A brief introduction to personal construct theory

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Who can say what nature is? Is it what now exists about us, including all the tiny hidden things that wait so patiently to be discovered? Or is it the vista of all that is destined to occur, whether tomorrow or in some distant eon of time? Or is nature, infinitely more varied than this, the myriad trains of events that might ensue if we were to be so bold, ingenious, and irreverent as to take a hand in its management?

Personal construct theory neither offers nor demands a firm answer to any of these questions, and in this respect it is unique. Rather than depending upon bedrock assumptions about the inherent nature of the universe, or upon fragments of truth believed to have been accumulated, it is a notion about how man may launch out from a position of admitted ignorance, and how he may aspire from one day to the next to transcend his own dogmatisms. It is, then, a theory of man's personal inquiry—a psychology of the human quest. It does not say what has or will be found, but proposes rather how we might go about looking for it.

Philosophical position

Like other theories, the psychology of personal constructs is the implementation of a philosophical assumption. In this case the assumption is that whatever nature may be, or howsoever the quest for truth will turn out in the end, the events we face today are subject to as great a variety of constructions as our wits will enable us to contrive. This is not to say that one construction is as good as any other, nor is it to deny that at some infinite point in time human vision will behold reality out to the utmost reaches of existence. But it does remind us that all our present perceptions are open to question and reconsideration, and it does broadly suggest that even the most obvious occurrences of everyday life might appear utterly transformed if we were inventive enough to construe them differently.

This philosophical position we have called constructive alternativism, and its implications keep cropping up in the psychology of personal constructs. It can be contrasted with the prevalent epistemological assumption of accumulative fragmentalism, which is that truth is collected piece by piece. While constructive alternativism does not argue against the collection of infor-

mation, neither does it measure truth by the size of the collection. Indeed it leads one to regard a large accumulation of facts as an open invitation to some far-reaching reconstruction which will reduce them to a mass of trivialities.

A person who spends a great deal of his time hoarding facts is not likely to be happy at the prospect of seeing them converted into rubbish. He is more likely to want them bound and preserved, a memorial to his personal achievement. A scientist, for example, who thinks this way, and especially a psychologist who does so, depends upon his facts to furnish the ultimate proof of his propositions. With these shining nuggets of truth in his grasp it seems unnecessary for him to take responsibility for the conclusions he claims they thrust upon him. To suggest to him at this point that further human reconstruction can completely alter the appearance of the precious fragments he has accumulated, as well as the direction of their arguments, is to threaten his scientific conclusions, his philosophical position, and even his moral security. No wonder, then, that, in the eyes of such a conservatively minded person, our assumption that all facts are subject—are wholly subject—to alternative constructions looms up as culpably subjective and dangerously subversive to the scientific establishment.

Facts and conclusions

But wherein does responsibility lie? Can we ever make facts, even facts that turn out as predicted, responsible for conclusions? I think not. Whatever the world may be, man can come to grips with it only by placing his own interpretations upon what he sees. While his ingenuity in devising suitable constructions may be limited, and many misfortunes therefore come to pass, still it is he, not facts, who holds the key to the ultimate future. This, it seems to me, makes him responsible, and suggests that it is quite inappropriate for him ever to claim that his conclusions have been dictated by any nature other than his own.

This, of course, is how I construe it; and in this undertaking I, too, have chosen to bear responsibility for where my constructive alternativism is leading me. So, also, my reader, if he accepts this invitation to join me, will, like any other Adam or Eve who chooses to understand for himself, be held responsible for his choice—though no more so than I should think him responsible for any other choice he might make, including the choice of not accepting this invitation.

None of this is a denial that men customarily share each other's insights and prejudices. Our ingenuity in devising alternative constructions is limited by our feeble wits and our timid reliance upon what is familiar. So we usually do things the way we have done them before or the way others appear to do them. Moreover, novel ideas, when openly expressed, can be disruptive to ourselves and disturbing to others. We therefore often avoid them, disguise them, keep them bottled up in our minds where they cannot develop in the social context, or disavow them in what we believe to be loyalty to the common interest. And often, against our better judgment, we accept the dictates of authority instead, thinking thus to escape any personal responsibility for what happens.

But though our devices for interpreting circumstances are still meager, and the human adventure continues to be fraught with dire uncertainties, it does not follow that facts ever dictate our conclusions, except by the rules we impose upon our acts. Events do not tell us what to do, nor do they carry their meanings engraved on their backs for us to discover. For better or worse we ourselves create the only meanings they will ever convey during our lifetime. The facts of life may even be brutal, but they are nonetheless innocent of any evil intent, and we can scarcely accuse them of taking sides in our epistemological disputes. Our ever present task is to de-

vise ways of anticipating their occurrences, and thus to prepare ourselves for assuming a more and more responsible role in the management of the universe.

The meaning of events

Constructive alternativism stresses the importance of events. But it looks to man to propose what the character of their import shall be. The meaning of an event—that is to say, the meaning we ascribe to it—is anchored in its antecedents and its consequents. Thus meaning displays itself to us mainly in the dimension of time. This is much more than saying that meanings are rehearsals of outcomes, a proposition implicit in behavioristic theory, or that the ends justify the means—the ethical statement of the same proposition.

Besides including anticipated outcomes, meaning includes also the means by which events are anticipated. This is to suggest that different meanings are involved when identical events are correctly anticipated by different sets of inferences. It suggests also the implication of quite different meanings when the basic assumptions are different, even when the chains of inference are otherwise more or less similar.

In all of this we look to events to confirm our predictions and to encourage our venturesome constructions. Yet the same events may confirm different constructions, and different, or even incompatible, events may appear to validate the same construction. So, for each of us, meaning assumes the shape of the arguments which lead him to his predictions, and the only outside check on his personal constructions are the events which confirm or disconfirm his expectations. This is a long way from saying that meaning is revealed by what happens, or that meaning is something to be discovered in the natural' course of events, or that events shape men and ideas. Thus in constructive alternativism events are crucial, but only man can devise a meaning for them to challenge.

When we place a construction of our own upon a situation, and then pursue its implications to the point of expecting something to happen, we issue a little invitation to nature to intervene in our personal experience. If what we expect does happen, or appears to happen, our expectation is confirmed and we are likely to think that we must have had a pretty good slant on the trend of affairs, else we would have lost our bet. But if we think the matter over carefully we may begin to have doubts. Perhaps a totally different interpretation would have led to an equally successful prediction; and it may, besides, have been more straightforward, or more consistent with our conscience. Or perhaps our vivid expectations overlaid our perception of what actually happened.

So, on second thought, even when events are reconciled with a construction, we cannot be sure that they have proved it true. There are always other constructions, and there is the lurking likelihood that some of them will turn out to be better. The best we can ever do is project our anticipations with frank uncertainty and observe the outcomes in terms in which we have a bit more confidence. But neither anticipation nor outcome is ever a matter of absolute certainty from the dark in which we mortals crouch. And, hence, even the most valuable construction we have yet contrived—even our particular notion of God Himself—is one for which we shall have to continue to take personal responsibility—at least until someone turns up with a better one. And I suspect he will! This is what we mean by constructive alternativism. Our view might even be called a philosophical position of epistemological responsibility.

The conduct of inquiry

One of the most exciting aspects of constructive alternativism is its bearing upon the conduct of human inquiry. According to the canons of logic a statement, if meaningful, is either true or not true. Indeed, the logical positivists have reversed the logic and argued that the criterion for meaningfulness is whether or not a statement can be proved true or not true. This means, I take it, that we should not ask a question until we have answered it. But constructive alternativism suggests that the canon itself is not fruitful, or at least that it tends to stultify fruitful endeavor. Besides, I note that most of the members of the famous Vienna Circle abandoned their extreme position—bursting with unanswerable questions, no doubt.

Since ultimate truth is such a long way off, it seems as inappropriate to try to capture it by, say, five o'clock on Tuesday as it is to claim we already have it in our grasp. Thus any proposition we contrive must be regarded as a crude formulation of a question which, at best, can serve only as an invitation to further inquiry, and one that can be answered only through personal experience and in terms of the ad interim criterion of anticipated events. Indeed, the answer we get is not likely to be exactly an answer to our question at all, but an answer to some other question we have not yet thought to ask.

To this way of thinking the verbs in all significant statements a man makes are implicitly cast in an "invitational mood", rather than in the indicative mood, or in one of the other moods recognized by English grammar. "What", he says, "would happen if…?" We suspect, furthermore, that this is psychologically characteristic of man whenever he is not in a defensive posture, and that it characterizes his unspoken impulses as well as his articulate sentences. "Please", he means to say, "join me in pursuing the implications of this pose I have assumed."

In this light, then, it is not necessary to disprove one proposition before entertaining alternatives to it. In certain situations, as in psychotherapy for example, it may even be disastrous to start with disproof, at least until we know what alternatives will drop into place once the disproof is taken seriously. Constructive alternativism is therefore an invitation to immediate adventure. By not insisting on disproof as a precondition for initiative it saves a lot of wear and tear on nerves and it should release a great deal of scholarly manpower for more productive and less disputatious occupations.

So, under constructive alternativism, even the appearance of some objective certainty may be taken as a flagrant challenge to throw—without waiting for the courage that disillusionment provides—a new light on the very circumstances that make it seem so obvious. Yet constructive alternativism tells us also that the reconstructive enterprise may be forestalled even earlier in the sequence. If one cautiously insists that truth must be compiled and cross-validated in fragments before he ever ventures further in the human quest, he may never reach the point where he can sense the challenge of upending smug certainties. He will be so eager to nail down his bits of truth once and for all that he will never back off and treat himself to a fresh look.

Generally, propositions cannot be effectively refuted unless we accept their terms of reference. But unless the terms are better stated than they usually are, it may be more appropriate to discard an old proposition than to go through the contortions necessary to disprove it. This seems to be mostly what we do with old propositions anyway! In any case, constructive alternativism suggests that we need not become bogged down in tedious refutations and that audacious proposals, including some that are badly put, may well serve as springboards for novel inquiry—even while we still retain a preference for their traditional alternatives.

Generating psychological theory

But now, since we are already on the threshold of psychological theorizing, we might as well get on with it, even though there is much more that could be said about the philosophical position of constructive alternativism. So let us talk about personal construct theory itself. We can come back to philosophy later if necessary.

The question of just how a theory is generated is about as complicated as the whole of human psychology. Since theories—so far, at least—are devised by men, it seems unreasonable to claim that they are shaped by any process other than a psychological one. Yet for a long time we have been saying that one moves from old propositions to new ones by the logical procedures of induction or deduction, as if this could happen independently of the personal disposition of man. Indeed, I have come to doubt that the notions of induction and deduction tell us very much about what goes on. In the one case I suppose it means we listen to ourselves making a clutter of assertions only to end up trying to say them all in one mouthful. In the other we let loose with a high-sounding remark and then, like a four-year-old child trying to "read" his own "writing", struggle to figure out what we meant by it.

In formulating the theory I have called the psychology of personal constructs I cannot say that I actually launched out deductively from the assumption of constructive alternativism as I have phrased it here, though now I can see how, with the help of a certain amount of idiosyncratic bias along the way, one could start with constructive alternativism and end up with personal construct theory. And I believe I can see how the clutter of events I experienced was important. Now that I think of it, I can remember a lot of relevant things that happened over the years. But not for one moment would I claim that these events converged to shape my theory. They seemed only to keep challenging it—and not always to be very constructive about it either. It may even be that I can remember these incidents now only because, on hindsight, they seem to confirm what my present formulation would forecast. And I am sure that I found myself perplexed and aggravated by many circumstances I have long since forgotten, and that what I came to think as a psychologist was what, over the years, I had jury-rigged as a man to cope with what was going on.

So let us not be hasty. Perhaps constructive alternativism was my basic assumption all along. I may only have delayed putting it into words. I recall that I have often felt that personal construct theory was as much an account of what had long been running through my noggin as it was the outcome of my labored thinking after I told myself to go ahead and dare to write a theory.

All of this is to suggest that the psychological postures, mine included, that we accent with words, or dignify in philosophical terms, may be quite personal and may considerably antedate our verbal statements about them. There is even reason to dread bringing such nascent constructions to light lest they betray us as foolish or even crazy. And I must say, at some risk to myself I suppose, that to propose a statement of such sweeping proportions as constructive alternativism is to flirt with grandiosity—a symptom more often associated with psychosis than with genius. But just as good cannot be accomplished without risking evil, so enlightenment cannot be sought wholeheartedly without approaching the brink of what may turn out to be insanity. There is no such thing as adventure with safety guaranteed in advance, not even when sitting alone with a typewriter. Not that I have ever lost any sleep over the matter!

George A. Kelly

Scientific behavior as a paradigm of human behavior

Legend has it that many theories originated with simple observations, often occurring under the most commonplace of circumstances. Archimedes is supposed to have been dallying in his bath when he made the observation that led to the notion of specific gravity. And there is the story about Newton napping under the apple tree. Then there is Bernoulli. I have long had my suspicions about what Bernoulli was doing.

Not to be outdone in fictionalizing itself, personal construct theory also can lay claim to an initial anecdote. In this case it is an observation of an amusing human, and even better than that, a psychologists' foible—which happily lowers it, I think, to the level of a caricature. So let us say that personal construct theory is a bit of humor that examined its own implications. And what, may I ask, could be more candidly psychological than that? Psychologists are likely to be very much in earnest about making their discipline into a science. (Unfortunately, not many are as concerned as they

might be about making science into something.) And they are never more deadly serious about staking a claim to scientific respectability than they are when they are writing elementary textbooks. It struck me rather suddenly one day that all the elementary texts I had read contained at least two theories of personality—one covert, lucid, and facile, and the others labelled, abstruse, and labored.

"Psychology is a science", each author would say as soon as he had finished his initial exhortation to his young readers to stop relying upon common sense, "and a scientist is one who observes, construes relationships, articulates theories, generates hypotheses, ventures predictions, experiments under controlled conditions, and takes candid account of outcomes." This is to say that if the student is to understand a psychologist's commitment to life, here is the way to make sense out of it. Not bad! It gives us a pretty clear picture of what it is like to be a psychologist. Altogether it is a most penetrating and perceptive theory of personality, albeit one reserved for the scientifically elite.

Later on in the book, after the writer has explained that the eye really sees things upside down, that dogs' mouths water when they hear the dinner bell, and that the child's confrontation with the school system at age sixteen turns out about the same way it did when he was six (proving that it is the child's intelligence that does not change) he takes up the matter of personality theories, making it clear that he is really talking about organisms and being careful not to anthropomorphize his explanations—even his explanations of man. And how do organisms, such as human organisms (still being careful to avoid the use of such a compromising term as persons), behave? Why, they are conditioned (meaning that learning is something they must have had done to them—probably when they weren't looking), they are propelled by drives (anyone can see that otherwise they would just sit and do nothing at all) deluded by their motives (why else would they disagree with us?), and stalked by the ghosts of their childhood fantasies (note how they read the comic strips in the newspaper).

But what would happen if one were to envision all human endeavor in those same terms the psychologists have found so illuminating in explaining themselves to their students? And, indeed, might it not be that in doing so one would see the course of individual life, as well as human progress over the centuries, in clearer perspective? Scientists are men, and, while it does not follow that men are scientists, it is quite appropriate to ask if it is not their human character that makes scientists what they are. This leads us to the question of how that human character can better be construed so as to account for scientists, and whether our construction can still explain as well the accomplishments that fall far short of what we, at this transient moment in our history, think good science is.

This is not a question of whether or not men do, in fact, live by the canons of science? That, except to an accumulative fragmentalist, is not even an appropriate question. We are not in search of such a neat conclusion, but of a strategic advantage in a long term quest for understanding. No theory can offer us more than that. The issue, then, is what this constructive alternative of seeing man as an incipient scientist will contribute at the present state in the search for a psychological understanding of him. Who knows-a by-product of this venture may be new light on scientific endeavor itself. In fact, I think I can see such a by-product emerging as personal construct theory suggests ways in which psychological processes we have hitherto spurned may enliven the scientific enterprise.

Basic Postulate

A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events. This is what we have proposed as a fundamental postulate for the psychology of personal constructs. The assumptions of constructive alternativism are embedded in this statement, although it may not be apparent until later in our exposition of the theme just how it is that they are.

We start with a person. Organisms, lower animals, and societies can wait. We are talking about someone we know, or would like to know—such as you, or myself. More particularly, we are talking about that person as an event—the processes that express his personality. And, since we enter the system we are about to elaborate at the point of a process—or life—rather than at the point of a body or a material substance, we should not have to invoke any special notions, such as dynamics, drives, motivation, or force to explain why our object does not remain inert. As far as the theory is concerned, it never was inert. As we pursue the theoretical line emerging from this postulate I think it becomes clear also why we do not need such notions to account for the direction of movement—any more than we need them to explain the movement itself.

This is to be a psychological theory. Mostly this is a way of announcing in the basic postulate that we make no commitment to the terms of other disciplines, such as physiology or chemistry. Our philosophical position permits us to see those other disciplines as based on man-made constructions, rather than as disclosures of raw realities, and hence there is no need for the psychologist to accept them as final, or to limit his proposals to statements consistent with them.

In addition, I think the theory sounds more or less like the other theories that are known as psychological. This gives me an inclusive, as well as an exclusive reason for calling it a psychological theory, although this is more or less a matter of taste rather than of definition. Certainly I have no intention of trying to define psychology; there are just too many things called psychological that I do not care to take responsibility for.

Some have suggested that personal construct theory not be called a psychological theory at all, but a metatheory. That is all right with me. It suggests that it is a theory about theories, and that is pretty much what I have in mind. But I hope that it is clear that it is not limited to being a metatheory of formal theories, or even of articulate ones.

There is also the question of whether or not it is a cognitive theory. Some have said that it was; others have classed it as existential. Quite an accomplishment; not many theories have been accused of being both cognitive and existential! But this, too, is all right with me. As a matter of fact, I am delighted. There are categorical systems in which I think the greater amount of ambiguity I stir up, the better. Cognition, for example, strikes me as a particularly

misleading category, and, since it is one designed to distinguish itself from affect and conation, those terms, too, might well be discarded as inappropriately restrictive.

Personal construct theory has also been categorized by responsible scholars as an emotional theory, a learning theory, a psychoanalytic theory (Freudian, Adlerian, and Jungian—all three), a typically American theory, a Marxist theory, a humanistic theory, a logical positivistic theory, a Zen Buddhistic theory, a Thomistic theory, a behavioristic theory, an Apollonian theory, a pragmatistic theory, a reflective theory, and no theory at all. It has also been classified as nonsense, which indeed, by its own admission, it will likely some day turn out to be. In each case there were some convincing arguments offered for the categorization, but I have forgotten what most of them were. I fear that no one of these categorizations will be of much help to the reader in understanding personal construct theory, but perhaps having a whole lap full of them all at once will suggest what might be done with them.

The fourth term in the postulate—channelized—was chosen as one less likely than others to imply dynamics. This is because there is no wish to suggest that we are dealing with anything not already in motion. What is to be explained is the direction of the processes, not the transformation of states into processes. We see states only as an ad interim device to get time to stand still long enough for us to see what is going on. In other words, we have assumed that a process can be profitably regarded as more basic than an inert substance. We have had to do this notwithstanding the commitments of the centuries to quite another kind of language system. There are some disadvantages that come with this notion of what is basic, but we are willing to accept them for the time being in order to explore the Heraclitean implications more fully than psychologists have ever done before.

In specifying ways of anticipating events as the directive referent for human processes we cut ourselves free of the stimulus-response version of nineteenth century scientific determinism. I am aware that this is a drastic step indeed, and I suspect that others who claim to have taken similar steps have not always seriously taken stock of the difficulties to be encountered. For one thing, the very syntax of the language we must employ to voice our protest is built on a world view that regards objects as agents and outcomes as the products of those agents.

In our present undertaking the psychological initiative always remains a property of the person—never the property of anything else. What is more, neither past nor future events are themselves ever regarded as basic determinants of the course of human action—not even the events of childhood. But one's way of anticipating them, whether in the short range or in the long view—this is the basic theme in the human process of living. Moreover, it is that events are anticipated, not merely that man gravitates toward more and more comfortable organic states. Confirmation and disconfirmation of one's predictions are accorded greater psychological significance than rewards, punishments, or the drive reduction that reinforcements produce.

There are, of course, some predictions we would like to see disconfirmed, as well as some we hope will indeed materialize. We should not make the mistake of translating personal construct theory back into stimulus-response theory and saying to ourselves that confirmation is the same as a positive reinforcement, and that disconfirmation nullifies the meaning of an experience. Disconfirmation, even in those cases where it is disconcerting, provides grounds for reconstruction—or of repentance, in the proper sense of that term—and it may be used to improve the accuracy and significance of further anticipations. Thus we envision the nature of life in its outreach for the future, and not in its perpetuation of its prior conditions or in its incessant reverberation of past events.

Personal construct theory is elaborated by a string of eleven corollaries which may be loosely inferred from its basic postulate. Beyond these are certain notions of more limited applicability which fall in line with personal construct thinking—notions about such matters as anxiety, guilt, hostility, decision making, creativity, the strategy of psychological research, and

other typical concerns of professional psychologists. These latter notions need not be considered part of the formal structure of the theory, although our theoretical efforts may not come to life in the mind of the reader until he has seen their applicability to the daily problems he faces.

Construction Corollary

A person anticipates events by construing their replications. Since events never repeat themselves, else they would lose their identity, one can look forward to them only by devising some construction which permits him to perceive two of them in a similar manner. His construction must also permit him to be selective about which two are to be perceived similarly. Thus the same construction that serves to infer their similarity must serve also to differentiate them from others, Under a system that provides only for the identification of similarities the world dissolves into homogeneity; under one that provides only for differentiation it is shattered into hopelessly unrelated fragments.

Perhaps it is true that events, as most of us would like to believe, really do repeat aspects of previous occurrences. But unless one thinks he is precocious enough to have hit upon what those aspects will ultimately turn out to be, or holy enough to have had them revealed to him, he must modestly concede that the appearance of replication is a reflection of his own fallible construction of what is going on. Thus the recurrent themes that make life seem so full of meaning are the original symphonic compositions of a man bent on finding the present in his past, and the future in his present.

Individuality Corollary

Persons differ from each other in their constructions of events. Having assumed that construction is a personal affair, it seems unlikely that any two persons would ever happen to concoct identical systems. I would go further now than when I originally proposed this corollary and suggest that even particular constructions are never identical events. And I would extend it the other way too, and say that I doubt that two persons ever put their construction systems together in terms of the same logical relationships. For myself, I find this a most encouraging line of speculation, for it seems to open the door to more advanced systems of thinking and inference yet to be devised by man. Certainly it suggests that scientific research can rely more heavily on individual imagination than it usually dares.

Organization Corollary

Each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs. If a person is to live actively within his construction system it must provide him with some clear avenues of inference and movement. There must be ways for him to resolve the more crucial contradictions and conflicts that inevitably arise. This is not to say that all inconsistencies must be resolved at once. Some private paradoxes can be allowed to stand indefinitely, and, in the face of them, one can remain indecisive or can vacillate between alternative expectations of what the future holds in store for him.

So it seems that each person arranges his constructions so that he can move from one to another in some orderly fashion, either by assigning priorities to those which are to take precedence when doubts or contradictions arise, or by arranging implicative relationships, as in boolean algebra, so that he may infer that one construction follows from another. Thus one's commitments may take priority over his opportunities, his political affiliations may turn him from compassion to power, and his moral imperatives may render him insensitive to the brute that tugs at his sleeve. These are the typical prices men pay to escape inner chaos.

Dichotomy Corollary

A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs. Experience has shown me that this is the point where many of my readers first encounter difficulty in agreeing with me. What I am saying is that a construct is a "black and white" affair, never a matter of shadings, or of "grays". On the face of it, this sounds bad, for it seems to imply categorical or absolutistic thinking rather than any acceptance of relativism or conditionalism. Yet I would insist that there is nothing categorical about a construct.

When we look closely the initial point of difficulty in following personal construct theory usually turns out to lie in certain unrecognized assumptions made earlier while reading the exposition, or even carried over from previous habits of thought. Let us see if we can get the matter straightened out before any irreparable damage is done.

Neither our constructs nor our construing systems come to us from nature, except, of course, from our own nature. It must be noted that this philosophical position of constructive alternativism has much more powerful epistemological implications than one might at first suppose. We cannot say that constructs are essences distilled by the mind out of available reality. They are imposed upon events, not abstracted from them. There is only one place they come from; that is from the person who is to use them. He devises them. Moreover, they do not stand for anything or represent anything, as a symbol, for example, is supposed to do.

So what are they? They are reference axes, upon which one may project events in an effort to make some sense out of what is going on. In this sense they are like Cartesian coordinates, the x, y and z axes of analytic geometry. Events correspond to the points plotted within Cartesian space. We can locate the points and express relations between points by specifying x, y and z distances. The Cartesian axes do not represent the points projected upon them, but serve as guidelines for locating those points. That, also, is what constructs do for events, including ones that have not yet occurred. They help us locate them, understand them, and anticipate them.

But we must not take the Cartesian analogy too literally. Descartes' axes were lines or scales, each containing in order an infinite number of imaginary points. Certainly his x or y-axis embodied well enough the notion of shadings or a succession of grays. Yet a construct is not quite such an axis.

A construct is the basic contrast between two groups. When it is imposed it serves both to distinguish between its elements and to group them. Thus the construct refers to the nature of the distinction one attempts to make between events, not to the array in which his events appear to stand when he gets through applying the distinction between each of them and all the others.

Suppose one is dealing with the construct of good versus bad. Such a construct is not a representation of all things that are good, and an implicit exclusion of all that are bad. Nor is it a representation of all that are bad. It is not even a representation of all things that can be called either good or bad. The construct, of itself, is the kind of contrast one perceives and not in any

way a representation of objects. As far as the construct is concerned there is no good-better-best scale, or any bad-worse-worst array.

But, while constructs do not represent or symbolize events, they do enable us to cope with events, which is a statement of quite a different order. They also enable us to put events into arrays or scales, if we wish. Suppose, 'for example, we apply our construct to elements, say persons, or to their acts. Consider three persons. One may make a good-bad distinction between them which will say that two of them are good in relation to the third, and the third is bad in relation to the two good ones. Then he may, in turn, apply his construct between the two good ones and say one of them is good with respect to the other formerly "good" one and the one already labelled "bad".

This, of course, makes one of the persons, or acts, good in terms of one cleavage that has been made and bad in relation to the other. But this relativism applies only to the objects; the construct of good versus bad is itself absolute. It may not be accurate, and it may not be stable from time to time, but, as a construct, it has to be absolute. Still, by its successive application to events one may create a scale with a great number of points differentiated along its length. Now a person who likes grays can have them—as many as he likes.

But let us make no mistake: A scale, in comparison to a construct, is a pretty concrete affair. Yet one can scarcely have himself a scale unless he has a construct working for him. Only if he has some basis for discrimination and association can he get on with the job of marking off a scale.

Now note something else. We have really had to fall back on our philosophical position of constructive alternativism in order to come up with this kind of an abstraction. If we had not first disabused ourselves of the idea that events are the source of our construct, we would have had a hard time coming around to the point where we could envision the underlying basis of discrimination and association we call the construct.

The geometry of psychological space

While we are at it, let us keep on going with this kind of abstract thinking and envision an equally abstract construction system made up of many constructs. If we can hold on we shall be well on our way to understanding personal construct theory's underlying mathematics or metaphysics. But we dare not fall back on our Cartesian analogy, once we have reached this point in the argument, lest we find ourselves envisioning systems of lines intersecting at common points. That may be all right for dimensioning physical space—though I am not so sure—but certainly it will not do for structuring psychological space.

To catch a glimpse of psychological space we may imagine a system of planes, each with two sides or aspects, slicing through a galaxy of events. One does not measure distances on these planes, he notes only, at any one instant of application, which side of each plane faces which events when the set is suspended in the galaxy. The set, or construct system, can, of course, be moved around in the galaxy in the manner I have described when a single construct is used to devise a scale. If the set is moved into all possible positions it generates a paracartesian hyperspace with its relatively concrete scalar axes. But that is a rather large undertaking, and one likely to fall through because man is inventive enough to keep thinking of new constructs he would like to add to the system. Another way of saying this is to suggest that even the simplest personal construct system can hardly get around to putting all events in order, and, unless the man is pretty unimaginative, he will have to keep starting over each time he thinks of a new way to discriminate or associate.

One thing more has to be said. In order to make the point, I have had to talk about constructs in such an explicit manner that I have probably given the impression that a construct is as highly articulate and cognitive as my discussion has had to be. If I had been able to say what I have said in metaphor or hyperbole I might have left the impression that a construct had something to do with feeling or with formless urges too fluid to be pinned down by labels. But personal construct theory is no more a cognitive theory than it is an affective or a conative one. There are grounds for distinction that operate in one's life that seem to elude verbal expression. We see them in infants, as well as in our own spontaneous aversions and infatuations. These discriminative bases are no less constructs than those the reader may have been imagining during the reading of the preceding paragraphs. Certainly it is important not to consider a construct as another term for a concept, else a major sector of the arena in which constructs function will be obscured from view.

Choice Corollary

A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for the elaboration of his system. It seems to me to follow that if a person makes so much use of his constructs, and is so dependent upon them, he will make choices which promise to develop their usefulness. Developing the usefulness of a construction system involves, as far as I can see, two things: defining it and extending it. One defines his system, by extension at least, by making it clear how its construct components are applied to objects or are linked with each other. He amplifies his system by using it to reach out for new fields of application. In the one case he consolidates his position and in the other he extends it.

Note that the choice is between alternatives expressed in the construct, not, as one might expect, between objects divided by means of the construct. There is a subtle point here. Personal construct theory is a psychological theory and therefore has to do with the behavior of man, not with the intrinsic nature of objects. A construct governs what the man does, not what the object does. In a strict sense, therefore, man makes decisions which initially affect himself, and which affect other objects only subsequently—and then only if he manages to take some effective action. Making a choice, then, has to do with involving oneself, and cannot be defined in terms of the external object chosen. Besides, one does not always get the object he chooses to gain. But his anticipation does have to do with his own processes, as I tried to say in formulating the basic postulate.

So when a man makes a choice what he does is align himself in terms of his constructs. He does not necessarily succeed, poor fellow, in doing anything to the objects he seeks to approach or avoid. Trying to define human behavior in terms of the externalities sought or affected, rather than the seeking process, gets the psychologist pretty far off the track. It makes more of a physicist of him than a psychologist, and a rather poor one, at that. So what we must say is that a person, in deciding whether to believe or do something, uses his construct system to proportion his field, and then moves himself strategically and tactically within its presumed domain.

Men change things by changing themselves first, and they accomplish their objectives, if at all, only by paying the price of altering themselves—as some have found to their sorrow and others to their salvation. The choices that men make are choices of their own acts, and the alternatives are distinguished by their own constructs. The results of the choices, however, may range all the way from nothing to catastrophe, on the one hand, or to consummation, on the other.

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Range Corollary

A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only. A personal construct system can hardly be said to have universal utility. Not everything that happens in the world can be projected upon all the dichotomies that make up a person's outlook. Indeed I doubt that anyone has ever devised a construct that could cover the entire range of events of which he was aware. There are patches of clouds in every man's sky. This is to say that the geometry of the mind is never a complete system. The lines of reference here and there become lost in irrelevancies and make it practically impossible to write formulas that are universally applicable.

The classical notion of a concept is that it embraces all elements having a common property, and excludes all others. But this kind of notion will not do for constructs. A construct is a distinction which has the effect of distributing objects tentatively into two associations. If one says that a man is tall he does more than exclude all objects that are not tall. He denies that the man is short. He asserts that there are other objects that are both not tall and are short. And he excludes only those objects which are outside his range of concern.

Logicians, accustomed to thinking about concepts and not yet altogether clear about what I mean by constructs, might take issue with me at this point. They might say that all one has disclaimed is the possibility that the man is not tall. But we must remind ourselves that here we are talking about the psychology of man's actions and intents, and we can be sure that if the person who makes the remark has nothing more on his mind than what formal logic suggests, he will keep his mouth shut. Psychologically, the only point in commenting on the man's being tall is to deny some alternative that needed denying. What is excluded, therefore, includes some pretty important considerations, as well as some irrelevancies.

If we are to understand a person's statement we had better take into account just what it was he felt he must negate, as well as what he used as the subject or the predicate of his sentence. This, again, is a way of saying that the construct is a basis of making a distinction and, by the same act, creating an association, as one does when saying that a man is tall and implying thereby that he is like some other objects in that respect. Especially, one must keep in mind that a construct is not a class of objects, or an abstraction of a class, but a dichotomous reference axis.

A construct has its focus of convenience—a set of objects with which it works especially well. Over a somewhat larger range it may work only reasonably well; that is its range of convenience. But beyond that it fades into uselessness and we can say the outer array of objects simply lies beyond that range of convenience.

It would be nice, mathematically, if every event in a man's world could be projected onto every construct he had. Then we might hope to check out the whole system and all its internal relationships. It would be even nicer if every event could be projected upon every construct of every man. Then we could check one man's outlook precisely against another's—hoping that neither would change his mind before the wallpaper came out of the computer. But I don't think this is very likely to happen, at least not during the natural life of personal construct theory.

Experience Corollary

A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events. Here again our analytic geometry model does not quite fit the mathematics of psycho-

logical space. Rather than remaining altogether fixed, as the axes of analytic geometry do when points are plotted within them, the tendency is for personal constructs to shift when events are projected upon them. The distinctions they implement are likely to be altered in three ways: (1) The construct may be applied at a different point in the galaxy, (2) it may become a somewhat different kind of distinction, and (3) its relations to other constructs may be altered.

In the first of these shifts it is a matter of a change in the location of the construct's application, and hence not exactly an intrinsic change in the construct itself. In the second case, however, it is the abstraction itself which is altered, although the change may not be radical enough for the psychologist to say a new construct has been substituted. Finally, in the third case, the angular relations with other constructs are necessarily affected by the transition, unless, by some chance, the construct system were rotated as a whole. But that is not a very likely contingency.

The first kind of shift might be observed when a person moves to an urban community. Some of the actions he once regarded as aloof and unneighborly he may come to accept as relatively friendly in the new social context. But he may also rotate the axis of his construct as he gains familiarity with city life, and, as a result, come to see "aloofness" as a neighborly respect for his privacy, something he had never had very clearly in mind before. This would be an example of the second kind of shift. The third kind of shift comes when he alters his notion of respect as a result of the experience, perhaps coming to sense it not so much a matter of subservience or adulation but more a matter of empathy and consideration. As a matter of fact, we might regard the whole transition as leading him in the direction of greater maturity.

Keeping in mind that events do not actually repeat themselves and that the replication we talk about is a replication of ascribed aspects only, it begins to be clear that the succession we call experience is based on the constructions we place on what goes on. If those constructions are never altered, all that happens during a man's years is a sequence of parallel events having no psychological impact on his life. But if he invests himself—the most intimate event of all—in the enterprise, the outcome, to the extent that it differs from his expectation or enlarges upon it, dislodges the man's construction of himself. In recognizing the inconsistency between his anticipation and the outcome, he concedes a discrepancy between what he was and what he is. A succession of such investments and dislodgments constitutes the human experience.

A subtle point comes to light at this juncture. Confirmation may lead to reconstruing quite as much as disconfirmation—perhaps even more. A confirmation gives one an anchorage in some area of his life, leaving him free to set afoot adventuresome explorations nearby, as, for example, in the case of a child whose security at home emboldens him to be the first to explore what lies in the neighbor's yard.

The unit of experience is, therefore, a cycle embracing five phases: anticipation, investment, encounter, confirmation or disconfirmation, and constructive revision. This is followed, of course, by new anticipations, as the first phase of a subsequent experiential cycle gets underway. Certainly in personal construct theory's line of reasoning experience is not composed of encounters alone.

Stated simply, the amount of a man's experience is not measured by the number of events with which he collides, but by the investments he has made in his anticipations and the revisions of his constructions that have followed upon his facing up to consequences. A man whose only wager in life is upon reaching heaven by immunizing himself against the miseries of his neighbors, or upon following a bloody party-line straight to utopia, is prepared to gain little experience until he arrives—either there, or somewhere else clearly recognized as not the place he was looking for. Then, if he is not too distracted by finding that his architectural specifications have been blatantly disregarded, or that the wrong kind of people have started moving in, I suppose he may begin to think of some other investments he might better have been

making in the meantime. Of course, a little hell along the way, if taken more to heart than most heaven-bound people seem to take it, may have given him a better idea of what to expect, before it was too late to get a bit of worthwhile experience and make something out of himself.

Modulation Corollary

The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose ranges of convenience the variants lie. While the Experience Corollary suggests that a man can revise his constructions on the basis of events and his invested anticipations of them there are limitations that must be taken into account. He must have a construct system which is sufficiently open to novel events to let him know when he has encountered them, else the experience cycle will fail to function in its terminal phases. He must have a system which also will admit the revised construct that emerges at the end of the cycle. If the revised construct is left to stand as an isolated axis of reference it will be difficult for him to chart any coordinated course of action that takes account of it; he therefore can do little with respect to it except vacillate.

Perhaps it is clear from these remarks that what is meant by permeability is not a construct's plasticity, or its amenability to change within itself, but its capacity to be used as a referent for novel events and to accept new subordinate constructions within its range of convenience. A notion of God, for example, which includes an unabridged dictionary of all things holy is likely to be impermeable. Anything new that turns up—such as an unbiblical event or idea—is likely to be excluded from the construct's realm of concern. Unless the novelty can fit elsewhere into some more permeable part of the construct system, it is likely to be ignored.

Fragmentation Corollary

A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other. We must be careful not to interpret the Modulation Corollary to mean that a construct system has to be logically intact. Perhaps in any proximate transition in the human process there is an inferential relationship between antecedent and consequent at some constructive level in the person's system. But persons move from a to b, and on to c without always taking into account the fact that their overview of c cannot be inferred from their overview of a. A man may move from an act of love to an act of jealousy, and from there to an act of hate even though hate is not something that would be inferred from love, even in his peculiar system. This is the kind of psychological fact to which the Fragmentation Corollary calls particular attention.

Perhaps I should add that I do not see this kind of "irrationality" as necessarily a bad thing. For man logic and inference can be as much an obstacle to his ontological ventures as a guide to them. Often it is the uninferred fragment of a man's construction system that makes him great whereas if he were an integrated whole—taking into account all that the whole would have to embrace—the poor fellow would be no better than his "natural self".

George A. Kelly

Commonality Corollary

To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his processes are psychologically similar to those of the other person.[1] On the face of it, this corollary appears to assert pretty much what personal construct theory seems to stand for: The notion that behavior is governed by constructs. But there is more to it than what such a simplified statement might be taken to imply.

If we do as most behavioristically influenced psychologists do, and use behavior as a synonym for all human process, we then might, I suppose, substitute the term "behaviors" for "processes" in stating this corollary. But what thoughtful behaviorists have in mind when they make behavior the focus of their concern is the logical positivist position that anything that cannot be identified as behavior is untestable and therefore a scientific distraction. If we were to take this stand—as I would prefer not—we would be concerned only with that phase of the experiential cycle I have called "personal investment". Personal construct theory would lead us, I think, to be concerned with the whole experiential cycle and the process which it represents, rather than with the behavioral phase only.

There is something more. I have used the expression, "construction of experience", rather than "construction of events". I wanted it to be clear that the construction would have to cover the experience itself, as well as the external events with which experience was ostensibly concerned. At the end of an experiential cycle one not only has a revised construction of the events he originally sought to anticipate, but he has also a construction of the process by which he reached his new conclusions about them. In launching his next venture, whatever its concern might be, he will have reason to take account of the effectiveness of the experiential procedures he employed in his last.

To be sure, in writing this corollary it would have been literally correct to say simply, "construction of events"; a phrase that appears so frequently in this exposition. This would have included "experience", since an experience, once it has been enacted, is itself an event. But experience is such an important event in charting what comes next, it seemed important to single it out for special mention. Besides, since experience, as I have defined it, already embraces the events with which the experiencing person has involved himself, the term is sufficiently inclusive, as well as exclusive, to pinpoint what needs to be said. What I especially want to make clear is that the extent of the psychological similarity between the processes of two persons depends upon the similarity of their constructions of their personal experiences, as well as upon the similarity in their conclusions about external events.

But let us also be especially clear about something this corollary does not say, and what that means for the psychology of man in motion. It does not say that the two persons must have experienced "the same" events and it does not say their two experiential cycles have to be "the same". And, to go further, it does not even say they must have experienced "similar" events or that the two experiential cycles must actually have been similar in some way. What has to be similar, in order for their processes to be similar in the same degree, is their construction of experience. And that includes similarity of the construction of events that emerges in the terminal phase of the experiential cycle.

The reason for this being so important is that the outcome of an experience is not merely a tendency to repeat or to avoid it thereafter, as reinforcement theory presumes, but that the conclusions reached through experience are likely to be in the form of new questions which set the

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[1] To my mild dismay I have only now realized that the word "psychological" was misplaced in my original phrasing of this corollary. Instead of modifying "processes", as I originally had it, the term should modify "similar", as constructive alternativism would suggest. Sorry about that!

stage for new ventures. One does not fully understand human behavior, or human processes, except as he understands also the flashes of ingenuity that intersperse human monotonies. While novel undertakings can be construed in ways which show replications, as the Construction Corollary suggests, itis not behavior or process itself which is concretely re-enacted. But in construing replications, rather than in claiming he has seen concrete repetitions, one may project a view of man engaged in ventures, rather than always repeating concretely what has been reinforced.

This corollary makes it possible to say that two persons who have confronted quite different events, and who might have gone through experiential cycles which actually seem to us to be quite different, might nevertheless end up with similar constructions of their experiences, and, because of that, thereafter pursue psychologically similar processes of further inquiry. Thus personal construct theory further releases psychology from assumptions about the identity of events and man's dependence upon them. It leaves us free to envision man coping with "familiar" events in new ways and co-operating with other men to produce novelties which make their world a different place to live in. Neither behaviorism nor phenomenology, as I see them, provides a psychological basis for this kind of forward movement in man.

Sociality Corollary

To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in asocial process involving the other person. The implications of this corollary are probably the most far reaching of any I have yet attempted to propound. It establishes grounds for understanding role as a psychological term, and for envisioning thereupon a truly psychological basis for society. As far as I can see, the term has only extrapsychological meaning elsewhere. This view offers, moreover, an approach to certain puzzling aspects of psychopathy, and it permits one to understand guilt in far more intimate terms than are possible within more conventional "personality" theories, or within current theological doctrines. It leads us also to a position from which we can distinguish personality theories from others.

Perceptive psychologists are keenly aware that there must be some important relationship between what they call "role", "guilt", and "psychopathic personality" on the one hand, and the viability of society on the other. Yet there is little in the stimulus-response kind of theorizing that throws psychological light on what the relationship may be. There is scarcely more to be found in the so-called dynamic theories, although the literature associated with them richly documents a vaguely disquieting awareness of what may be transpiring in the community of man.

Let me start by trying to differentiate two levels at which I may try to understand another person—say, my reader. It is not hard for me to imagine him—you, I mean—at this moment a figure bending over a book. It—the figure—is skimming the paragraphs with the right forefinger in a position to turn to the pages that follow. The eye movements zig zag down the page and quickly the next leaf is flipped, or perhaps a whole section—a chapter or more—is lifted with the left thumb and drawn horizontally aside.

What I am envisioning is a moving object, and whether or not I am correctly describing the movements that are taking place can be reasonably well confirmed—or disconfirmed—by an observer who has been watching you for the past few moments, or if he saw a motion picture film of what has been taking place. This is to say I have couched my picture of you in the terms of "objective" psychology. I have offered a hypothesized description of a "behaving organism".

Ordinarily, if I wanted to play the game by the rules of objectivity, I would not stoop to ask you outright whether or not my description of your actions was correct; the noises you might make in reply could be taken in so many different ways I can be sure of being "a scientist" only if I stick to what can be confirmed. Being a "scientist" may be so important to me that I dare not risk sullying myself with your delusions. I shall therefore play my part and retain my membership in Sigma Xi by referring to your reply as a "vocal response" of a "behaving organism". Hello there, Behaving Organism!

But now let me say it quite another way. There you are, my reader, wondering, I fear, what on earth I am trying so hard to say, and smiling to yourself as the thought crosses your mind that it all might be put in a familiar phrase or two—as indeed it may. You are hunched uncomfortably over the book, impatiently scanning the paragraphs for a cogent expression or a poignant sentence that may make the experience worth the time you are stealing from more urgent duties. The right forefinger is restlessly poised to lift the page and go on to discover if perhaps anything more sensible follows.

Let me confess that I feel at this moment like urging you not to try so hard. While it has taken me hours to write some of these paragraphs—the four preceding ones, for example—and I would like to think the outcome has been worth some of your time too, they were not meant to be hammered into your consciousness. They are intended, instead, to set off trains of thought. And, in following them, I earnestly hope we shall find ourselves walking along the same paths.

There now, isn't that the way it really is? It isn't? Then, tell me, what are you doing? And while we are at it, tell me also how my efforts strike you—I mean, what do you think I am trying to do, not merely whether I am making sense or not. Only please do not tell me that all I am really doing is pounding a typewriter in an effort to keep my wife awake; I have other psychoanalytically oriented friends who are only too happy to offer me that kind of "interpretation".

Although these two descriptions of my view of the reader both represent a wide departure from accepted literary style, I hope they will make clear the contrast between construing the construction processes of another person and construing his behavior merely. In the first instance, I construed only your behavior. There is nothing wrong with that, as far as it goes. In the second case I went further and placed a construction upon the way in which I imagined you might be thinking. The chances are that I was more or less mistaken in both instances, particularly in the second. But the point I want to make lies in the difference in my mode of construing you. In both formulations I was indeed concerned with your behavior, but only in the second did I strive for some notion of the construction which might be giving your behavior its form, or your future behavior its form. If immediate accuracy is what I must preserve at all costs, then I had better stick to the first level of construction. But if I am to anticipate you, I must take some chances and try to sense what you are up to.

One does not have to be a psychologist to treat another person as an automaton, though training in "experimental psychology" may help. Conversely, treating him that way does not make one into a scientist—though some of my colleagues may wish to dispute this. It is easy enough to treat persons we have never met as behaving organisms only, and many of us think that is the sophisticated way to go about secondary human relations. We may even treat our neighbors that way, especially if there are more of them than we care to know. I have even observed parents who go so far as to treat their children so, and they sometimes come to me for psychological advice on how to do it. I sometimes suspect it is because they have more children than they care to know. To be very frank about it, my construction of you, while writing some of these passages, has often lapsed into no more than that. And, if you are like me in this

respect, there must have been moments when you regarded me as a disembodied typewriter, or as an Irish name on the title page of a book, or as a kind of animated sentence ejector.

Points about roles to be emphasized

I know from past experience in attempting to explain this notion of role that two things need especially to be made clear, particularly if I am trying to explain it to a thoroughly trained fellow psychologist. First, my construing of your construction processes need not be accurate in order for me to play a role in a social process that involves you. I have seen a person play a role, and do it most effectively—even in a manner quite acceptable to his colleagues—when he grossly misperceived their outlooks, and they knew it. But because he did what he did on the basis of what he thought they understood, not merely on the basis of their overt acts, he was able to play a collaborative role in a social process whose experiential cycle led them all somewhere. Experiential cycles which are based on automaton—like constructions do not I think, generate social processes, though they may lead to revisions of the manipulative devices by which men try to control each other's actions.

The second point that experience has led me to stress is that my construction of your outlook does not make me a compliant companion, nor does it keep us from working at cross purposes. I may even use my construction of your view as a basis for trying to undo your efforts. But there is something interesting about this; there is still a good chance of a social process emerging out of our conflict, and we will both end up a good way from where we started—in my case, because the experiential cycle will reflect back upon my construction of your outlook, not of your behavior only, and, in your case, because you would find that something beyond your overt behavior was being taken into account, and you might revise your investments accordingly.

There is a third point that sometimes needs mentioning. What I have proposed is a psychological definition of role, and therefore it does not lean upon sociological assumptions about the nature of society or economic assumptions about the coordination of human labor. Being psychological, it attempts to derive its terms from the experience of the individual, though, once the derivations have been made, there are no necessary restrictions on pursuing implications on out into the world of the sociologist, or even into that of the mathematician.

What comes out, then, is a definition that permits us to say that roles are not necessarily reciprocal; you may indeed enact a role based on your construction of my outlook, but my failure to construe you as anything more than a "behaving organism" may prevent me from enacting a role in relation to you. The social process that results from such an exchange stems from you but not from me. It involves you because your behavior tests out a version of my outlook, and the experiential cycle in which you invest yourself leads you to a reinterpretation of our social relationship. It does not involve me because the only hypotheses to which I have made an experiential commitment are hypotheses about your overt behavior.

Role and experience

If I fail to invest in a role, and relate myself to you only mechanistically, then the only thing that disconfirmation can teach me is that the organism I presumed you to be is not wired up to produce the behaviors I thought it would—just as my typewriter does not always behave in the way I expect it to. When my typewriter behaves unpredictably I look to see if there isn't a

screw loose, or if something hasn't gotten into the works. Sometimes I find I have struck the wrong key; I'll strike a different one next time.

And if I insist on construing you as I do my typewriter, I shall probably take my predictive failures as an indication only that I should look to see if there isn't "a screw loose somewhere" in you. Or perhaps I shall wonder if I haven't "struck the wrong key", or if something hasn't "gotten into your works", like a "motive" or a "need", for example. I may even conclude that you are a brand of "typewriter" that has been badly put together. Certainly if this is the way I go about concluding my experiential cycle, I can scarcely claim that I have engaged myself in a social process. Mine might be the kind of experience that gets the commonwealth's work done, but it would not be the sort that builds viable societies.

When one construes another person's outlook, and proceeds to build an experiential cycle of his own upon that construction, he involves himself, willy nilly, in an interesting way. He can test his construction only by activating in himself the version of the other person's outlook it offers. This subtly places a demand upon him, one he cannot lightly reject if his own experience is to be completed. He must put himself tentatively in the other person's shoes. Only by enacting that role can be sense the impact of what happens as a result of taking the point of view he thinks his friend must have.

This means making a behavioral investment of his own, following the hypothesized lines, and experiencing the consequences. The enactment by which he pursues this experiential venture comes close to what is popularly regarded as role-taking. While not all enactments constitute roles in the personal construct sense, and not all role enactments culminate in completed experiential cycles, these brief comments may serve to suggest why the term role has been given such a salient part in the development of this theory.

Guilt

It is in the context of the Sociality Corollary that one can begin to develop a truly psychological definition of guilt. This is not to say that such a definition has to be at odds with ecclesiastical or legal definitions, though it may indeed suggest quite different courses of human action where misdemeanor is involved. We shall be speaking, of course, about the experience of guilt and what it is like, psychologically.

Most psychological theories, both "mechanistic" ones and "dynamic" ones, regard the experience of guilt as a derivative of punishment. One feels guilty because he thinks he has made himself eligible for punishment. But suppose one does not see punishment as the appropriate treatment of wrong-doing, only as revenge by injured persons serving simply to make clear that they have been hurt. Or suppose one does not see wrong-doing as something for which he has been systematically punished. Can he still feel guilty? I think he can. I think Jesus thought so too, though very few ecclesiastics appear to agree with either of us on this point. Even the term "repentance", which I think might better be taken to mean rethinking or reconstruing, as its etymology suggests, has come to stand for undertaking something irrelevantly unpleasant or punitive in compensation for disobedience, rather than doing something which will throw light on past mistakes.

As far as I can see, both from what I have observed and what I have figured out for myself, a person who chronically resorts to this kind of penitence to bring his guilt feelings back into comfortable equilibrium, or to write off his wrong-doing, ends up as a well-balanced sanctimonious psychopath. His only possible virtue is obedience and the society he perpetuates has no purpose except to uphold its own laws. I suspect, furthermore, that this is the net effect of any stimulus-response-reinforcement kind of theory, whether in psychology, religion or poli-

tics. And I have been moved to say, on occasion, that a psychopath is a stimulus-response psychologist who takes it seriously—a remark I find does not endear me to all my colleagues.

From the standpoint of personal construct theory, guilt is the sense of having lost one's core role structure. A core structure is any one that is maintained as a basic referent of life itself. Without it a person has no guidelines for staying alive. To the extent that one's core structure embodies his role also, as we have defined role, he is vulnerable to the experience of guilt. He has only to perceive himself dislodged from such a role to suffer the inner torment most of us know so well.

To feel guilty is to sense that one has lost his grasp on the outlook of his fellow man, or has unwittingly played his part in a manner irrelevant to that outlook by following invalid guidelines. If the role is based on one's construction of God's outlook, or The Party's, he has only to fail to play it or to find that in playing it he has grossly misinterpreted its principal dimensions, to experience a religious sense of guilt. With this goes a feeling of alienation from God, or man, or from both. It is not a pleasant experience, and if the perception of excommunication is extensive or the core role deeply disrupted, it may be impossible for life to continue. Indeed, among primitive people, life may be extinguished within a few days, and, among more civilized ones, it may be abandoned by suicide.

A person who has never developed a role, or who has never allowed his life to depend on it, need not experience guilt. Guilt follows only from the loss of such a central part in the affairs of man. Persons who have always lacked a sense of role, such as psychopaths are said to be, may become confused or even anxious, as they contemplate the disconfirming outcomes of their experiences, but what they display is usually clinically distinguishable from guilt. But, then, neither do such persons play any substantial part. in the developments by which societies emerge. Guilt is thus a concomitant risk in any creative social process by which man may seek to transcend blind obedience. The author of the Book of Genesis seems to have perceived this a good deal more clearly than his readers have.

Hostility

At this point let us turn back to the Experience Corollary and examine its contribution to our understanding of another puzzling matter—hostility. The experience cycle described in that section included a terminal phase embodying an assessment of the construction in terms of which the initial anticipation had been cast and the behavioral commitment had been made. If outcomes emerging successively from ventures based on the same construction continue to leave a trail of disconfirmations behind, it becomes increasingly clear, even to the most dim-witted adventurer, that something is wrong with his reference axes.

Of course, all he has to do when this happens is to start revising his constructs. But, if he procrastinates too long or if his core constructs are involved, this may prove to be a major undertaking. Constructs which are in the process of revision are likely to be pretty shaky, and if he has a great deal of importance resting on one of them, with no others nearby to take up the load, he may find himself on the verge of confusion, or even guilt.

Ordinarily one can loosen his constructs by falling back on more permeable constructions, as suggested by the Modulation Corollary. But if his superordinate constructs are impermeable he will find himself unable to range any new constructions under them. He will then be confronted with a far more extensive revision of his system than he would if he had more open-ended constructions to fall back upon. The upshot of all this may be that he will find himself precariously poised between the minor chaos that his recent disconfirmations have disclosed,

and the major chaos that might engulf him if he attempted to make the needed repairs in his reference axes. In this predicament he may look for some way to avoid both.

One way to avoid the immediate chaos is to tinker with the validational evidence which has recently been giving trouble. There are several ways of doing this. One is to stop short of completing one's experiments. Graduate students are quick to catch on to this one. Another is to loosen up one's construction of outcomes, though this is likely to invite charges of being unrealistic. Still another is to claim rewards as valid substitutes for confirmations, the way doting parents and reinforcement theorists do. One does this by exploiting his dependency on people who are over eager to be helpful.

But there is still another way. That is to force the circumstances to confirm one's prediction of them. A parent who finds that his child does not love him as much as he expected may extort tokens of affection from the helpless youngster. A nation whose political philosophy has broken down in practice may precipitate a war to draft support for its outlook. A meek and trembly spinster, confronted at last by the fact that it is her impregnable posture that renders her unmarriageable, may "prove" the validity of her stand by enticing one of the male brutes to victimize her. A child, unwilling to concede his parents' better judgment because of its far-reaching implications for himself, may seize upon the first opportunity to engage in spiteful obedience by following their advice legalistically in a situation to which it obviously does not apply.

Each of these illustrates an instance of hostility. What personal construct theory has to offer in this matter differs radically from what conventional psychological theory implies. As with other topics with which it deals, personal construct theory attempts to define psychological constructs in terms of the personal experience of the individual to which they are to be applied. Thus, in defining hostility, we do not say that it is essentially an impulse to destroy—even though that may be its consequence—for that sounds more like a complaint of the victim than a prime effort of the hostile person. Instead, hostility is defined as the continued effort to extort validational evidence in favor of a type of social prediction which has already proved itself a failure.

Further implications of personal construct theory

Since this presentation is intended to be a brief introduction to personal construct theory, rather than a condensation of it, much has had to be omitted. The important decision cycles and creativity cycles which the theory envisions remain unmentioned until this moment, as does a radically different view of dependency. There are strictly psychological definitions of threat, impulsivity, anxiety, transference, preemption, constellatoriness, and propositionality. There is a linguistic system called the language of hypothesis, an ontology exemplified in orchestrated approaches to psychotherapy, and a methodology of psychological research. The notions of motivation, needs, and psychodynamics vanish under the light of the Basic Postulate which accepts man as alive to begin with, and the principle of the elaborative choice which takes care of the directionality of man's moves without invoking special motivational agents to account for each of them.

The concept of learning evaporates. The boundary between cognition and affect is obliterated, rendering both terms meaningless. Fixed role therapy illustrates one of a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches which, at first glance, appear to violate most accepted canons of mental treatment by recognizing man as his own scientist. A new view of schizophrenia emerges, as well as fresh interpretations of "the unconscious", depression, and aggression.

But this is enough to mention now. All it has been possible to accomplish in these pages is to state the basic propositions from which hypotheses may be drawn, to illustrate a few of the lines of inference that may be pursued, and to encourage the more impatient readers to seek out the theory's most exciting implications for themselves.

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Reference (APA)

Kelly, G. A. (2017) A brief introduction to personal construct theory. *Costruttivismi*, *4*, 3-25. doi: 10.23826/2017.01.003.025