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# A Postmodern Perspective on Maslow's Fourth Force Psychology: A Constructivist Alternative for Realizing an Eupsychian Workplace

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## A Brief Review

Less a theory of human development than a philosophical approach, humanistic psychology was organized in 1960 as a protest movement against the prevailing behavioral approach to research and the near domination of clinical practice by psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, humanistic psychology was heir to the more than 500-year history of efforts to stress the dignity and worth of the individual and the capacity for self-realization through reason begun in the Enlightenment. At the heart of the "disagreement" was the nature of the person, not necessarily the assumptions inherent in the scientific enterprise. The new humanistic psychology would emphasize conscious rather than unconscious determinants of behavior, immediate rather than past experience, free will rather than conditioning, individual uniqueness rather than determinism, motivation toward self-actualization rather than tension reduction, and most importantly, the basic goodness of the individual. Despite its seeming differences with the prevailing psychologies of its time, humanistic psychology remained steadfastly positivist in its notions about the perfectibility of the larger social order.

As one of its founders, Abraham Maslow (1968) described the basic assumptions of this point of view as follows:

1. We have, each of us, an essential biologically based inner nature, which is to some degree "natural", intrinsic, given, and, in a certain limited sense, unchangeable, or, at least, unchanging.
2. Each person's inner nature is in part unique to himself and in part species-wide.
3. It is possible to study this inner nature scientifically and to discover what it is like--(not *invent--discover*).
4. This nature, as much as we know of it so far, seems not to be intrinsically or primarily or necessarily evil....
5. Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, it is best to bring it out to encourage it rather than to suppress it. If it is permitted to guide our life, we grow healthy, fruitful, and happy.
6. If this essential core of the person is denied or suppressed, he gets sick sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes immediately, sometimes later.
7. This inner nature is strong and overpowering and unmistakable like the instincts of animals. It is weak and delicate and subtle and easily overcome by habit, cultural pressure, and wrong attitudes toward it.
8. Even though weak, it rarely disappears in the normal person--perhaps

not even in the sick person. Even though denied, it persists underground forever pressing for actualization.

9. Somehow, these conclusions must all be articulate with the necessity of discipline, deprivation, frustration, pain, and tragedy. To the extent that these experiences reveal and foster and fulfil our inner nature, to that extent they are desirable experiences (pp. 3-4).

Basic to Maslow's own theory of personality was the hierarchy of needs through which the individual must pass in efforts to become self-actualized, the presumed endpoint of personal development. Only when lower order needs (physiological and safety needs) are satisfied can one move on to the satisfaction of higher order needs (belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization). In the final revision of his hierarchy, Maslow added a level beyond self-actualization, called "transcendence," or a surrender into an expanded sense of self. Maslow foresaw a "transpersonal world view which transcends ego boundaries, sees all parts as being equal in the whole, all humans as having the same needs, feelings and potentials" (Hendricks & Weinhold, 1982, pp. 5-7).

Maslow's explication of a hierarchy of basic needs notwithstanding, his notion of a drive toward self-actualization was mediated by a dialectic growth-fostering and growth-discouraging forces. Consistently, he viewed culture as "sun and food and water; it is not the seed" (1968, p. 161). As a consequence, efforts to humanize the workplace from such a perspective have tended to encourage the least-restrictive environment as being the one most encouraging of growth as a dynamic process of self-actualization. Therefore, education (particularly schooling) should be directed to liberating these forces by removing environmental encumbrances and encouraging freedom of choice. Critics have argued that freedom does not necessarily lead to responsibility, however, especially to conditions set forth by the larger society.

### **A Few Persistent Ironies**

As humanistic psychology helped liberate individuals to feel they have more freedom to choose the course of their personal destinies, ironically, people have come to feel powerless in the face of overwhelming economic and social forces to realize that course. As "empowerment" became the watchword of organization restructuring in the past decade, people in systems found themselves more and more powerless to effect necessary and wanted change (Glickman, Hayes & Hensley, 1992). Rather than being empowered, Parry (1993) has noted "the citizen of the modernist world is a powerless person with boundless desirers" (p. 436).

Despite its own efforts to put the child center stage for its particular form of "social engineering," humanistic psychology has witnessed schools that continue to cycle between the pillars of access and accountability (Glickman, 1990). Central to the most recent school restructuring movement is the notion that those in schools need to have greater control over the decisions that affect their lives (Maeroff, 1988). When given the opportunity to transcend their current limitations, however, why do so many in schools find it so difficult to transcend

what Maslow (1968) called the "psychopathology of the average" (p. 16)? Maslow would argue that they choose safety over growth and that they would spontaneously seek growth over safety were there safety assured. Creating a safe environment, one must conclude from reading Maslow, leads naturally and spontaneously to growth.

Few will disagree that the great accomplishment of modernity has been the liberation of the individual. From the emergence of humanism as a philosophical force in the 15th century into the present century, there developed a growing faith that reality is One, that it is knowable, and that it is subject to "scientific" observation. From this positivist position, one might claim that something is "true" only if it corresponds to an independent, "objective" reality informed by the methods of "science." Psychologists have disagreed, however, as to the basic rules for establishing objectivity.

In spite of Maslow's (1968) own objections to the prevailing "impersonal science" and the call to "construct a philosophy of science large enough to include experiential knowledge" (p. 216), his own psychology lay embedded in the root metaphors of a purely individualistic psychology. Nonetheless, Maslow believed that "we must help the 'scientific' psychologists to realize that they are working on the basis of a philosophy of science, not *the* philosophy of science, and that *any* philosophy of science which serves primarily an excluding function is a set of blinders, handicap rather than a help" [italics in original] (p. 218).

Most importantly, this press to find a universal truth amidst the proliferation of voices has only exacerbated the spilt between theory and practice (Hoshmond & Polkinghorne, 1993). Thoughtful consideration of the prospects for a "human science" (Guba & Lincoln, 1990; Howard, 1986) has lead psychologists to challenge the basic assumptions underlying their own theory and practice. Many (Caple, 1985; Gergen, 1991; Hare-Mustin, 1988; Kimble, 1984; Polkinghorne, 1991; Scarr, 1985; Wilber, 1985; Zohar, 1990) argue that we are in the midst of a paradigmatic struggle that is changing both the way that we conceptualize human functioning (theory) and the way in which psychologists relate to their clients (practice). Like those in so many disciplines before them, psychologists have begun to entertain the possibility that modernism may have run its course.

### **The Postmodern Critique(s)**

Although no single unifying alternative framework has yet arisen, there are several confluent positions that are generally associated with a larger movement called postmodernism. Originally a movement in literature, postmodernism, has been given serious consideration by academics, professionals, and society at large. The term is used to describe a set of confluent trends that are challenging the great narratives of Western civilization (large-scale theoretical interpretations purportedly of universal application). Instead, modernism is seen as one among many possible narratives; empiricism is seen as an, rather than the, approach to science (Derrida, 1981; Foucault, 1972; Lyotard, 1983).

Postmodernism represents a general loss of faith in the modernist enterprise as leading to the rational planning of an ideal social order and the consequent

standardization of knowledge and production. Instead, postmodernists favor "heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse' (PRECIS, 1987). Fragmentation, indeterminacy, and intense distrust of all universal or totalizing "discourses" (to use Foucault's term) are the hallmark of postmodern thought. In particular, postmodernists reject the pictorial (iconic) metaphor of knowledge in favor of a constructivist (architectural) metaphor (Lyotard, 1983).

At the end of the 19th century, psychology emerged from its dependence upon either physiology or philosophy to adopt its own particular forms for explaining human behavior (Loevinger, 1987). Despite the resulting proliferation of theories (e.g. psychodynamic, behavioral, social learning, cognitive-behavioral, psychometric, or person-centered), observers (Allport, 1962; Gardner, 1978; Gergen, 1991; Gibbs, 1979; Hempel, 1966; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1973; Langer, 1969, Sanrey, Kohlberg, & Noam, 1983) have argued that these "separate" approaches share a basic ontological assumption about the a priori nature of reality. Maslow's approach among them, they remain steadfastly positivist; they differ about where to search for the source of certainty and coherence in human functioning--in the environment or within the person.

It is the argument of the postmodernists that the near total focus of the modernist enterprise upon individual freedom has obviated attention to the larger social context within which such changes were taking place. Thus, from an epistemological-metaphysical perspective, postmodernism suggests that the courses of our uncertainty should be systematically exposed and that there be a restructuring of the intellectual life in order to attend fully to the meaning of a lack of secure intellectual markers.

Despite Maslow's rather bold claims for the emergency of a fourth psychology to add to the psychodynamic, behavioral, and humanistic, he failed to recognize the significance of yet another psychology. Near the turn of the century, Baldwin (1902/1897), Cooley (1902), Dewey (1896), James (1890), and Mead (1934) argued that it is logically impossible to establish the "truth" of any particular piece of knowledge, no matter where one looks for the answer. Because each claim to know the truth is itself subject to comparison with yet another claim, we never get to see the constraints of the world with which our enterprise collides. Instead, what we experience, and thus come to know, is necessarily built up of our own building blocks and can be explained in no other way than in terms of our ways and means for building. In this sense, reality is what you make it.

This perspective, now widely referred to as constructivist (Hayes, 1994), asserts that we do not discover reality, rather we invent it (Watzlawick, 1984). Unlike Maslow's developmental psychology, the constructivist proposes an epistemic notion of reality as constructed--of an experiential world that makes no claim whatsoever about truth in the sense of correspondence with an ontological reality. Rather, what is "known" cannot be the result of a passive receiving nor self-discovery, but originates as the product of the "activity of the knower."

Further, something which has already been experienced will be put together in relationship with subsequent experience to give rise to one of two concepts: similarity or difference. In this way the concepts of equivalence and individual

identity are built up over time through successive experiences. This notion of the self as a self-organizing system has profound implications for understanding human development and, in turn, for reconceptualizing counselling as something other than psychotherapy (Carlsen, 1988; Friedman, 1933; Goodman, 1984; Hayes, in press; Howard & Orlinsky, 1972; Ivey, 1986; Kegan, 1982; Kvale, 1992; Mahoney, 1985; Saari, 1991).

### Constructivism and Human Development

Although the basic tenets for a truly constructivist developmental psychology can be found in the work of many of those noted previously, especially that of James Mark Baldwin (1902), it is to the genetic epistemology of Jean Piaget (1924, 1936/1954, 1926/1955) that one must turn to find its most explicit expression. According to Piaget, humans inherit two basic functions: organization and adaptation. Organization refers to the tendency for all living things to attempt to order their processes; in effect, organisms organize. Once experienced, this object is brought into our awareness as a part of the way we think. As Piaget (1937) explained: "Intelligence organizes the world by organizing itself" (p. 311). Thus, we learn through our experience with objects.

The second function is the tendency of living things to make modifications in response to changing environmental conditions in anticipation of desired outcomes. The test of truth, therefore, is not correspondence with Reality, but rather viability. As von Glasersfeld (1991) put the issue, "What matters is not to match the world, but to fit into it in spite of whatever obstacles or traps it might present" [italics in original] (p 16).

Piaget's constructivist framework has been elaborated further into developmental models that describe a progression of meaning-making structures in a variety of domains in addition to cognition. The study of dialectical thinking by Basseches (1984), moral reasoning by Kohlberg (1969, 1981), cognition by Bruner (1986), social perspective taking by Selman (1980), ego development by Loevinger (1976) reflective judgment by Kitchener and King (1981), intellectual and ethical development by Perry (1970), and self-development by Kegan (1982) have all relied heavily upon Piaget's work. Although equal credit must be shared with Baldwin, Piaget also had a major influence upon Vygotsky's (1962) otherwise very original work in language development. Recently, Ivey (1986), Leva (1984), Noam (1988), Rosen (1985) and Weiner, (1985) have each made deliberate attempts to fashion a constructivist developmental therapy model based on Piaget.

While Piaget and his adherents focussed their attention upon theory construction in human development, clinicians were independently elaborating constructivist models of therapy. Although the works of Alfred Adler (1926/1972), Harry Stack Sullivan (1953), and the object relations theorists (St Clair, 1986) point in the general direction of a constructivist therapy model, perhaps only George Kelly's (1955) psychology of personal constructs satisfies our current understanding of a constructivist approach. Today the list can be expanded to include Arbib and Hesse (1986), Goodman (1984), Guidano (1987), Mahoney (1990), and Watzlawick (1984) in addition to those neo-Piagetians mentioned above.

Space does not permit a full explication of the similarities among and the

differences between each of these approaches here. Nonetheless, they all share the basic constructivist perspective that humans actively create their own particular reality. More specifically, they share the assumptions that:

1. Individuals are active agents in their own development.
2. Cognition is an active relating of events such that what one knows emerges in the light of interactions between certain organismic structuring tendencies and the structure of the outside world (Kelly, 1955; Piaget, 1960).
3. Reality is constructed from experience. In the process of organizing one's experience, the individual must simultaneously assimilate novel experiences into pre-existing structures and accommodate pre-existing structures to meet the demands presented by new experiences (Baldwin, 1902; Piaget, 1960).
4. Development is contextual; it takes place in a social context. The process of knowing emerges in the light of transactions between ourselves and our personal surroundings (Basseches, 1984; Gibbs, 1979; Mead, 1934).
5. Because people make meaning within the context of their own understanding, the telling of one's own life history is more fabrication than recreation (Howard, 1989; Noam, 1988). Consistent with the postmodern critique, each person's life can be viewed as its own grand narrative (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; Howard, 1989).
6. Development is a qualitative reorganization of meaning. Each person's self-regulating system emerges as a consequence of new states of equilibrium that were created by the previous self-regulatory system. Therefore, disequilibrium serves as a stimulus to development, while equilibration is its goal (Langer, 1969, pp. 95-96).
7. Developmental stages refer to "qualitative [italics in original] differences in children's modes of thinking or of solving problems at different ages" (Kohlberg, 1969, p. 352). Each of these stages provides a "structured whole" (Piaget, 1960, p. 14) that represents an individual world view or frame of reference for meaning-making. Each succeeding stage represents the capacity to make sense of a greater variety of experience in a more adequate way. Thus, each stage is a more differentiated, comprehensive, and integrated structure than the one before it.
8. Development is understood as successively more complex attempts to make meaning of the facts of one's social experience. The fundamental reason for movement from one stage to the next is that a latter stage is more adequate in some universal sense than an earlier stage. The basic notion of this stage concept

leads to the conceptualization of development as the movement toward greater adaptation, differentiation, and integration of distinct modes of thought in a universal, invariant, and hierarchical developmental sequence (Kohlberg, 1969; Piaget, 1960; Werner, 1940/1973).

### **Reconstructing Maslow's Hierarchy**

As argued above, Maslow's own search for a personal science and his faith in a transpersonal psychology notwithstanding, he failed to transcend the limitations of his own developmental psychology. Likewise, he failed to grasp fully the implications of a constructivist psychology emerging before him. Indeed, it is a line of thought that Maslow (1968) complained "I wouldn't take seriously were it not that so many others *do* take it seriously" (p. 180). Continuing, he noted that this "Harry Stack Sullivan type of effort to define a Self simply in terms of what other people think of him [is] an extreme cultural relativity in which a healthy individuality gets lost altogether. With these comments, Maslow dismissed a transactive social psychological development of the self as nothing more than to "define the Self simply in terms of what other people think" (p180).

More recent transpersonal psychologies have not failed to appreciate the significance of this perspective. In particular, the work of Ken Wilber (1980, 1983) relies upon constructivist development paradigms that pose a dialectic between the self and a social environment such that the self is constructed rather than elaborated (i.e., evolved) over time. From this view, contradiction and conflict are the impetus to development. It is the confrontation of the self and environment rather than the subservience of environment to self that fosters development. In the context of schooling, the constructivist argues that true development arises only in the context of challenge by the environment.

In reconstructing Maslow's hierarchy, therefore, each stage can be viewed as creating the awareness of specific needs and as possessing the capability for responding to such needs. Thus motivation is not due to need deprivation but rather to anticipation of satisfying needs as yet unrealized. Higher stages represent expanded opportunities for choice. Higher stages emerge through lower stages rather than as a consequence of their satisfaction. The transpersonal, rather than emerging from an awareness of more basic core personality variables, represents a transcendence of the person as the basis for self-construction. It is a level at which interindividuality and the interpenetrability of self systems has become the content for a higher structure of self.

### **Implications**

At the outset of this article, Maslow was quoted as asking how to set up social conditions in any organization so that the goals of the individual merge with the goals of the organization. It has been suggested that the difficulty for Maslow in answering his own question lay in his acceptance of a dichotomy between the needs of the individual and the society. Additionally, it has been argued that his difficulties were exacerbated by his reliance upon a positivist developmental psychology. A modification to Maslow's hierarchy has been suggested that permits an understanding of individual human development as a transactive social

process that expands rather than merely displaces previous modes of functioning. Accepting this constructivist reinterpretation of Maslow's hierarchy points the way to a set of implications for conceptualizing developmental intervention in education and counseling.

The primary implication of this self-constructive view of reality is that development is essentially the task of mastering the facts of one's existence. The focus of teaching, therefore, would not be on students as human beings as much as it is on students as humans being. It is to the student's struggle to understand the self and others, therefore, in the context of a shared social experience, that constructivist educators turn their attention.

The central implication of this constructivist account for teaching is that students construct reality through their experience. Thus the student's reality represents a relationship between the student and the world as the student understands that world. It is not so much that students have problems as that they experience problems, for how one understands and makes meaning of experience betrays the underlying logic of how one makes sense of one's own existence. Understanding cognition as an active relating of events shifts the object of study from cognitions to the cognitive process itself. As Mahoney and Lyddon (1988) have explained:

Central to the constructivist formulations is the idea that, rather than being a sort of template through which on going experience is filtered, the representational model [of the individual] actively creates [italics in original] and constrains new experience and thus determines what the individual will perceive as "reality" (p. 200).

From a constructivist perspective, educators should be less concerned with what students believe to be true, or with why they believe it, and more with how they came to believe it. Consequently, educators should shift their attention from changing what students believe, or from helping them to uncover the reasons why, to varying the process by which students arrive at those beliefs. True understanding combines knowledge with felt experience.

If personality development is essentially the universal, ongoing process of meaning making, then education should focus on development and the person's experience of this process. The implication of this model for understanding cognitive development is that individuals within a particular stage of development view reality in ways that are similar with regard to structure but may be vastly different with regard to content. In this way, each level of cognitive development might be viewed as a culture of cognitive structure.

If we understand the person's history as the construction of a personal social narrative, then all actions are essentially incomplete, susceptible to limitless interpretations by ever-more imaginative interpreters. Therefore, the test of truth, as noted earlier, is pragmatic--it is the viability or practical utility of knowledge that makes it "true."

From a constructivist perspective, the person serves as his or her own historian in confronting the past either as menacing and unknown or as an organizing framework of thought and feeling that needs to be assimilated into present

structures. The implication of this perspective is that education should create a social context for reconstruction--an expansion across the life history of what Winnicott, referring to the infant, called the "holding environment" (Kegan, 1982, p. 256).

The most important aspect of a constructivist view of how we think is that experience is the necessary condition for development, although experience itself is not enough. Because we tend both to organize and adapt, we must necessarily interact with the environment. Thus, each person's experience must be of a kind that presents genuine cognitive conflict for him or her. Rather than minimize conflict, the constructivist encourages conditions that present a discrepancy to some optimal extent between the student's existing mental structures and the student's present experience.

Thus, teaching from a constructivist perspective looks more like a dialogue than a lecture or even an interview. It is a dialogue between the student's structures and the structures of the environment, where the educator may be understood as one of many elements in that environment (Gergen, 1991). Within the context of counseling, in taking the perspective of the counselor as audience to the client, the client experiences him or herself in new and potentially more growthful ways.

If we understand that development is a liberating function in that it expands the basis upon which our present reality is constructed, then we should seek those social relationships that will support such expansion/liberation most fully. Rather than being a powerless person with boundless desires, the postmodern individual is an empowered person with bounded desires--bounded by the realization that his or her present understanding is necessarily limited but, having realized the nature of his or her own construction, the individual is empowered to change that world.

The notion that a person's construction of reality is constrained both by past experience and existing structures leads to the conclusion that individual knowledge is necessarily incomplete. As a consequence, it is very difficult to be certain one knows the truth even if a knowledge of truth were possible. The impossibility of objective reality supports continual expansion of forums for democratic decision making to enable new possibilities to become crystallized and to get acted upon.

The constructivist's recognition of the social construction of discourse on the world (Gergen, 1991) points to the problem inherent in negotiated understandings across the boundaries of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, or personal experience. The realization that neither problems nor solutions are ontologically "correct," is the consequence of recognizing that our particular realities are self constructions. Recognizing that deficiencies in the other are more appropriately understood as one's own construction of the other makes the individual more tolerant. Put in other words, intolerance of others is actually intolerance of oneself.

To promote tolerance, constructivism encourages the development of a language of difference that would permit one to understand the other as the self, recognizing the inseparability of our knowledge of one another. As argued by Dewey (1916/1944): "A democracy is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (p. 87). What Dewey is saying is that democracy

begins in conversation because in conversation one must take the other into account. Because both self and other are changing within a changing social context, neither self-development nor the consequent demand for conversation are necessarily complete.

Faced with the recurring possibility of error, the individual must engage in a process of continual self-reflection. Because the problems encountered by professional practitioners are frequently complex, Schon (1987) has argued that professional education should be centered on enhancing the practitioner's ability for "reflection-in-action." Set within a democratic social structure, the self-reflective practitioner will act as a collaborator in the solution of real world problems that demand mutual understanding among all group members. Recognizing social interaction as a self-constructive act, educators and their students who engage one another in the satisfaction of mutually-determined goals will do nothing less than promote their own self-development. To resolve Maslow's management problem of setting up "social conditions in any organization so that the goals of the individual merge with the goals of the organization," one need recast the question. Rather than set conditions that reveal, foster, and fulfil our inner nature, for which Maslow argued, the constructivist engages the other (whether student, client, or colleague) fully in negotiating the very conditions to be set in realizing mutually-determined goals. As a consequence, the conditions for a truly Eupsychian workplace lie in the process of moving toward becoming one world rather in the realization of such an event.

### **In Conclusion**

As noted above, constructivist educators will want to focus more on present understandings in the service of future actions than on past actions in the service of present understandings. In attempts to understand students' present efforts at making meaning, educators should focus on the interaction between students and their present environments, recognizing themselves and the contents of their students' own narratives as objects in that social environment. Thus, the constructivist educator attempts to provide a holding environment for facilitating the student's development by acknowledging the student's reality and by supporting the student's efforts to restore some balance to the world as the student knows it.

The implications of meeting the challenge of a postmodern world from a constructivist perspective is that teachers and counselors should become developmental educators who are involved in the development of deliberate democratic institutions. The expansion of the self as a meaning making system should be the proper aim of a truly developmental education. By becoming developmental educators within a deliberate democratic community, teachers who take a constructivist approach will accept the challenge to empower students to work together to realize communities of their own making (Hayes, 1993).

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