

The Social Construction of Reality (and Conclusion)

Spring 2014

1

Final Examination

- Monday, May 12, 2014
 - 7:00 - 10:00 PM
 - 2050 Valley Life Sciences Building
- 3-Hour Exam
 - 1st Hour (+), Noncumulative
 - c. 15 very short-answer questions
 - 2nd Hour (-), Cumulative
 - 5 less short-answer questions
 - 3rd Hour Free
- DSP Proctoring Is Being Arranged

2

Topics in Noncumulative Portion

1. The Self
2. Social-Cognitive Neuropsychology
3. Development of Social Cognition
4. Personality and Social Cognition
5. Social Construction of Reality

3

Final Examination

- Review Session Monday, May 5
 - 9:00 – 10:00 AM, Dwinelle 145
 - *No Webcast!*
- New Review Materials Posted by Friday
 - Lecture Supplements Updated
- Queries to Website Forum
 - Must be posted by 12:00 Noon, Friday, May 9
 - No Queries via Personal E-Mail

4

Knowledge and Reality

- Purpose of Cognition is to Acquire Knowledge of Reality
 - Basis for Adaptive Behavior
- Social Cognition: Reality is Social in Nature
 - Other People, Their Behavior
 - Ourselves, Our Own Behavior
 - Situations in which We Interact with Others
- Reality has Existence Independent of the Knower

5



Philosophical Roots: Realism vs. Idealism

- Descartes, Mind vs. Body
- Realism (Kant)
 - The Objects of Perception Exist Independent of Our Perception of Them
- Idealism (Berkeley)
 - The Objects of Perception Do Not Exist Independent of the Activities of Our Own Minds
 - Intrinsic vs. Context-Dependent Properties



6



The Enlightenment Stance

Cassirer (1932)

- “Enlightenment” of 17th-18th Centuries
 - Locke, Voltaire, Diderot
- Contrast with Medieval Superstition
 - Knowledge Through Authority
- Knowledge Acquired Through Reason



Theatrbild von Oer
The Weimar Courtyard of the Museum (1860)

7

The Enlightenment Stance

Reason is the Central Human Capacity

Permits Correct Thought and Action

- Humans are Rational by Nature
- Progress to Perfection
- All Humans Equally Rational
- Tolerance
- Acceptance of Beliefs Based on Reason



Arise! Charles Lemonnier
"Reading of the Tragedy 'L'Orphelin de la Chine' in the Salon of Madame Geoffrin" (1812)

8

The Enlightenment Stance

Reason is the Central Human Capacity

Permits Correct Thought and Action

- Individuality vs. Local Prejudice
- De-Emphasis on Historical Difference
- De-Emphasis on Cultural Difference
- De-emphasizes Intuitive, Artistic
 - Set Stage for 19th Century Romanticism

9



Science and the Enlightenment Stance

The Laws of Nature are Inexorable

“Any intelligent alien anywhere would have to come upon the same logical system as we have to explain the structure of protons and the nature of supernovae”
---Steven Weinberg

10

Social Construction and Social Cognition

- Beliefs Create Reality
 - Subjective, Objective
 - About Ourselves, Others
 - Situations, Behavior
- How Are These Beliefs...
 - Acquired (through Perception)
 - Stored (in Memory)
 - Altered (through Thought)
 - Communicated (through Language)

How Do Beliefs Create Reality?

11

The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Merton, 1947, 1958



"Definitions of a situation... become an integral part of the situation and thus affect subsequent developments...."

The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*.

The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning".

Such are the perversities of social logic.

12



Expectancy Confirmation Effects

Snyder (1978); Darley & Fazio (1980); Jones (1986)



- Behavioral Confirmation
 - Elicitation of Confirmatory Behaviors
 - Creates *Public* Reality
- Perceptual Confirmation
 - Interpretation of Ambiguous Behaviors
 - Creates *Private* Reality

13

Modes of Perceptual Confirmation

- Constructive Processes in Perception
 - Interpret Current Events
- Reconstructive Processes in Memory
 - Re-Interpret Past Events
- Constructive Alternativism in Thinking
 - Construe Events in Different Ways

14

Constructive Alternativism

Kelly (1955)



- Events Can Be Construed in Multiple Ways
 - Choose Among Available Constructs
 - Abandon Old Constructs
 - Acquire New Constructs
- Construal Determines Subjective Reality
 - Mental Representation Determines Behavior

15

Two Aspects of Social Cognition

- Cognition of Social Reality
 - Understanding the Social World
 - Exists Independent of Individual Mind
- Creation of Social Reality
 - Constructing the Social World
 - Through Thought and Action

16

Levels of Constructivism

- Shared Premise
 - We Do Not Perceive the World Directly
 - Only Through Our Representations of It.
- Individual Variant
 - These Representations are the Product of Cognitive Constructions.
- Social Variant
 - These Representations are the Product of Social Constructions.

17

Constructivism in Psychology

- Stimulus Environment is Inherently Ambiguous
- Respond to Mental Representations of Objects, Events in World
- No Denial of External Reality
 - The World Exists Outside Our Minds
 - But Does Not Determine Our Behavior
- Action Determined by Internal, Mental Representation of Reality

18

The Standard View of Reality

- Objective Reality
 - Exists Independent of the Mind
 - Discovered through Science, Reason
 - Can Be Changed Through Overt Behavior
 - Mental States Determine Behavior
- Subjective Reality
 - Product of Constructive Mental Activity
 - Perception, Memory, Thought
 - May Not Correspond to Objective Reality

19

The Post-Enlightenment Stance

Denial of Universal, Objective Truths

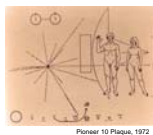
- Historical Contingency of Scientific Knowledge
 - of Scientific Discoveries, Scientific Facts
- Nominalism
 - Classification Reveals Inherent Structure
 - Classification as Convenient Label
- Stability
 - Coalition Supports Findings
- Discovery vs. Construction of Reality

20

Gender as a Biological Fact

Sex is Observer-Independent

- Chromosomal Heritage
 - XX, Female; XY, Male; etc.
- Hormonal Endowment
 - Fetal sex hormones
- Primary, Secondary Sex Characteristics
 - Internal, external genitalia
 - Physique
- Gender Identity, Gender Role, Sexual Orientation
 - Follow from Biological Facts



21

Social Construction of Gender

De Beauvoir (1947)



“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”

- Biological Differences Between the Sexes Do Not Determine Gender, Gender Attributes, or Gender Relations
- Gendered Attributes and Relations are Highly Contingent on History and Social Structure

22

Gender as a Social Construction

- Biological Sex is Objective Fact
- Gender Identity, Role are Subjective Facts
 - Identify Self as Male, Female
 - Transsexualism
 - Social Consensus About Behavior
 - Masculinity: Agency, Independence
 - Femininity: Communion, Dependence

23

The Social Construction of Race

Painter (2010)



- Race Not a Biological Concept
 - Biological Differences Miniscule
- Racial Distinctions Highly Contingent on History and Social Structure
 - “One Drop Rule”
 - History of US Census
 - “Whiteness”
 - “Caucasian” “Anglo-Saxon”

24

A Short History of "Whiteness"

After Painter (2010)

- Greeks and Romans vs. "Barbarians"
 - Circassians
- Blumenbach's "Racial Science" (1776)
 - Caucasians
 - Mongolians, Malays, Negroids, Americans
- Jeffersonian/Emersonian Conceptions
 - Anglo-Saxons, Teutons
 - Nordics, Aryans
 - Alpines
 - Mediterraneans



The Social Construction of...

Hacking (1999)



- Authorship
- Emotions
- Knowledge
 - Nature
 - Quarks
 - Reality

26

Analysis of Social Constructivism

Hacking (1999)



Meanings are...

- Not Inherent and Immutable
- Historically Contingent
- Product of Social Forces

27

Stages of Social Constructivism

Hacking (1999)



1. X Appears to be Inevitable...
2. X Need Not Have Existed
 - a. or Need Not Be As It Is
 - b. or Not Determined by the Nature of Things
 - c. or Not Inevitable
3. X is Quite Bad As It Is
4. We Would Be Better Off If...
 - a. X Were Done Away With
 - b. or X Were Radically Transformed

28

Traditional Social Constructionists

Hacking (1999)



- Historical
 - X is Historically Contingent
- Ironic
 - X Could Have Been Different
 - But We're Stuck With It Now
- Unmasking
 - X is Stripped of Ideological Authority
 - X is a Bad Thing, We're Better Off Without It

29

"Unmasking" Social Constructivists

Hacking (1999)



X is bad...

- Reformist
 - We Can Make It Better
- Rebellious
 - We Can Get Along Without It
- Revolutionary
 - We Should Change the World

30

Objective Facts Can Be Socially Constructed

Searle (1995, 2010)



Money

Marriage

Property Rights

- These Things Are What They Are
 - Because We Think They Are What They Are.
- But They Are What They Are, Objectively.
 - Not Simply a Matter of Belief.

31

Institutional Reality

- Brute Facts
 - Matters of Physics and Biology
 - Exist Independently of Human Institutions
 - Require Language Only to State the Facts
- Institutional Facts
 - Exist Only in the Context of Human Institutions
 - Brought Into Being by Speech Acts
 - But Not Merely Matters of Opinion

32

The Big Question

Searle (1995, 2010)



“How can there be an objective reality that is what it is only because we think it is what it is?”

33

Confusion of Ontology and Epistemology

Searle (1995, 2010)

- Two Modes of Existence
 - Objective
 - Does not Depend on Subject's Experience
 - Subjective
 - Exist Only as Experienced by Subject
- Two Forms of Knowledge
 - Subjective, “First-Person Mode”
 - Truth Value Depends on Attitudes/Feelings of Observers
 - Objective, “Third-Person Mode”
 - Truth Value Independent of Attitudes/Feelings of Observers

34

Features of the World

- Intrinsic (Observer-Independent)
 - True Regardless of What People Think
 - Ontologically Objective
 - Epistemically Objective
- Observer-Relative (Observer-Dependent)
 - True Only Because People Think They're True
 - Ontologically Subjective
 - Epistemically Objective

35

Facts About People

- Intrinsic
 - 6'2" Tall
 - Male or Female
 - Active or Inactive
- Observer-Relative
 - Aggressive or Passive
 - Extraverted or Introverted
 - Masculine or Feminine
 - Intelligent or Dull

36

Evolution of the Five Factor Model of Personality

- The Big Four
 - Neuroticism
 - Extraversion
 - Agreeableness
 - Conscientiousness
- The Fifth Factor
 - Intelligence
 - Intellectance
 - Openness to Experience
 - Absorption/Fantasy
 - Intellectance
 - Political Liberalism

Different Cultures May Choose
Different Traits as "Basic"

37

Two Kinds of Science and Two Kinds of Features of the World

Searle (1995, 2010)

- Natural Sciences
 - Observer-Independent Features
- Social Sciences
 - Observer-Dependent Features



38

Implications for Social Cognition

- Social Cognition a Field of Psychology
- Goal of Science
 - Objective Knowledge of *Social* Reality
- Some Features are Intrinsic
 - Exist Independent of Observer
- Others are Observer-Dependent
 - Depend on Observer's Attitudes, Feelings
- Some are Products of Collective Intentionality
 - Exist Only in Certain Social Contexts

39

Social Cognition Defined

Bruner & Tagiuri (1954); Tagiuri (1969)

Placing the "knowing of people"
in the wider theoretical context of
how we know the environment generally

- Cognition in Social Psychology
 - Persons as Dependent Variables
- Social Psychology of Cognition
 - Persons as Independent Variables

40

Canonical Topics in Cognition

- Perception
- Memory
- Thinking (Reasoning, Problem-Solving)
- Language
- Intelligence
- Cognitive Development
- Mathematical/Computational Modeling
- Neuropsychology/Neuroscience

41

Quantitative Differences between Social and Nonsocial Cognition

- Ambiguity
- Conflicting Cues
- Context Effects
- Role of Emotion, Motivation
- Social Cues
- Social Learning
- Social Interaction
 - "The Purpose of Perception is Action"

42

Qualitative Differences between Social and Nonsocial Cognition

- Modularity
- Self as Object vs. Self as Subject
- Object as Sentient Being
 - Impression-Management
- Observer-Dependence
 - Social Reality as Cognitive Construction
 - Self-Fulfilling Prophecy
 - Interpersonal Expectancy Effects
 - Social Reality as Social Construction

43

Social Cognition *Is* Special

- Cognition
 - Mind Forms, Transforms Mental Representations of the World
- Nonsocial Cognition
 - The Objects of Cognition Have an Existence That is Independent of the Mind
- Social Cognition
 - To Some Extent, at least, the Objects of Cognition Are Not Independent of the Mind

44

In Social Cognition, Belief Creates Reality

- Constructivism
 - constructs mental representations of world
- Self-Fulfilling Prophecy
 - subjective interpretations of ambiguous behavior
 - create objective conditions in world
- Social Constructivism
 - create objective reality through shared beliefs

45

“Sovereignty” of Social in Cognitive Psychology

Ostrom (1981, 1984)

- Humans as Social Creatures
 - Live in Groups
 - Cooperation, Competition
 - Mate for Life, Tend young
 - Culture as Social History
- Animistic Thinking in Children
 - Attributions of Intentionality
 - Generalize from Social to Nonsocial
 - Later, Learn Differences

46

“Sovereignty” of Cognitive in Social Psychology

Ostrom (1981, 1984)

- Cognitive Mediation of Social Behavior
- Linguistic Basis of Social Behavior
 - Language as Tool for Thought
 - Medium for Social Interaction

47



“Two Cultures” in Cognition

Holyoak & Gordon (1984) after Snow (1948)



- Social vs. Cognitive Psychology
- Anthropological Analogy
 - One Culture Temporarily Dominates
 - Each Culture Reconstructs the Other
 - Each Culture Learns from the Other
- Neuroscience as a “Third Culture”?
 - Eliminative Reductionism

48



Social Cognition as a Link to Cognitive Social Science

Turner (2001)



- Meaning
- Reason
- Choice
- Concept Formation and Conceptual Change
- Human Evolution
- Cultural Differences

49

In order to understand social cognition, we must understand social forces outside individual

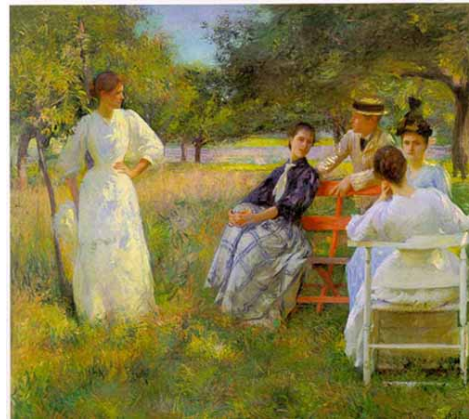
Is it time for an interdisciplinary cognitive social science paralleling cognitive neuroscience?

50

Maybe

- Social Cognition the first step toward cognitive social science
- Cognition not just a matter of the activities of individual minds trying to understand external reality
- Cognition also a matter of minds working together
- Trying to understand a reality that is partly the making of their own minds

51



52