discoverable,

little has been gleaned from Nietzsche, Dewey and Sartre; empirical discoveries can never be

laws as experience can never give universal judgments; mankind is constrained by its temporal

nature, only knowing the past (ibid). Therefore, this argument assumes *a priori* endowments[1].

Given this assumption the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis on which much of constructivism rests - that

"language precedes thought" - is incomplete[2]. The question must be raised, how is anything,

including language, even learnable at all? The only possibility is that at least some *a priori*

endowment exists. Most notably, the author would argue, is that mankind is equipped with

memory, classification, recognition/attribution faculties, and logic (inductive and deductive

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[1] For Durkheim, this was Cultural Collective Representations & Mental Collective Representations; for Mead this was social interaction or language and meaning (Bergesen, 2004, p. 2). Both accept a materialist presupposition; the idea that we are composed solely of matter, and the organic "brain secretes thought like the liver produces bile" (Pierre Cabanis). I reject this presupposition in favor of the notion that my soul or mind is who I am and it animates my body.

[2] The second and third propositions are that "Language is not a given" and "Language is culturally determined". The three propositions create a both a "linguistic determinism" and a "linguistic relativity". I would argue that language did not arise out of a social need, but God endowed Adam with this for him to name the animals, but more importantly so that Adam could talk with God, and vice versa. Even after the Tower of Babel incident, language (whichever one spoke) corresponded to a meaning in the mind that was communicated. Language does change as technology and culture change, but nonetheless it still communicates meaning.

reasoning capabilities). Some forms of the way people think are socially constructed to be sure, but to argue that only a surface reality[3] exists, the reality of everyday life in Berger and Luckmann's terms, and to ignore the full range of worldview options is naïve for the presuppositionalist. Van Til would assert that both Christians and non-Christians employ logic, but non-Christians employ it to suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18) (as discussed in Frame, 2004). Both use the same laws of logic, but the non-Christian has "no basis for believing that the laws of logic apply to reality" (ibid).

Essentially, what people believe about ontology (being or beings), epistemology (knowing), hermeneutics (interpretive methods) and axiology (valuations) and the manner in which thinkers order them, or give them primacy, dictate the kinds of answers one can arrive at regarding all of life. This is what is called *worldview* (Weltanschauung). Each decision on the basic questions provides an axiom and leads to other axioms based on those foundational beliefs. Foundational beliefs are just that, beliefs; they are non-provable. So in some respects, perhaps Rorty was right when he said that truth is "what our peers will let us get away with saying" (as quoted in Plantinga, 1982, p. 50). While one cannot act as if presuppositions are provable, it is possible to make arguments in favor of and demonstrate coherence and validity, and demonstrate that they are valuable in interpreting the world. The question is, are presuppositions being considered by those who hold them? Are they useful in making sense of the world or reason and experience; the world that is known? As Gordon Haddon Clark puts it, "…can we assert creation without implying something about zoology? No, truth is not thus disjointed. It is systematic. And *by the systems they produce*, axioms must be judged (emphasis added) (1968, p. 60).

<div align="center">Ontological Options</div>

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[3] Throughout the paper I will use small r-reality and capital R-Reality to represent perceived or subjective reality and ultimate Reality respectively. Also truth and Truth will be used to indicate subjective truth and ultimate conception of Truth respectively.

Ontology basically deals with the questions "Who am I?" and "How do I exist?" (Martin, 2006). The answers to these questions could be wildly divergent, and historically this can be seen in various faith systems, both religious and non-religious. But essentially, whether one examines a Babylonian creation epic or is reading a modern attempt to explain big bang cosmology, there are still the same two options, a super-naturalistic or a naturalistic explanation (Ibid, p. 19). One's choice in this regard dramatically affects choices in the other arenas. Subsequently people accept ideas about the type of special or natural creation we live in, and the type of creator or process that brought about this world, but this is beyond the scope of this paper. T.S. Eliot gives the options quite clearly, "Either everything in man can be traced as a development from below or something must come from above" (as quoted in Schlossberg, 1990, p. 174).

Typical options (see Appendix A) regarding questions of ontology begin with the concepts of *Ontological Realism* (that a world exists independent of human cognition, thought, or speech processes) and *Ontological Idealism* (that "the world" is a construct of human cognition and thought) (Appendix A). In the end these choices are based upon personal decisions with regard to the broader category, natural or supernatural. The supernatural option, leads the author to assume a Creator. The Biblical concept of the Creator God is most compelling on numerous levels, and thus answers to the subsequent ontological issues are developed on that basis. *Ontological Realism* seems most appropriate to the author because when a person's noetic activity ceases, the world continues and that is because a "proposition exists because God thinks or conceives it" (Plantinga, 1982, p. 70). So in some sense I accept a form of constructivism of Reality, in that God constructs it by His thought. He creates a proposition by thinking/speaking it and thusly He also believes its truth. Plantiga argues that the most sensible anti-realists are Biblical theists (ibid).

So to clarify: Ones choice regarding a NATURALISTIC or SUPER-NATURALISTIC Ontology lead to choices regarding a *real* or *ideal* ontology of the world (creation).

Epistemic Options

The concept of "how we know anything at all" and on "what basis we accept that knowledge" is not as straightforward as the ontological options. To clarify the concept, John Peifer (as quoted in Naugle, 2005, p. 321) states "Do we, in knowing, by means of what is thought, attain to things, to realities which enjoy an independence in physical existence outside of thought, or do we by knowing attain only to what is in thought?" Peifer continues, "Does thinking terminate in things or in thought?" (ibid). Plato attempted to answer this question in *Republic*, Book VII with *The Allegory of the Cave*. Briefly, Plato's argument is that people are like chained prisoners who can only view in one direction, toward the wall of the cave they are within. There burns a fire behind them illuminating objects and their own shadows. This is all they know and all they can know, but do not realize that there is a real thing, a so-called Platonic "form" that is what is really real, and they only see the shadows (Plato).[4]

Plato's answer to the question is that human thinking ends in representations of things, and "if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error" that they would actually see and know what is really Real (ibid). Of course Plato's point is that people need to be ruled by philosopher-kings (like himself) so they can be released in wise manner from their slavery. Plato answered his epistemological question based on his ontology. This pattern (deal with ontology first, then epistemology derived therefrom; followed by hermeneutics, etc.) basically held true until the Enlightenment. It is at this point we see a shift in primacy from being to knowing, or rather, from ontology as primary, to epistemology as primary. Knowing came to precede being, as Descartes placed the rational self as the foundation of knowledge with "*Cogito ergo sum*" ("I

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[4] "The Matrix Trilogy" movies put this concept in vivid detail, albeit with extensive artistic license.

think therefore I am") (Sire, 2004, p. 216). Thinking and rationalism (not mere rationality) become the hallmarks of the Modern world. In science this worked wonders, but in philosophy the result was more dismal.

Hume raises the question "How is it that we know anything?" and Kant attempts to answer him. The effect though is "exalting the knowing self to the position of 'creating' reality" (ibid, p. 218). Nietzsche furthers the Cartesian argument and questions the certainty of the existing self. "What if it is the thinking that creates or causes the *I* rather than the *I* that causes the thinking?" (ibid). So as Sire points out, we shift again "from knowing to meaning" and knowledge can no longer be a basis for anything and *truth* (and Truth) vanishes (2004, p. 217). "In the absence of truth there is only power" (conversation with Dr. David Beck, October 9, 2007) as justice vanishes when truth does. It is this *power* that postmodernists typically focus on. *Truth* and *truths* are "power" and "the authority to determine what counts as true is also the power to determine who counts as important" (White, p. 55). This plays an important role in educational philosophy as one might imagine. So essentially there is a shift in what is seen as the philosophical first question. The Pre-moderns structured philosophy in the following manner: ontology → epistemology → hermeneutics; the Modernist in emphasizing knowledge changed the order to epistemology → ontology → hermeneutics; the Postmodern era now emphasizes meaning which reorients the questions again to hermeneutics → ontology → epistemology.

The position that Plato ends with is what might be called naïve realism or common-sense realism. The notion is that meaning is found in a "'vertical' relation between terms and their referents" or rather, words correspond directly with Reality (Sayer, as quoted in Nightingale and Cromby, 2002, p. 703). Naugle discusses variations on this concept of ideas in the mind and their existence outside a person's mental concept. He argues that there are three options with regard to

epistemology; naïve realism, creative anti-realism, and critical realism (see a typical options

chart in Appendix A – although only two options are present). The following premises

describing the positions are from his book *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (2002, pp. 322-

324).

Naïve Realism
1) an objective, independent reality exists;
2) the character of this reality is fixed and independent of any observer;
3) human knowers have trustworthy cognitive capacities by which to apprehend this fixed reality unencumbered by personal prejudices and traditions;
4) truth and knowledge about the world are discovered and certain, not invented and relative

Creative Anti-Realism
1) while an external world may, and probably does exist, its objective character remains forever obscure;
2) human knowers lack epistemic access to apprehend the world as it is in itself
3) what poses as reality is linguistically constructed, an idealistic product of the human mind;
4) consequently, truth and knowledge about the world are not discovered and certain, but invented and relative.

Critical Realism
1) an objective, independent reality exists;
2) the character of this reality is fixed and independent of any observer;
3) human knowers have trustworthy cognitive capacities by which to apprehend this fixed reality, but the influences of personal prejudices and worldview traditions conditions or relativizes the knowing process;
4) truth and knowledge about the world, therefore, are partially discovered and certain, and partially invented and relative.

So the Naïve Realist would answer the question, "can we know truth it itself" (ding-an-

sich) in the affirmative. The Creative Anti-Realist would also answer in the affirmative, in that

truth is created within the subject, so in that sense, we can truly know what we create (truth is

subject-laden), but the Critical Realist would answer both yes and no. "Yes" in that we have

epistemic access to the truth, and it is Real, but "no", in that there are subjective elements to

reality (they are perspectival due to the finiteness of human beings), and sin nature constrains the

ability to know completely as sinners are biased against the truth. Again, the importance of revelation is illustrated.

Van Til argues that those who do not believe in revelation "can and do argue logically, but do so on borrowed capital" (in Frame, 2000). The theistic Critical Realist would also parallel each proposition mentioned above with the following concepts 1) God thinks/spoke this Reality, so it is Real; 2) God is unchanging; 3) mankind is created in the image of God (logic) but the fall of man affects his faculties; 4) Scripture assumes Truth but the Apostle Paul becomes "all things to all men" (I Cor. 9:22) indicating the subjective nature of some truth in reality. This is also seen in 1 Cor. 13:12, where Paul states "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."

<div align="center">Truth? What is Truth?</div>

Aristotle, in defining *truth* stated, "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true (Stanford). So to Aristotle, truth is a subjective acknowledgment of what actually is. This is known as the correspondence theory of truth. The correspondence theorist would argue that absolute or objective Truth is out there and the human faculties can know it. This is also essentially the Platonic or naïve realist conceptualization of truth.

Looking at the chart in Appendix A, one can see that there are two other theories noted. Again, the chart is incomplete[5] and not reflecting all ways of knowing, just three of the more popular ones. It is largely on the correspondence theory of truth that constructivism levels its most devastating attack. Putnam mentions that there is "no 'God's-eye view' from which we might compare our utterances to the world" (as quoted in Nightingale, p. 703). This is something

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[5] I am not trying to set up this chart in Appendix A as authoritative and then strike it down in a straw-man argument, but I am seeking to merely demonstrate that many philosophers do not completely understand the nature of presuppositions as demonstrated by the prevalence of incomplete charts of this sort.

unknowable, people can only make more or less compelling argument in favor of one perspective or another. Arguments are more or less compelling based on our presuppositions regarding the nature of man, knowledge, reality, and terminate in unproven assumptions (axioms) about the way things are that collectively maintain a semblance of logic and define our conceptual schemes.

Clark is correct, that secular philosophy has failed in that it could not establish the law of non-contradiction (p. 64). According to current secular trends in philosophy, objects can be both true and false in the same given situation, undoing almost 2500 years of philosophy and denying what most experience in everyday life; namely pink is not blue and that $1+1 \neq 11$.

The typical understanding of truth is *justified, true, belief*. Thus, it would be written logically accordingly:

Any thinker T, knows p, if and only if

1. T believes *p*;

2. T is justified in believing *p*;

3. *p* is true

The major issue is that postmodern thought is destroying objectivity about facts; justification, and rational explanation, and in so doing it destroys the possibility of any knowledge or truth at all (Boghossian, pp. 15-24). There is only relativism about everything, including logic. As Boghossian, (p. 40) points out; the social constructivist picture of reality is as follows:

1. Since we have socially constructed that *p*, therefore *p*.

2. And since it is possible that another community should have constructed the fact that *not-p*, then possibly *not-p*;

3. So, it is possible that both *p* and *not-p*.

He continues,

> How could it be the case both that the first Americans originated in Asia *and* that they did not originate there but originated instead in a subterranean world of spirits? How could it be the case both that the world is flat (the fact constructed by pre-Aristotelian Greeks) *and* that it is round (the fact constructed by us) (ibid)?

The idea that truth is socially constructed essentially does away with any possibility about any facts at all; truth is gone, because constructivism (specifically fact-constructivism) stands contrary to the law of non-contradiction. But how can this law of logic be established if modern secular philosophy has destroyed the possibility of it? It cannot and there is only irrationalism that remains. Turning again to Clark's presuppositional argument of axiomatic revelation, John 1:1 states, "In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The term translated "Word" is the Koine Greek *Logos*. This is from where the word logic derives. Christ is the *Logos*, "the definition, the theory, the argument, the principle of law, the sentence, the wisdom … so in the beginning was, the Logic" (Clark, p. 67). Logic therefore is the description of *how* God thinks. Demonstrating this concept, Stephen Charnock (as quoted in Clark, p. 66) states, "God knows himself because his knowledge with his will is the cause of all other things."

The law of non-contradiction merely explains the manner in which reality, as created by God's thinking, works. The thoughts in the Bible are the thoughts of God (1 Cor. 2:16 – "We have the mind of Christ"; Phil. 2:5 – "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."). So men have *a priori* rational endowment as God's nature is rationality. We are created in his

image (*imagio dei*) and are "the expression on a created level of the internal coherence of God's nature" and "the science of logic seeks to discover the principles (such as the law of non-contradiction) for correct inferences and correct judgments of consistency" (Frame, 2004).

Historical Approach

For purposes of describing the various philosophical options, a brief historical recounting of conceptual changes and the resulting shifts in culture is warranted. A rather common breakdown is; pre-modernity, modernity, and post-modernity. Pre-moderns characteristically accepted the authority of the church and hence there is an acceptance of the status quo with regard to the available answers to the basic questions; ontology – God created and mankind exists within that creation and can know it. This is typically accepted because the authority of the church and the truth of the Scriptures were acknowledged because "what was needed for both knowledge and virtue could be found in the resources of tradition" (White, p. 25). Education was rare and typically was focused on a study of authoritative texts, not critical studies or experimentation (ibid, p. 26). So Premoderns ultimately placed their faith in authority; Moderns lost their faith in authority and placed it in human reason around the time of the enlightenment; finally, the Postmoderns kept the Modern distrust of authority but lost their faith in reason and have found nothing to replace their faith (ibid, p. 41).

Pre-modernity → Modernity → Post-modernity

The Cartesian foundational proposition *Cogito ergo sum* sets up the Modern era; an era in which most philosophers believed certain truths were actually self-evident (Boghossian, 2006, p. 116). Descartes and Locke were both convinced of the reasoning power of the human mind to solve the deepest questions plaguing humanity (White, 2006, p. 31). Prior to this, most knowledge in Western society was religiously derived, in that the Bible was the basis for what

was sure. For Pre-moderns, the idea "was for the Biblical text to shape the worldview of the reader" (White, p. 118). But Descartes' desire to find complete intellectual certitude was fatal to what Kant called the "Cartesian revolution" and what has become known as Modernism. Too much faith (not proof, again emphasizing the presuppositional nature of axioms) was placed in the ability of the human mind (Sire, 1997). Sire (p. 236) points out that God claims to be "I AM WHO I AM" - the self existing, self-referential one (c.f. Exodus 3:14). The rationalist approach says that there is reality and we can know it of our own inherent rationality. This has come under intense scrutiny (by both pre-moderns and post-moderns) after the failure of modernity to actually create the better world it promised since the Enlightenment. Progress has never occurred in the utopian manner of the modern context. The constructivist approach responds and asks how you even know there is Reality outside of our subjectively created reality (i.e. creative anti-realism). All that can be said is that the only reality that is even knowable is that which we create. The critical realist admits fallibility in knowledge (as Kuhn so aptly demonstrates in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*) but adheres to the existence of an objective reality (contra-Kuhn who was an anti-foundationalist). So one can see a pre-modern, to modern, to post-modern transition that in reality can be balanced out by reversion to the pre-modern notion that there is objective truth and reality - but these things are only knowable from a finite perspective. There is a blend of the rational and objective with the subjective; honoring both the *Logos* (definition – who is Christ) and the subjective created being in his or her context. It is a reorientation from an overemphasis on objectivity (modernity) and an overemphasis of subjectivity (post-modernity).

Problems with Constructivism in Particular

Schlossberg criticizes the social constructivist position in that it "always has the environment precede the idea, even when it cannot provide evidence for that order" (1990, p.

154). Constructivists Berger and Luckmann admit that they take their root proposition from Marx; specifically "that man's consciousness is determined by his social being" (1967, pp. 5-6). The issue with this sort of formulation is that there is another assumption, that history is the same as nature (another derivative of Marx's materialism). Reinhold Niebuhr criticizes this in *The Irony of American History*, calling it "naïve belief". The idea that methods used in understanding nature can be used in studying human action and interaction is naïve according to Niebuhr (i.e. it is a category error). But this should be no surprise as most social scientists begin with presuppositions of the Natural (rather than supernatural) and hence "mind is a product of material origin or that human behavior is completely contingent on prior experiences" (Schlossberg, p. 153). "The habitat accounts for the opinions of the thinker and explains why his ideas are different from those of another person who lives in a different habitat" (ibid). Schlossberg continues:

> The all-inclusiveness of the system [social constructivism] makes it invulnerable to refutation, regardless of the evidence adduced… All arguments are turned back as further evidence that the speaker is bound by the determining influence… which Mannheim admits is a "means for side-stepping the discussion"… Such imperviousness to refutation, far from being a sign of strength, is further evidence that these disciplines are not the sciences they claim to be (p. 156).

Karl Popper levies strong criticism of constructivism by arguing, according to the theory, that the entire theory might simply be expression of the class interests of those who advocate this theory (1971, p. 243). This is actually quite amusing as it might be the only critique that actually can not be subsumed by the theory.

So, to illustrating that constructivism is more of a faith system than a scientific enterprise, the following summation of the presuppositions is offered (from Schlossberg, 1990; Naugle, 2002; Plantinga, 1982; White, 2006; Sire, 2004; Boghossian, 2007):

- Constructivism assumes the truth of its root proposition (a la Marx).

- Constructivism assumes a value-free social science (Schlossberg, p. 155).

- Constituents of constructivism unjustifiably exempt social constructivism from its own relativization (ibid).

- Constituents of constructivism use logic and persuasion but disprove the truth of logic; the theorist falls prey to his theory (c.f. White, 2007, p. 82).

- Telling others about social constructivism is meaningless, if one assumes the truth of the system.

- Constituents of constructivism attempt to include worldviews in their analysis (Berger specifically), but fail to see their own perspective as a worldview, and removes constructivism from the criticism it levies on others (Naugle, p. 233).

- Berger's constructivism conflates a difference in representation with a difference in the thing represented (i.e. he mistakes "different worlds" for "differences in belief about the world").

- Constructivism is "hugely empowering. If we can be said to know up front that any item of knowledge only has that status because it gets a nod from our contingent social values, then any claim to knowledge can be dispatched if we happen not to share the values on which it allegedly depends" (Boghossian, p. 130). For the postmodern thinker "grammar is power: whoever controls the rules and ordinary usages of a language controls what can be thought" (White, 2007, p. 99).

- Constructivism asserts that the "powerful can not criticize the oppressed, because the central epistemological categories are inexorably tied to particular perspectives, it also follows that the oppressed can not criticize the powerful… unless we allow a "double standard: allow a questionable idea to be criticized if it is held by those in a position of power – Christian creationism, for example – but not if it is held by those whom the powerful oppress – Zuni creationism, for example" (ibid).

- Constructivism is valuable in that it demonstrates the fact that society molds us in many ways, but if it molded us in all ways, and we are simply the "product of the blind forces of nature and society, then so is our view that we are only the product of the blind forces of nature and society. A radical sociology of knowledge is also self-refuting" (Sire, pp. 236-237).

- The idea that we have no access to reality and that we can only have stories is self-referentially incoherent. It is an illogical axiom, or "put crudely, this idea cannot account for itself, for it tells us something that, on its own account, we can not know" (ibid). Likewise, if it is true that all discourse is a power play and should be questioned (a la Foucault) then should not that proposition also be questioned? For it only makes sense if that one sentence is excluded from being a power play (ibid, p. 236).

- The answer to the question "Is Constructivism True?" can never be answered in the affirmative. From within the system, the constructivist accepts relativity, so it can be *true* (but only in a pragmatic sense; that it is instructive perhaps), but not *True*. From outside the system, no one would accept it as true without being subsumed by the system.

Philosophical constructivism as a system is largely internally consistent in that it is strong enough to redefine everything according to the theory itself. But like any other worldview, it has certain basic propositions that are un-provable, that must be accepted simply on faith. One of the main problems with this worldview is that it terminates in the relativization of Truth to perspectival truths. There can be no True facts in this system, only pragmatic facts. This is self-refuting in that scientific data, argumentation, and logic are used to demonstrate and "sell" a worldview that denies the Truth of those types of arguments. Secondly, it is not ultimately a livable and viable system – hard sciences reject it outright as no facts can be generated in the system, no one can fly to moon if we socially construct physics. In the end an inability to determine what is True must inevitably result in a breakdown of culture as opposed to a protection of *all* from the power of others over them, as postmoderns typically seek (c.f. White, 2007, p. 55-57). Knowledge is no longer seen a power; for the postmodern, *truth is power*. While it is important to be concerned with how Truth is used (i.e. Lincoln, Roosevelt, Hitler, Stalin, Mao, etc.) throwing out the concept of Truth altogether does not eliminate oppression, it merely changes the nature of it so that anything we dislike can be deemed oppressive, and still be called truth.

Constructivism in Education

As any comprehensive theory or meta-narrative, constructivism has implications for other areas of life. In education, postmodern thinking has detrimental effects as truth and reality no longer exist other than in our perceptions and beliefs of that truth or reality. Windschitl (1999) defines constructivism as the "belief that learners actively create, interpret, and reorganize knowledge in individual ways" (p. 151). Similarly, Siegel argues that "knowledge is acquired through interactions with the environment". Both of these theses in educational constructivism

have direct roots in philosophical postmodernism in the social constructivist vein. Referring back to previous discussions, philosophically, Modernism primarily appeals to rationalism, postmodernity primarily appeals to meaning. If an object or concept in one's mind does not actually reflect some reality outside the mental concept, then interpretation and meaning become absolutely essential. If two people can have no actual common external reference point, then all communication is essentially pointless. But, as people do exist in society, and they have a pragmatic need to act as if things were commonly referable, people thusly do engage in social activity. To that end, education needs to be reconceived as "all knowledge is invented or 'constructed' in the minds of learners. It can't be any other way, postmodernists say, because the ideas teachers teach and students learn don't correspond to any objective [external] reality" (DeLashmutt & Braund, 1996, p. 99). Given the constructivist view of truth, the purpose of education takes two forms according to Vadeboncouer (1997), either to "educate the individual child in a manner which supports the child's interests and needs" or "social transformation and the reconstruction of society aligned with democratic ideals" (p. 15). The first might be considered a less radical goal, but both of these goals are derived from an anti-realist view of truth. As mentioned previously, "knowledge, ideas, and language are created by people not because they are 'true,' but rather because the are useful" (DeLashmutt & Braund, p. 99).

For the constructivist, since learning only happens in the context of social interaction, and since teachers do not have "privileged relationship to truth" (ibid) constructivists advocate a radical departure from the Modernist idea of education. Bruffee (quoted in Petraglia, 1998, p. 95) states that "a social constructionist position in any discipline assumes that entities we normally call reality, knowledge, thought, facts, texts, selves, and so on are constructs generated by communities of like-minded peers". Thusly,

knowledge arises through consensus rather than through correspondence with objective truth or in an individual's autonomous construction of that reality. For educators… social constructionism seems a logical and complementary extension of constructivist learning theory especially as embodied in sociohistorist and second-wave cognitive schools of thought (Petraglia, pp. 95-96).

The chart below, taken from DeLashmutt and Braund (1997, p. 97)

demonstrate the shift in perspective in four important arenas; knowledge,

culture, values, and human nature

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	Modernist Theory[2]	Postmodern Theory
Knowledge	Educators should be authoritative transmitters of unbiased knowledge.	Educators are biased facilitators and co-"constructors" of knowledge.
Culture	Culture is both an object of study and a barrier to learning. Students from diverse cultures must be trained in a shared language before teachers can transmit knowledge to them.	The modernist goal of unifying society results in domination and exploitation, because unity is always based on dominant culture. All cultures are not only of equal value, but also constitute equally important *realities*. Minority students must be empowered to fight against Eurocentric enculturation.
Values	Traditional modernists believe that educators are legitimate authorities on values, and therefore *they should train students in universal values*. More liberal modernists argue that *education should be "values-neutral."* Teachers help students with "values clarification"— deciding what values each individual student will hold. Values can and should be separated from facts. The most important values are *rationality, freedom, and progress*.	Education should help *students construct diverse and personally useful values in the context of their cultures*. Values are considered *useful for a given culture*, not *true* or *right* in any universal sense. Since teachers cannot avoid teaching their own values, it is okay for teachers to openly promote their values and social agendas in the classroom as long as these are not "fundamentalist" or totalistic." Important values to teach include diversity, tolerance, freedom, creativity, emotional expressiveness, and use of intuition.
Human Nature	Modernists generally *believe in a stable, inherent self that can be objectively known*. Since humans are thought to have a stable essential nature, IQ tests, and other similar "objective tests," can be used to discover students' innate intelligence. By giving students mastery over subject matter, teachers enhance students' self-esteem. Education helps individuals discover their identities. Individuals and society progress by learning and applying objective knowledge.	Students have no "true self" or innate essence. Rather, selves are social constructs. Postmodern educators believe *self-esteem is a precondition for learning*. They view education as a type of therapy. Education helps individuals appreciate their identities rather than discover them. Individuals and society progress when people are empowered to attain their own chosen goals.

Appendix A

A Typical "Basic Questions" Chart

[I] What is the object of cognition? (Ontological aspect)	*(Ontological) realism.* A world exists independently of human cognition, i. e. independent of thought and speech processes [cp. e.g. Bunge (1977)].	*(Ontological) idealism.* The „world" is a construct depending on human consciousness [cp. e.g. von Foerster (1996)].	
[II] What is the relationship between cognition and the object of cognition?	*Epistemological realism.* objective cognition of an independent reality is possible. It claims the possibility of eliminating subject-dependent distortions of the cognition of reality, as soon as suitable measures for the removal of appropriate intervening variables are found [cp. e.g. Loose (1972)]	*Constructivism.* Cognition in is subjective, i. e. „private". The relationship of cognition and the object of cognition is thus determined clearly by the identifiable subject [cp. e.g. Glasersfeld (1986, 1987), Lorenzen (1987), Wyssusek and Schwartz (2003)].	
[III] What is true cognition? (Concept of truth)	*Correspondence theory of truth.* True statements are those which correspond with „real world facts" [see below].	*Consensus theory of truth.* A statement is true (for a group), if and only if, it is acceptable for the group [see below].	*Semantic theory of truth.* A requirement for true statements is the differentiation of an object and a meta language [see below].
[IV] What is the origin of cognition/knowledge?	*Empiricism.* Experience-based knowledge is called *a posteriori* or *empirical knowledge* [Alavi et al., 1989, Berkley, 1975, Hume, 1978, Locke, 1982, Carnap, 2003, Quine, 1961, Carnap et al., 1929]	*Rationalism.* Non-experience-based knowledge is referred to as *a priori knowledge*. [Leibniz, 1962, Chomsky, 1965, Spinoza, 1992, Hanson and Hunter, 1992, Descartes, 1996, Bonjour, 1998]	*Kantianism.* Conciliating positions recognize both experience and intellect as sources of cognition. Thoughts are meaningless without content, cognitions are blind without being linked to terms [Kant, 1999]
[V] By what means can cognition be achieved? (Methodological aspect)	*Inductivism.* Induction is understood as the extension from individual cases to universal phrases, the generalization. An inductive conclusion means the transfer from statements via (observed, empirical) individual cases to a universal law a statement on the basis of an assumption of homogeneity on nature [cp. e.g. Rott (1995), Seiffert (1996)].	*Deductivism.* Deduction is seen as the derivation of a statement (thesis A) from other statements (hypothesis A_1, ..., A_n) with the help of logical conclusions. It is the derivation of the individual from the universal and is applied, for example, in mathematical axiom systems [cp. e.g. Gethmann (1995)].	

Chart retrieved from http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/8/4/1/Figure5.jpg

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