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Kenneth J. Gergen

Swarthmore College, kgergen1@swarthmore.edu

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History and Psychology

Three Weddings and a Future

Kenneth J. Gergen

Psychological science and historical scholarship have not always been congenial companions. For many historians, psychology has been a suspicious enterprise, an uneven fledgling in the intellectual world, disingenuously arrogating to itself the status of a natural science. Further, psychology's implicit agenda is hegemonic. In the present case, if psychological science furnishes foundational knowledge regarding human behavior, and historical study is largely devoted to understanding just such conduct across time, then history stands to be absorbed by the science—ancillary and subsidiary. Psychology's attitude toward history has been equally distant. As a child of cultural modernism, psychological science has treated historical inquiry with little more than tolerant civility. Psychology has been an enterprise struggling to develop general laws through scientific (and largely experimental) methods. Because of its newly fashioned commitment to empirical methods, preceding scholarship of the mind or scholarship about earlier mentalities was necessarily impaired. In an important sense, the past was a shroud to be cast away. Psychologists might scan historical accounts of earlier times in search of interesting hypotheses or anecdotes, but the results would most likely confirm the widely shared suspicion that contemporary research—controlled and systematic—was far superior in its conclusions. From the psychologist's standpoint, historians are backward looking, while the proper emphasis of research should be placed on building knowledge for the future.

Slowly, however, these disciplinary antipathies have begun to subside. With the emergence of new cultural topoi—globalization, ecology, information explosion, multiculturalism, and postmodernity among them—we encounter increased sensitivity to the artificial and often obfuscating thrall of disciplinarity. Division and specialization are falteringly but increasingly replaced by curiosity, dialogue, and an optimistic sense of new and fascinating futures. It is with the shape of this future that the present chapter is concerned. A marriage of history and psychology can take many forms, and reflexive concern over their differing potentials and shortcomings is essential. It is not merely a matter of intellectual and scholarly promise; long-standing traditions hang in the balance—to be strengthened or dissolved accordingly. These traditions are further linked to broader societal practices of moral and

political consequence. In choosing our mode of inquiry, so do we fashion a cultural future.

With these concerns in mind, I wish to consider three contrasting orientations to this blending of orientations: history as psychological expression, history as psychological progenitor, and psychological discourse as history. Wherever possible, we shall keep issues of the emotions in the foreground; however, where the literature directs us to other psychological states and conditions, we shall find that the conclusions are also relevant to the emotions. I will not pretend to be impartial in this analysis. Indeed, the issue of moral and political impartiality is central to the discussion. At the same time, I make no claims to clairvoyance in these matters. These remarks are not intended as conclusive—the end of the conversation—so much as invitations to collective reflection on the building of a viable future.

History as Psychological Expression

My chief concern in the present analysis is the set of assumptions traditionally grounding central inquiry in both the psychological and historical domains. These assumptions, I will argue, while inviting certain forms of communication between history and psychology, are also problematic and delimiting in significant respects. Further, within certain forms of historical psychology, these assumptions are giving way to significant alternatives. For many, these latter developments represent important threats to the relevant disciplines. However, as I shall argue, these threats are more than offset by the manifold advantages, both to historical/psychological study and for societal life more generally.

Let us briefly consider several pivotal assumptions that traditionally conjoin these domains. I shall not lay out the terrain in any detail in this essay, as the assumptive paradigm is well elaborated within twentieth-century philosophy of science (as emerging within 1920s positivism and extending through logical empiricism to the Popperian extenuations in critical rationalism), and deeply embedded as an implicit forestructure within the everyday activities of scholars and scientists themselves. Briefly to recapitulate four of the central working assumptions within vast sectors of the disciplines today, we find commitments to the following:

1. *An independent subject matter.* Until recent years, historians and psychologists have virtually assumed the existence of their subject matters independent of the particular passions and predilections of the inquiring agent. This obdurate subject matter—given in nature—is there to be recorded, measured, described, and analyzed. Experience of this subject matter may serve as an inductive basis for the generation of knowledge or understanding. Contrasting accounts of the world may be compared against the range of existents to determine their relative validity.

2. *An essentialist view of mind.* Historians have largely joined psychologists in presuming that among the important subject matters to be explored are specifically mental processes, their antecedents and manifestations. Because human action is based on a psychological substratum (including, for example, emotion, thought, intention, and motivation), an illumination of psychological functioning is essential

for historical knowledge (lest history become a mere chronicle of events). Mental process is the pivotal focus of psychological science.

3. *Understanding as objective and cumulative.* Psychologists have expended great effort to insure the objective assessment of their subject matter. Instrumentation, computer control, experimental design, and test validation studies are only a few of the safeguards to objectivity. Although few historians would claim the world of the past to be transparent, most would agree that through the examination of manuscripts, letters, diaries, and other artifacts, one can construct accounts of the past that shed increasing light on the actual occurrences. Objective understanding may not be fully achievable, but the goal can be approximated in ever advancing degree. Further, in both disciplines objectivity serves as the foundation for cumulative knowledge. With increasing study of a given phenomenon—whether psychological depression or the Great Depression—scholars can achieve more fully detailed understanding.

4. *Value neutrality.* The pervasive tendency in historical and psychological inquiry has been a claim to ideological nonpartisanship. To be sure, scholars and scientists may harbor strong personal values, but these should in no way influence the assaying of evidence or the resulting account of the subject matter. The quest for objectivity in both cases is simultaneously linked to a belief in objectivity as liberation from ideology.

In large measure, these shared assumptions are also responsible for the emergence of a small but robust movement toward a historical psychology. Given broad agreement in metaphysical assumptions, a variegated range of exciting and challenging explorations into the interrelations between psychological process and historical change has emerged. It will be useful for the present analysis to draw several of these enterprises into focus, and then to examine several problematic implications. With these issues in place, we can turn to two further developments that offer alternative weavings of the historical and the psychological.

Assumptions in Action: Historical Psychology

As indicated, the assumptions outlined here essentially prefigure the dominant postures of inquiry. If we presume the existence of psychological process (entities, mechanisms, dispositions, etc.), along with an objectified historical context (that is, a context that exists independently of mental representation), then we are disposed to analyses that causally link mental predicates with historically specific events or actions. Two major forms of inquiry are favored: the first illuminating *psychological origins* of historically located actions, and the second focused on the *psychological outcomes* of specific historical conditions. While interactions between psychological and historical conditions are rare but noteworthy, most research tends to favor one of these causal sequences or the other. In the case of psychological origins, perhaps the premier efforts have been those of psychohistorians (see, for example, DeMause, 1982; Loewenberg, 1983; Brown, 1959), who typically presume the existence of various psychodynamic processes and focus analysis on the ways these processes manifest themselves in various historical events. Such analyses may consider the psychody-

namic conditions of people at a given era of history (for example, Fromm, 1941), or the individual psychology of significant historical figures (for example, Erikson, 1975). While Martindale's work (especially 1975, 1990) on psychological motives giving rise to aesthetic appreciation and interests places primary stress on the mind as origin of history, his work is especially interesting in demonstrating that psychological states create context effects that loop back to alter their own character. Thus, for Martindale there are predictable historical trajectories derived from psychohistorical interactions.

Increasingly prevalent, however, is research in which mental states and expressions are positioned as effects of particular historical conditions. This work does not propose that psychological processes are products of these conditions; rather, the analyst presumes the existence of fundamental psychological processes (e.g., cognitive, emotional, motivational, etc.), and views the historical context as shaping their content, character, or expression. In effect, we might say, there is a *historical texturing* of the psychological. Work of this sort has sprung from many sources. There has been a long-standing concern, for example, with the ways processes of child development are situated within particular historical milieus (Aries, 1962; van den Berg, 1961; Kessen, 1990). Wide-ranging works such as those of Elias (1978) on the civilizing process, Ong (1982) on forms of cognition favored by oral as opposed to print cultures, and Elder (1974) on the psychological effects of the Great Depression also stand as important contributions to this form of inquiry. Researchers such as Simon-ton (1984, 1990) have even attempted to generate means of quantifying historical variables so as to predict historically specific levels of creativity, genius, or leadership. Perhaps the most extensive and concerted work within this domain has been that of Stearns and Stearns, including their history of anger in the American context (Stearns and Stearns, 1986), the evolution of jealousy in recent history (Stearns, 1989), and the fate of Victorian passions in twentieth-century life (Stearns, 1994). Further exemplars of inquiry in these various domains is contained in the volume *Historical Social Psychology* (Gergen and Gergen, 1984).

Approaching the Limits of the Tradition

As we find, each of the traditional assumptions outlined earlier is clearly manifest in these lines of inquiry. Each presumes the independent existence of its subject matter, the psyche as a "natural kind" available to scientific appraisal, research as objective and cumulative, and the research enterprise not itself ideologically invested. A significant enrichment of understanding has resulted from the pursuit of these assumptions, including among them the very development of the social/behavioral sciences as significant disciplines on the cultural landscape; an emerging sense of unity in questions of knowledge, its importance, and how it is to be pursued and taught; and an enormous body of inquiry serving to stimulate the intellect, the imagination, and public practice. Yet while there is much to be said for these endeavors, it is also important to realize their limitations. That we should applaud the traditional efforts is not in question; whether a single paradigm should suffice is yet another matter.

Three critical issues demand attention in the present context. At the outset, it is

important to realize that the assumptions giving rise to this form of inquiry are themselves derived from a historically situated intelligibility. The assumptions as articulated give the impression of "first principles," foundations that transcend historical and cultural context. Yet the historically sensitive analyst will draw attention to the social conditions under which these assumptions emerged, and the part they may have played within the political and economic context of the time. The "grounding" assumptions, then, derive their legitimacy not from transcendent verities but from specific conditions of society. And if this is so, then there is no binding necessity for maintaining them to the exclusion of others. Or more positively, because they are optional they may be opened to broad-ranging scrutiny and alternatives invited.¹

Such scrutiny begins in earnest when it is realized that these pivotal assumptions furnish no means of critical self-reflection. Once they are set in motion, there are no means of questioning their premises or intelligibly raising questions falling outside the ontology they circumscribe. Once it is agreed that knowledge is accumulated through empirical assessment of the world's givens, it is difficult to challenge this assumption. To question it on grounds that did not assume the ontology (e.g., on spiritual grounds) would be irrelevant to the venture (e.g., "mere mysticism"). To put empiricism to empirical test would be equally problematic. It would be conceptual mischief to suppose that empirical methods could prove themselves untrue.

Yet the problem is not limited to an incapacity for self-reflexivity. As we find, once the paradigm is in motion, all questions falling outside the bounded domain of empirical knowledge are placed in jeopardy. In particular, critics have long been concerned with the inability of the traditional orientation to speak to questions of human value. Because the language of value cannot unequivocally be linked to events in the material world, issues of value have been largely removed from discussion. Further, the pursuit of knowledge is concerned with establishing what is (or was) the case, it is said, and not with promulgating a canon of "oughts." Objective inquiry is not in the business of ideological propaganda. Yet, as critics insist, in his or her choice of descriptive terminology, explanatory base, method of exploration, and rationalizing metaphysics, the scientist/scholar is also acting in the world and inevitably shaping its future for good or ill. In spite of erstwhile claims to value neutrality, then, traditional research pursuits are inevitably ideological. Means must be found, it is argued, to restore a sense of moral and political responsibility to such endeavors.

There is a final issue, less profound in implication, but nonetheless significant. This concerns the tensions inhering in the dominant traditions of history and psychology, and the ways they are resolved within various forms of interdisciplinary work. Of particular concern, psychological study has generally, though not exclusively, been a generalizing discipline. That is, the chief attempt is to establish knowledge of human functioning that transcends both time and culture. In contrast, most (but not all) historical analysis has tended to be particularizing, concerned with the unique configuration of circumstances existing at different periods of time. In terms of our preceding discussion, these differences in propensity are not without political significance. For the generalizing disciplines, a conception of human nature as relatively fixed (of genetic origin) tends to prevail. Thus, there is a preference for

explaining various social ills (e.g., aggression, poverty, drug use) in terms of individual, inherent tendencies, with an associated preference for strong state controls and political conservatism. ("One cannot change human nature, but only control its excesses.") For the particularizing scholar, the tendency is to view human nature as more mutable and multi-potiated. Societal problems are more likely to be understood in terms of the particular configuration of circumstances (e.g., economic, attitudes and values, quality of governance), with policy solutions favoring collaboration and creativity over control and punishment.

In this context we find that many of the efforts just described, in their assumption of human action as an effect or expression of a fixed psychological substrate, will tend to privilege the universal over the particular. The existence of the emotions, for example, is never doubted; their expressions and effects essentially constitute the historical. Such expressions may be controlled, channeled, or suppressed, but the fundament remains fixed. Thus, psychological process remains a prevailing force in the generation of historical events, and the history of psychological processes can be written only in terms of the variations on the fundamental theme. We can appreciate these contentions more fully by contrasting this initial orientation with a second.

The Historical Constitution of the Psyche

In important respects, the second line of psychohistorical inquiry represents a more extreme version of the texturing approach just discussed. However, rather than the historical context serving to give content or conditions of expression to an otherwise fixed domain of psychological functioning, here we find that the historical constitutes the mental. That is, mental processes—both the ontology of the mind and the specific manifestations—are by-products of antecedent historical conditions. These conditions may be material: for Marxist historians, psychological conditions of self-alienation and false consciousness are the specific outcome of conditions of labor. The reconfiguration of labor would essentially eradicate these particular states of mind. For the most part, however, scholars have looked to the social conditions as the primary formative agents of psychological process.

This approach has been most inviting for a range of psychological states that are either marginal or controversial to the society more generally. Thus we are not at all discomforted by accounts of the social history of romantic love (for example, Hunt, 1959; Kern, 1992). Possibly because many feel uncertain that they never have or will experience such a state, and possibly because romantic love is essentially problematic to an Enlightenment ideal of a rational and objective functioning of the mind, there is a certain relief attendant on such historization.

However, the intellectual and ideological stakes are raised considerably when such analysis turns to psychological predicates more pivotal to our public institutions. For example, the radical implications of Lev Vygotsky's (1978) views on human development have not been lost on the professional psychologist. For Vygotsky, "There is nothing in mind that is not first of all in society" (142). In effect, for Vygotsky the processes of thinking and memory are not there in nature, prior to culture, but owe

their very existence to cultural antecedents. At the same time, this view serves as a strong invitation to historical analysis. The periodist may attempt to locate unique psychological states resonating with the configuration of cultural conditions dominant at a given time. Exemplary is Badinter's (1980) analysis of the mother's "instinctive" love for her child, its genesis traced to particular political and intellectual conditions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. My own work (Gergen, 1991) attempts to link various senses of self (as variously possessing a deep interiority, unity) to earlier eras, and argues for the contemporary (postmodern) erosion of this sensibility. Harre and Finlay-Jones's (1986) explorations of *accidie* and *melancholy* in the early European context are also apposite. Although cross-cultural in its focus, Lutz's work on the social constitution of emotions such as *fago* and *song* in the Ifaluk people of the southwest Pacific is highly compelling. Contributions to Harre's (1986) edited collection, *The Social Construction of Emotions*, add important dimension to the form of study.

It is noteworthy that most of the research on the sociohistorical constitution of mind has not been carried out by empirically oriented psychologists. This is perhaps not surprising, inasmuch as the implications of such work for traditional empirical psychology are little short of devastating. At the outset, such inquiry challenges the essentialism so endemic to psychological science, and so necessary to its claims to be studying "universal man." Not only is the search for transhistorical and transcultural generalizations thrown into question, but the very assumption of the science as cumulative is jeopardized. Today's empirical results, on this account, are indicators not of universal truths, but of historically contingent customs (see Gergen, 1994a). Or in terms of our previous concerns, this form of analysis reverses the privilege of the psychological over the historical. Here psychology becomes a tributary of historical analysis.

When their implications are extended, such analyses also favor a self-reflexive posture. This is primarily so because the analyst comes to appreciate the historical contingency of the very conceptions of human knowledge giving rise to historical study itself. For example, if mentalities are socially constituted, what are we to make of the concept of objectivity as state of mind, and the assumption of an unbiased relationship between a private subjectivity and the objects of study? The very idea of a mind separate from the world, existing within the body, and reflecting the contours of an external world becomes open to historical reflection (see, for example, Rorty, 1979). If subjectivity is socially constituted, then isn't all scientific description and explanation colored by (if not derivative of) the community conventions of the time? A space is opened, then, for self-reflexive dialogue.

Further, a view of minds as historically constituted begins to generate a moral and political sensitivity. In particular, if the mental is socially constituted, then forms of psychological being are essentially optional. And if they are optional, we may inquire into the desirability of existing modes of being, and the potentials inherent in potential alternatives. To illustrate, Averill (1982) argues for anger as a form of culturally situated performance. Anger in Western culture, for example, is not duplicated elsewhere, and what we might wish to term anger in many other cultures scarcely resembles what we take to be anger in our own. Under these circumstances,

we in contemporary Western culture can raise questions about the desirability of our current construction of anger. Based on this premise, Tavris (1982) argues for a transformation in our cultural constructions, so as to reduce family violence and other crimes of aggression. More recently, Averill and Nunley (1992) extend these arguments to propose that people should create the emotional forms essential for fulfilling lives.

Finally, we find in this orientation the seeds for a dramatic recasting of the role of historian in matters of psychology. As we found in the preceding analysis, once mentalities are objectified, they will tend to make pivotal demands on all historical analysis. However, if the mental world is historically constituted, then historical understanding is essential to any further analysis of mind. The work of the historian becomes a necessary prolegomenon for further understanding in psychological science. To launch research into any psychological "phenomenon" without a grasp of the textual history giving rise to the very presumption of a phenomenon would be cavalier, to say the least. To carry out research without a sense of the sociocultural forestructure that sets the limits of the project's intelligibility would be myopic.

In spite of the profound implications of inquiry into the historical constitution of the psyche, it must be said that its practitioners have not typically been among the most active in pressing forward its more radical implications. In spite of the tensions, most of this work has proceeded within the traditional metatheoretical thrall. Practitioners have primarily set out to do illuminating historical work, justified in terms of its evidential base and without a particular ethico-political agenda. Such provocation is saved for a third form of psychohistorical inquiry.

Psychological Discourse in Historical Context

The most recent turn in scholarship is a dialogic companion to an array of interrelated movements recently sweeping the humanities and social sciences more broadly. These movements—variously indexed as poststructural, post-empiricist, post-foundational, post-Enlightenment, and postmodern—all tend to converge in their concerns on the construction of meaning through language and within community. That is, in varying ways they draw attention to the multiplicity of ways differing communities construct, typically in language, a local sense of the real and the good. Further, as it is commonly argued, because such constructions create and sustain particular forms of conduct, they simultaneously operate as forces of control or power within society. Most pointedly, as it is proposed, those standing at the margins of such communities may become subject to what, for them, are oppressive if not annihilative consequences of construction.²

These have been stirring if not dramatic dialogues, and their implications far-reaching. Of particular relevance to the present chapter, they have stimulated an alternative form of scholarship, devoted in this case to the historical and cultural circumstances giving rise to particular vocabularies in the ordering of social conduct. The argument here is not that mental events are socially constituted, as in the

previous case. For most of these scholars the existence of mental life itself is undecidable. That is, whether or not there is "mental life" and how (if it exists) it is constituted are not questions generally felt to be answerable outside the confines of a particular interpretive community. The major concern, then, is with the discourses of mental life, people's actions made apparent or possible through such discourses, and the functioning of these discourses (and associated actions) within society over time.

Emotions as Discourse: An Illustration

To convey the logic of this work, I will illustrate with the discourse of the emotions. Attempts to define the emotions and elucidate their character have ornamented the intellectual landscape for over two thousand years. Two characteristics of this continuing colloquy are particularly noteworthy: first, the presumption of palpability, and second, the interminability of debate. In the former case, until the present century there has been little doubting the obdurate existence of the emotions. In the second book of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle distinguished among fifteen emotional states; Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* enumerated six "affective" and five "spirited" emotions; Descartes distinguished among six primary passions of the soul; the eighteenth-century moralist David Hartley located ten "general passions of human nature"; and the major contributions by recent theorists, Tomkins (1962) and Izard (1977), describe some ten distinctive emotional states. In effect, in Western cultural history there is unflinching agreement regarding the palpable presence of emotional states.

At the same time, these deep ontological commitments are also matched by a virtual cacophony of competing views on the character of the emotions—their distinguishing characteristics, origins, manifestations, and significance in human affairs. For Aristotle the emotions constituted "motions of the soul"; for Aquinas the emotions were experienced by the soul, but were the products of sensory appetites; Descartes isolated specific "passions of the soul," these owing to movements of the "animal spirits" agitating the brain. For Thomas Hobbes (1651), the passions were constitutive of human nature itself, and furnished the activating "spirit" for the intellect, the will, and moral character. In his *Treatise on Human Nature* (1739), David Hume divided the passions into those directly derived from human instinct (e.g., the desire to punish our enemies), and those that derive from a "double relation" of sensory impressions and ideas. A century later, both Spencer's *Principles of Psychology* and Darwin's *Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* attempted to place the emotions on more seemingly certain biological grounds.

This interminability of debate is most effectively illustrated when we consider the "object of study" itself, that which is identified as an emotion. For example, Aristotle identified *placability*, *confidence*, *benevolence*, *churlishness*, *resentment*, *emulation*, *longing*, and *enthusiasm* as emotional states no less transparent than *anger* or *joy*. Yet, in their twentieth-century exegeses, neither Tomkins (1962) nor Izard (1977) recognizes these states as constituents of the emotional domain. Aquinas believed that *love*, *desire*, *hope*, and *courage* were all central emotions, and while Aristotle agreed in

the case of *love*, all such states go virtually unrecognized in the recent theories of Tompkins and Izard. Hobbes identified *covetousness*, *luxury*, *curiosity*, *ambition*, *good naturedness*, *superstition*, and *will* as emotional states, none of which qualifies as such in contemporary psychology. Tompkins and Izard agree that *surprise* is an emotion, a belief that would indeed surprise most of their predecessors. However, whereas Izard believes that *sadness* and *guilt* are major emotions, they fail to qualify in Tompkins's analysis; simultaneously, Tompkins sees *distress* as a central emotion, while Izard does not.

There is a certain irony inhering in these two features of emotional debate, palpability and interminability. If the emotions are simply there as transparent features of human existence, why should univocality be so different to achieve? Broad agreement exists within scientific communities concerning, for example, chemical tables, genetic constitution, and the movements of the planets; and where disagreements have developed, procedures have also been located for pressing the nomenclature toward greater uniformity. Why, then, is scientific convergence so elusive in the case of emotions? At least one significant reason for the continuous contention derives from a presumptive fallacy, namely, Whitehead's *fallacy of misplaced concreteness*. Possibly we labor in a tradition in which we mistakenly treat the putative objects of our mental vocabulary as palpable, whereas it is the names themselves that possess more indubitable properties. Because there are words such as love, anger, and guilt, we presume that there must be specific psychological states to which they refer. And if there is disagreement, we presume that continued study of the matter will set the matter straight. After two thousand years of debate on the matter, one is ineluctably led to suppose that there are no such isolable conditions to which such terms refer.

This latter possibility has become more compelling within recent years, and particularly with the development of ordinary language philosophy. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* was the major stimulus in this case, both questioning the referential base for mental predicates and offering an alternative way of accounting for such discourse. As Wittgenstein (1953) asks, "I give notice that I am afraid. — Do I recall my thoughts of the past half hour in order to do that, or do I let a thought of the dentist quickly cross my mind in order to see how it affects me; or can I be uncertain of whether it is really fear of the dentist, and not some other physical feeling of discomfort?" (32e). The impossibility of answering such a question in terms of mental referents for the emotion demands an alternative means of understanding mental terms. This understanding is largely to be found in Wittgenstein's arguments for use-derived meaning. On this view, mental predicates acquire their meaning through various language games embedded within cultural forms of life. Mental language is rendered significant not by virtue of its capacity to reveal, mark, or describe mental states, but by its function in social interchange.

Historicizing Psychological Discourse: Instances and Implications

Arguments of the preceding kind inform a genre of historical work concerned not only with emotion, but also with the full range of discourses on the nature of psychological functioning. The focus of inquiry is variously on the genesis and sustenance of

psychological discourse, its modes of functioning within society, and the values and groups that it sustains (and suppresses). Illustrative are Suzanne Kirschner's (1996) exploration of the way contemporary conceptions of psychological development echo the narratives of neo-Platonist theological texts; David Leary's (1990) edited collection on the place of metaphor in the history of psychological theorizing; Gigerenzer's (1991) analysis of the influence of statistical methodology on psychology's emerging conception of cognitive functioning; Hacking's (1995) *Rewriting the Soul*, a historical inquiry into the conceptions of multiple personality and the politics of memory; Spacks's (1995) exploration of the emergence of boredom in the eighteenth century; and Herman's (1992) inquiry into the political roots of the discourse of psychic trauma. A broad sampling of historical work on psychological discourse is also contained in *Historical Dimensions of Psychological Discourse* (Graumann and Gergen, 1996).

This latter work begins to form a significant alternative to the stance of value neutrality pervading both the preceding psychohistorical enterprises. That is, rather than simply reflecting on the nature of the past, these latter inquiries use historical work in the service of moral/ethical critique with the aim of altering the shape of cultural action. This kind of value-based analysis is specifically invited by the assumption that what we take to be human action is neither given as an essence nor fixed within individuals as cultural disposition; rather, human action is woven into the fabric of discursive understandings. Thus, if the scholar can alter such forms of understanding—as in the case of the historicization of psychological discourse—then we enter a clearing in which choice is possible. To understand that the psychologist's conceptions of emotion, for example, are not maps of human nature but the outcomes of cultural tradition enables us to reflect on the relative value of these conceptions in comparison with other possibilities. The discourse is not fixed, but is rendered optional. Particularly illustrative of these concerns are Rose's (1985, 1990) Foucauldian explorations of the role of the discourse and methods of professional psychology in the political "disciplining" of the society; Lutz's (1988) critique of the androcentric biases fostered by the discourse of emotions in contemporary Western culture; and Sampson's (1988) analysis of the individualist ideology sustained by emerging conceptions of mental life.

The implications of this growing corpus of work for more traditional historical and psychological inquiry seem, at the outset, little short of annihilative. From the discursive perspective, it is difficult to locate a subject matter that is independent of the discursive/theoretical projects of the investigating agents. The very idea of an "independent subject matter"—whether the mind or history itself—lapses into incoherence. And with this turn, of course, so do essentialist conceptions of mental events or processes. If anything, these inquiries demonstrate the tenuous (if not tautological) relationship between our language of the mind and its putative referents. Further, the aspiration for an objective science/history begins to wither. Yes, the sense of objectivity may be achieved within a particular community of interlocutors. However, the scientist/scholar loses the warrant for claiming truth beyond community, some privileged relationship between words and world. Similarly, knowledge may accumulate, but only by virtue of the standards shared within an interpretive community.

Yet in the end, the annihilative implications of these arguments cannot be sustained. Should the discursive critic make claims to the truth of his/her critique, then the very grounds from which they issue are removed. More positively, this is to say that discursive inquiry does succeed in avoiding the pitfalls of gainsaying its own rationale. Whereas traditional inquiry has no means of questioning its own premises (e.g., presumptions of objectivity, value neutrality), the discursive scholar is invited into a posture of humility. Thus, the discursive critique of the traditions must itself be viewed as a discursive move, a means of carrying on intellectual life within the scholarly community, and relating this community to the broader society. The arguments essentially serve as an invitation to forms of conversation and relationship that may offer new alternatives for inquiry and new roles for the scholar.

Finally, we find that from the discursive perspective, neither psychology nor history is furnished an ultimate explanatory privilege. Neither psychological nor historical events are celebrated as the generative sources of action. In the discursive account, psychological processes are bracketed, thus seeming to give explanatory privilege to historical analysis. At the same time, one might counter that discourse analysis now replaces mental states as the central focus of historical analysis. However, because psychological discourse is integral to (and not separated from) social process, it is neither a cause nor an effect of social pattern. In effect, discourse both constitutes and is constituted by the historically located conditions of the culture. Neither mind nor material are paramount.

History and Psychology: Is There a Future?

We have surveyed three significant departures in the marriage of historical and psychological scholarship, the first drawing on traditional essentialist assumptions regarding both history and psychology, the second emphasizing the historical constitution of the psychological domain, and the third transforming both history and psychology to discourse. How should we now regard these ventures in terms of future investments? Should the traditional endeavors, still very robust, simply continue unabated in their hegemonic trajectory? Do the emerging alternatives now make it impossible to return to traditional work? Is there some form of amalgam that we should seek? These are complex questions, and discussions should remain open. However, we may draw several conclusions from the preceding discussion that may serve as useful entries into the dialogue.

At the outset, I find myself compelled by the various arguments seeding the discursive turn in social analysis. To be sure, the chief outcomes of historical and psychological scholarship are bodies of discourse—books, articles, lectures, and the like. The extent to which these bodies of discourse are referentially linked to events outside language must always remain in question; word-object relations are forever in motion (“infinite semiosis”), and words themselves are easily objectified even when there are no ostensible referents. Further, when we attempt to describe the world to which discourse could be linked, we again enter the corridors of discourse. To be sure, we may deconstruct this line of reasoning by resorting to its own

forms of argument. However, such an act of deconstruction, though certainly valid, simultaneously reasserts the intelligibility of the discursive arguments.

With this said, however, we do not locate within the discursive orientation any foundational arguments against the preceding lines of investigation. Unlike the empirically based traditions, there is no presumption that research may proceed in an unbiased way to reveal what is (or was) the case. Thus, there is no means of discrediting a particular form of inquiry because it fails to participate within the paradigm (e.g., because it fails to employ traditional canons of evidence). Rather than ruling out forms of inquiry, then, the discursive scholar should ideally welcome a range of possible endeavors, each of which would speak for a given community, its traditions and values. The aim should not be to obliterate traditions of language but to enrich them. At the same time, we are sensitized by the logic of discursive inquiry to the potential effects of our study on intellectual, political, and societal life more generally. Thus, while not discrediting any particular form of study out of hand, we should explore the societal implications of all our inquiries, whether oriented around psychological process, historical analysis, or discursive process. To publish work without preliminary attention to the moral and political implications within one's cultural/historical context would, from the discursive standpoint, be arrogant if not inhumane.

What seems favored in the end is a dialogic marriage among equals. With no ultimate grounds of dismissal on any side, it may also be possible to appreciate the interdependencies of these various forms of inquiry, along with complementarities and potential affinities. With respect to interdependency, for example, with all its critique of objectively accurate analysis, discursive inquiry must indeed rely on the rhetoric of objectivity to render its analyses intelligible. Concerning complementarity, analyses favoring both the social constitution and discursive construction of the mind do tend to privilege social change over stability (liberal and transformative agendas over conservative). However, it is very unlikely that any analyst would favor a complete overhauling of all societal investments; absolute change would be the equivalent of absolute chaos. Transformation is possible only against the backdrop of a deep stability. And finally, there are opportunities for coalescence. For example, there is a high degree of overlap between the social constitutionalist and the discursive constructionist efforts. With the former shifting the emphasis from psychological states to culturally situated performances, and the latter embedding discourse within embodied actions, a powerful form of historical analysis would be consolidated. Perhaps within intellectual life, polygamy will prove a superior cultural form to monogamy.

NOTES

1. See Levy (1989) and Modell (1989) for discussions of some of these limitations.
2. For more extended discussion of the emergence of social constructionism, see my 1994 volume, *Realities and Relationships*. For a detailed analysis of the position of historical analysis within these debates, see Novick (1989).

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