

ILLiad TN: 145726 ✓



Borrower: GWC

Lending String: *GSU,MI@,VRM,AVL,TFW

Patron: Korobov, Neill

Journal Title: Culture & psychology.

Volume: 6

Issue: 3

Month/Year: 2000

Pages: 365-373

Article Title: ; Social Constructionist æTheory
HopeÆ; The Impasse from Theory to Practice

Imprint: London ; Thousand Oaks, CA ; Sage
Public

ILL Number: 43151133



Call #: PER BF1 .C82

Location: 3N
IN PROCESS DATE:
20080529

UPS Campusship
IFM Charge
Maxcost: \$25IFM

Shipping Address:
Library, ILL
University of West Georgia
1601 Maple St
Carrollton, GA 30118-2000

Fax: 678-839-6511

Ariel: 160.10.98.75

Or ship via: UPS Campusship

Social Constructionist 'Theory to Hope': The Impasse from Theory to Practice

Neill Korobov
Clark University, USA

Gergen, Kenneth J., *An Invitation to Social Construction*. London: Sage, 1999. 248 pp. ISBN 0-8039-8377-8 (pbk).

If one has read Gergen's 1994 *Realities and Relationships in Social Construction*, then one will find his latest book, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, to be very much the same. Although written with his characteristic erudition and literary volubility, Gergen's most recent work does not really step beyond the shadow left from his last book. Even the format is eerily familiar, beginning as before by opening the space for the emergence of social constructionism by capitalizing on what he refers to as a 'crisis of representation', which is purportedly a failure of the traditional (mimetic, mirroring) responsibility of language, as well as on the epistemological problems of dualism, introspection, objectivity and rationality (Chapter 1). With broad strokes, Gergen genuflects to the Wittgensteinian idea of language as a game, casting acts of description and explanation away from their putatively truth-telling status to something more like Austin's (1962) performative criteria of felicity and infelicity within particular linguistic conventions, or forms of life.

As such, constructionism emerges as a metatheoretical vanguard aimed at emancipating discourse—said differently, constructionism as

Uchebno-pedagogicheskiye
Vyshty. In L.S. Vygot'sky Razvitiye vyshikh
i kh trudov (pp. 233-363). Moscow:
i nauk. (Original work presented as
psikhologicheskogo krizisa. In A.R.
Vygot'sky. *Sobranie sochinenii: Tom 1.*
1-436). Moscow: Pedagogika.
vshikh psikhicheskikh funktsii. In A.M.
iye sochinenii: Tom 3. *Problemy razvitiya*
ika. (Original work written 1931)
pensatornykh processah v razviti
kologii (pp. 115-136). Moscow:
931)
D. B. El'konin (Ed.), L.S. Vygot'sky.
kholiia (pp. 376-385). Moscow:
as a lecture in 1933-1934)
e cultural development of the child. In
ne Vygot'sky reader (pp. 57-72). Oxford:
929)
oscow: Labrint. (Original work

d symbol in child development.
der Veer & J. Valsiner (Eds.), *The*
UK: Blackwell.
ation Grant, No. 3988.

who has moved into psychology
and neuropsychological ideas of Lev
erested in children's development of
cesses. He is currently a Lecturer at
psychology and conducting research
velopment. ADDRESS: Aaro Toomela,
Tartu, Tugi 78, Tartu 50410, Estonia.

generative theory—an invitation to step out of the realities we have created, taking stock of who is speaking, who is silenced, and what the repercussions are for different traditions of argumentation. In this spirit, Gergen reveals quite nicely the rhetoric that sustains various *practices*, squaring himself markedly against the tacit imperialism that not only sustains traditional empirical research and scientific inquiry, but that also marginalizes competing paradigms (Chapters 2–4). In the later chapters of the book (6–7), Gergen sets about the task of taking seriously the constructionist dictum that ‘words are themselves a form of social practice’ (p. 142) by illustrating the hermeneutic notion of meaning as an ‘emergent property of coordinated action’ (p. 145). His move is towards what he calls *transformative dialogue*—a kind of self-reflexivity aimed at polyvocality within institution and therapeutic locales. As such, his emphasis for this book emerges more clearly. Gergen is concerned chiefly with the consequences of social constructionism as a *practice*, as a way of reflecting critically on the limitations and potentials of different forms of life.

This brings us to the focus of this review, namely the consequences of social constructionism as a metatheoretical orientation for practice. The promise that Gergen paints goes something like this: armed with the anti-foundationalist creed that all talk is perspectival/conventional/relational, the benefactor of Gergen’s transformative dialogue should now have the opportunity to escape the limitations of foundationalist imperialism through a kind of ‘doublethink’—because s/he now *knows* that ‘everything that is meaningful stems from relationships’, s/he is now able to critically resist and reflect on the vicissitudinous nature of our relationships. Dialogues can then expand, fostering talk of change, contextual sensitivity and relational selves. Thus, a rehabilitation by social constructionism of the importance of culture, history, politics and convention, as opposed to the hegemony of science, logic, brute fact, or objectivity. This ‘anti-foundational theory hope’, as Fish (1989) calls it, evokes two questions for the idea of practice. Paralleling Fish’s sentiment,¹ we may first ask: does social constructionism as a metatheoretical orientation provide us with the directions for achieving the epistemological state it describes? Second, is it such that if we heed Gergen’s lesson of social constructionism, the lesson that ‘all that is meaningful stems from relationships’, we will thereby become more self-consciously relational and thereby inhabit our relational nature in a more effective way? My answer to both questions, as it is Fish’s answer as well, is no.

This ‘dismal’ pronouncement, far from being a posture set against social constructionism, is one that ironically directly follows from its

central assumptions. Following the map of the world, but rather as the basis for our methods of simultaneous constructing it. Following Derrida, that language generates meaning not it is, but through an intra-linguistic meaning as they differ from other within the language game(s) itself, an extant reality. This is why Derrida always already mediated. But in announce that what he is saying has Fish (1989) shows quite nicely that that knowledge is always already really a discovery, ‘at least not in purchase on it that we did not have

That is, the realization that something make it more the case than it was before still, epistemologically speaking, in the The fact that we are now able to articulate make us more situated, and even worse situated was our situation. (p. 348)

What Gergen capitalizes on so precisely a discovery—a discovery that stands several decades of postempiricist thought. It is the discovery that lies, namely the insight furnished by social edge is relational/situated/construction position or in which relationship is even attempt to be offered as a posture ship? If it is the type of insight aimed at practices by giving us a critical perspective on our positions/practices, then the posture is over and above its own nature aim for practice can be seen as such

The transformative challenge here is one of self-reflexivity—toward questioning our stand, we must necessarily adopt questioning, we relinquish the ‘stand’ open possibilities for other conversations is made possible by the fact that we a

The transformative challenge here is to shift the conversation in the direction of self-reflexivity—toward questioning one's own position. In reflecting on our stand, we must necessarily adopt a different voice. . . . Thus, in self-questioning, we relinquish the 'stand fast and firm' posture of conflict, and open possibilities for other conversations to take place. Such self-reflection is made possible by the fact that we are polyvalent. We participate in multiple

What Gergen capitalizes on so persuasively is exactly the novelty of a discovery—a discovery that stands on the shoulders of the last several decades of postempiricist, poststructuralist, and hermeneutic thought. It is the discovery that lies at the heart of liberal thought, namely the insight furnished by social constructionism that all knowledge is relational/situated/constructed. But, we may ask, from which position or in which relationship is this insight being offered? Does it even attempt to be offered as a position or detached form of relationship? If it is the type of insight aimed at getting us to change our practices by giving us a critical perspective (Gergeren calls it 'self-reflexivity') on our positions/practices, then we may wonder how this critical posture is over and above its own relationality/situatedness. Gergeren's aim for practice can be seen as such:

That is, the realization that something has always been the case does not make it more the case than it was before you realized that it was; you are still, epistemologically speaking, in the same position you were always in. The fact that we are now able to announce that we are situated does not make us more situated, and even when we could not announce it, being situated was our situation. (p. 348)

That is, the realization that something has always been the case does not make it more the case than it was before you realized that it was; you are still, epistemologically speaking, in the same position you were always in. The fact that we are now able to announce that we are situated does not make us more situated, and even when we could not announce it, being situated was our situation. (p. 348). He goes on to say: purchase on it that we did not have before' (p. 348). He goes on to say: really a discovery, 'at least not in the sense that it would give us a that knowledge is always already embedded in relationships is not Fish (1989) shows quite nicely that Derrida's point is that announcing announce that what he is saying has *always already* been announced. always already mediated. But in the same breath he is quick to an extant reality. This is why Derrida (1976) says that knowledge is within the language game(s) itself, not through correspondence with meaning as they differ from other words. Thus, meaning is generated it is, but through an intra-linguistic system of differences—words have that language generates meaning not by mapping on to the world as constructing it. Following Derrida, Gergeren is right to note (Chapter 1) basis for our methods of simultaneously understanding the world and map of the world, but rather as the very instrument that is itself the have by and large chosen to view language not simply as a mirror or central assumptions. Following the 'discursive turn', constructionists

step out of the realities we have king, who is silenced, and what the conditions of argumentation. In this the rhetoric that sustains various by against the tacit imperialism that critical research and scientific inquiry, gergeren sets about the task of taking that 'words are themselves a form of coordinated action' (p. 145). His *transformative dialogue*—a kind of self-within institution and therapeutic consequences of social construction—reflecting critically on the limitations life. review, namely the consequences theoretical orientation for practice. es something like this: armed with at all talk is perspectival/con- of Gergeren's transformative dia- unity to escape the limitations of a kind of 'doublethink'—because that is meaningful stems from critically resist and reflect on the ships. Dialogues can then expand, sensitivity and relational selves. constructionism of the importance of tion, as opposed to the hegemony objectivity. This 'anti-foundational evokes two questions for the idea ent, we may first ask: does social orientation provide us with the logical state it describes? Second, sson of social constructionism, the stems from relationships', we will sly relational and thereby inhabit ve way? My answer to both ques- from being a posture set against onically directly follows from its

relationships. . . . If these suppressed voices can be located and brought forth within the conversation of differences, we move toward transformation. (p. 162)

Although we might find such a liberal attitude to be commendatory, it does not take its warrant from social constructionism. Although Gergen is careful to offer the humble detraction that social constructionist thought does not attempt to rise above that which it surveys, he still enters into another, more subtly disturbing area of difficulty.

What Gergen must take seriously is the very thing that sustains the social constructionist movement's novelty—that is, the inescapability of being situated in some relational matrix. And if situatedness is really inescapable, then, as Fish (1989) says,

. . . students could not possibly identify in nonevaluative ways their own beliefs, because as situated beings some set of beliefs of which they could not be aware would be enabling any identification they might make; and, therefore, the act of identification would from the very first be 'evaluative' through and through. (p. 350)

Yet, it is exactly this kind of conviction, the seemingly specious conviction taught to us by constructionists that we can develop a critical posture on our knowledge claims, that allows for change in practice to occur, whether it is criticizing empirical methodology, developing empathy in therapy for a spouse, or acquiescing political strife. As Gergen notes, 'constructionist scholars have become increasingly interested in the emancipatory potential of discourse analysis, that is, inquiry which causes us to reflect critically and creatively on our own forms of life' (p. 80).

This is the bread and butter of constructionist theory for practice. Yet, reform within practice cannot be justified, nor can it take its warrant from the insights of social constructionist theory, and to be persuaded otherwise through arguments that criticize traditional empiricism or that punt to the hermeneutic emphasis on situatedness/interpretation of all knowledge is to run the risk of lapsing back into foundationalism, or of becoming a new kind of foundationalism. We must remember that any epistemological breakthrough that occurs through constructionist efforts is always within a forestructure of understanding, forestructures that can never be the object of our self-conscious theorizing. Thus, the conviction that 'all that is meaningful stems from relationships' has no particular cash value for the situation you happen to be in, for as Fish (1989) stresses, 'the constraints of that situation will not be relaxed by that knowledge' (p. 351). Constructionism may be a new, more liberal and progressive philosophical

position, but it cannot be turned into an epistemology.

As a theoretical/philosophical position, it tells us that all knowledge and claims to knowledge are relational and historically saturated. However, it does not tell us where and how we might go to change culture and over the course of history. It does not give us a practical method for delimiting knowledge. All it tells us is that whatever we do, our facts may seem, that they are perspective-dependent. In no way does this obviate the realist, insofar as realism is simply a perspective. According to Searle (1995), it is wholly a matter of logical position, even social constructionism is not really an epistemological position. It is a position that a real world exists independent of us. Constructionists simply say *how* the world is (relational/situated), while realists simply say *that* the world is (constructionists' best attempt at an account of reality that all knowledge is relational) simply is. As Fish (1989) notes, 'cannot be translated into a form that use your account of knowing in order to know'.

Nevertheless, constructionist scholarship has sought to put the insights of constructionism to work. What occurs is in the area of discourse analysis. The emphasis being on uncovering the structure of language in this or that linguistic or institutional context, whether academic and political, bearing the burden of its trappings. The goal is to see how social structures and different forms of communication, whether verbal or linguistic modes. The immediate insight, as Gergen notes, is that it turns discourse structure (the structure of discourse structure) into an object of study. As Gergen (1976) both stress is that a discourse structure is a set of empirical particulars. Discourse structure and unspoken assumptions that [structure] shape the world and changing in response to the world. (1989, p. 352). Thus, the act of discourse structure as an object of description, is always already a structure, and, as such, is nonsensical. The one who is speaking from is impossible. The one who is always speaking from a

As a theoretical/philosophical position, constructionist theory tells us that all knowledge and claims to certainty are culturally, politically and historically saturated. However, constructionist theory does not tell us where and how we might go about finding knowledge within culture and over the course of history. Constructionist theory does not give us a practical method for deliberation among competing claims. All it tells us is that whatever we do decide, however recalcitrant the facts may seem, that they are perspectival and relational through and through. In no way does this obviate the possibility of still being a realist, insofar as realism is simply an ontological position, and, according to Searle (1995), it is wholly commensurate with any epistemological position, even social constructionism (which, I would argue, is not really an epistemological position at all). Realism is simply the position that a real world exists independent of our representations. Constructionists simply say *how* things are (that they are always relational/situated), while realists simply say *that* they are. Yet, the constructionists' best attempt at an account of knowing (i.e. the insight that all knowledge is relational) simply is their point, and, as Fish (1989) notes, 'cannot be translated into a recipe for knowing; you don't use your account of knowing in order to "do" knowing' (p. 383).

Nevertheless, constructionist scholarship often forgets this and tries to put the insights of constructionism into practice. One place this occurs is in the area of discourse and/or gender studies, with their emphasis being on uncovering the discourse structures that are used in this or that linguistic or institutional medium. Here, the hope is both academic and political, bearing both discursive and emancipatory trappings. The goal is to see how something like power is parasitic on different forms of communication, within different discourse structures or linguistic modes. The immediate problem with this, as Fish (1989) notes, is that it turns discourse structures (or at least the idea of a discourse structure) into an object of study. What Fish (1989) and Derrida (1976) both stress is that a discourse structure is more than simply a set of empirical particulars. Discourse structures are 'bundles' of tacit and unspoken assumptions that [are] simultaneously organizing the world and changing in response to [their] own organizing work' (Fish, 1989, p. 352). Thus, the act of discussing a discourse structure itself, as an object of description, is always already done within a discourse structure, and, as such, is nonsensical. To speak about the very position one is speaking from is impossible. It is impossible to preserve the idea that one is always speaking from a particular discourse and at the same

position, but it cannot be turned into a set of directions for how to do epistemology.

voices can be located and brought forth
 ces, we move toward transformation.

eral attitude to be commendatory, it
 social constructionism. Although
 ble detraction that social construc-
 o rise above that which it surveys,
 dibly disturbing area of difficulty.
 y is the very thing that sustains the
 matrix. And if situatedness is really
 ys,

ity in nonevaluative ways their own
 me set of beliefs of which they could
 y identification they might make; and,
 ould from the very first be 'evaluative'

ction, the seemingly specious con-
 nists that we can develop a critical
 hat allows for change in practice to
 nprical methodology, developing
 or acquiescing political strife. As
 ars have become increasingly inter-
 al of discourse analysis, that is,
 ritically and creatively on our own

constructionist theory for practice.
 t be justified, nor can it take its
 constructionist theory, and to be
 nments that criticize traditional
 rmenetic emphasis on situated-
 is to run the risk of lapsing back
 g a new kind of foundationalism.
 ological breakthrough that occurs
 always within a forestructure of
 an never be the object of our self-
 iction that 'all that is meaningful
 ticular cash value for the situation
 (9) stresses, 'the constraints of that
 at knowledge' (p. 351). Construc-
 al and progressive philosophical

time treat those discourse structures as objects that can be characterized.

Taken seriously, the lesson of social constructionism—the lesson that all knowledge is relational and that we are always within relationships—entails that social constructionism is at a loss for providing us with a way of ‘doing’ the knowledge we already have. It is not and cannot be a recipe for practice. Knowing that our knowledge claims are inherently relational cannot put us more in possession of them within practice, nor can it deprive us from them. The attempt to transform the rhetoric of social constructionism into a way of emancipating practice is to exempt it from its own position. This way, constructionism cannot have the consequences for which Gergen hopes, the consequences of loosening the grip of traditional empirical imperialism so that we may more flexibly pursue generative theory, self-reflexivity and other forms of liberal, transformative conversation. Those who read the rhetoric of social constructionism must be careful not to make the mistake of thinking that social constructionism, through its demonstration of the relationality of knowledge, can now tell us how to go about our daily practices. It cannot help us to adjudicate between competing beliefs. Said differently, a social constructionist cannot reject something simply because that something is always already a part of context as opposed to being independent of it.

Nowhere is this tension more obvious than in the tension between the use of a realist theory or social constructionist theory, and I should take a minute to show this. For the traditional realist there is a real world independent of our representations of it (an ontological claim). For the constructionist, there may or may not be a real world independent of our observations of it (ontologically mute), but whatever knowledge we do claim will always be relational/situated knowledge (a moot point—i.e. one that tells us nothing that was not already the case). And, as stated earlier, they are not incommensurate positions. Yet, I would like to add, each has no bearing at the level of practice. Neither are epistemological positions that one could self-consciously put into action. Neither the belief that there is something beyond our present situated knowledge discoveries nor the trumpeting proclamation that ‘all knowledge is relational’ will put us in any better position to make decisions when it comes to everyday practice.

For the realist, while acting in the moment of practice, the belief that there really is an independent, invariant structure to this or that convention will not render transparent that convention, nor will it help the realist in choosing among various alternatives. And for the constructionist, the belief that their knowledge claims are the product of

culturally and historically infused make those relationships speak or tives. We are always proceeding relationships which cannot be the of are always already the content of that realism and social construction itions without a whole lot of prac seriously, may go a long way in relationship between the two.

Thus, we are left in an interesting the theory behind social construct with a critical posture that tries to nness (a move with all of the above Gergen would avoid, for it would edge, and thus a reinvention of fou social constructionism isn't anyth which practice can be dictated, but or code word. As Hacking (1999) 'code', 'use it favorably, [and] yo trash the phrase, [and] you declar and respectable' (p. vii). Or, follow could view social constructionism a like a theoretical position and mor movement or serve as the harbinger

What are the results of such a r ture, the insights of social const changes in practice that are accred status—hence, viewing social cons less like a theory that can direct p may not be so bad. The new practic tivities to the relational nature of political programs, or of the fluidit about by almost anything and h insights of ‘social constructionism’ This way, even the impulse to reex of our most cherished practices (o ist admonition) may be provoke winning the lottery, getting a divo person may hold this or that theor a ‘radical relativist’ or a ‘staunch r aspire to *practice* like a ‘constructio theoretical devotions will matter v

theoretical devotions will matter very little. aspire to *practice* like a 'constructionist' or 'traditional empiricist', their a 'radical relativist' or a 'staunch realist', but at the moment that they person may hold this or that theoretical position, seeing themselves as winning the lottery, getting a divorce or finding God. That is to say, a ist admonition) may be provoked by something as far-fetched as of our most cherished practices (or any other purported construction- This way, even the impulse to reexamine the underlying assumptions insights of 'social constructionism' as a *theory* that can direct practice. about by almost anything and have no unique relationship to the political programs, or of the fluidity of social processes can be brought tivities to the relational nature of knowledge, the embeddedness of may not be so bad. The new practices that result from heightened sensi- less like a theory that can direct practice is an act of deflation, and it status—hence, viewing social constructionism more like a 'slogan' and changes in practice that are accredited to it are now given no special ture, the insights of social constructionism and the accompanying What are the results of such a recharacterization? With this carica- movement or serve as the harbinger of change.

like a theoretical position and more like an attitude that might rally a could view social constructionism as a kind of 'slogan', something less and respectable' (p. vii). Or, following the sentiment of Ellis (1989), we trash the phrase, [and] you declare that you are rational, reasonable, 'code', 'use it favorably, [and] you deem yourself rather radical . . . or code word. As Hacking (1999) points out, the phrase has become which practice can be dictated, but something more like an orientation social constructionism isn't anything like a theory or position from edge, and thus a reinvention of foundationalism), or we may say that- Gerger would avoid, for it would imply a form of detached knowl- ness (a move with all of the above-mentioned problems, and one that with a critical posture that tries to stand apart from its own situated- the theory behind social constructionism is one that we implement Thus, we are left in an interesting quandary. We may either say that relationship between the two.

seriously, may go a long way in stymieing the seemingly hostile tions without a whole lot of practical purchase. This insight, taken that realism and social constructionism are simply philosophical pos- are always already the content of one's attention. What this means is relationships which cannot be the object of one's attention because they tives. We are always proceeding in the context(s) of innumerable- make those relationships speak or appear so as to adjudicate alterna- culturally and historically infused relationships will not, so to speak,

es as objects that can be character- tal constructionism—the lesson that at we are always within relation- nism is at a loss for providing us dge we already have. It is not and nowing that our knowledge claims ut us more in possession of them as from them. The attempt to trans- tionism into a way of emancipating n position. This way, construction- for which Gerger hopes, the con- traditional empirical imperialism so e generative theory, self-reflexivity ormative conversation. Those who tionism must be careful not to make onstructionism, through its demon- wledge, can now tell us how to go help us to adjudicate between com- social constructionist cannot reject nothing is always already a part of independent of it. vious than in the tension between onstructionist theory, and I should e traditional realist there is a real tations of it (an ontological claim). or may not be a real world inde- ontologically mute), but whatever s be relational/situated knowledge nothing that was not already the re not incommensurate positions. no bearing at the level of practice. ns that one could self-consciously at there is something beyond our rtes nor the trumpeting proclama- 'I will put us in any better position everyday practice. moment of practice, the belief that tant structure to this or that con- that convention, nor will it help the alternatives. And for the construc- ledge claims are the product of

For instance, I may be convinced of the relational nature of all knowledge claims, but that conviction will be of no consequence for the generation of new practical knowledge when I set out to answer an empirical question. This is because one's theoretical convictions form the enabling conditions of one's practice rather than serving as the object of some metacritical examination. This may fly in the face of so many born-again constructionists, who would swear that they changed their practices after capitulating to constructionism's theoretical position. What this insight forgets, as Fish (1989) notes, is that while the converted may *quarry* from the constructionists' new list of vocabulary and modes of argumentation, this is not to say that they have now become a practitioner of the position itself. If we say anything at all about the consequences of being a social constructionist, it is less that constructionism guides practice, than that constructionism is a *kind* of practice—the kind that is like a 'slogan'. As a slogan, its insights can be published, venerated, reviled, turned into conference themes, and made the topic of journals. In short, its consequences for practice just are the sound and fury of its rallying cry.

This may not be so bad. In fact, we may ask, what else is there? As a 'slogan', or, more euphemistically, as a practice itself, constructionism may continue to imposter a *kind* of theory which can direct and influence practice. And moreover, nothing will negate the effects it will have as a form of persuasion. Social constructionism can continue to do what all discursive practices do: attempt to persuade us that its insights can and will pave the path for a more progressive, liberal and tolerant political and intellectual life. This supposed intellectual tour de force will always, as it were, be effective in the way that slogans are—as acts of rhetorical inducement. And, to its defense, this type of practice may be a form of life that one may not be able to refuse.

Whatever conclusions we come to regarding what social constructionism is or is not, it remains one of the most intellectually poised and effective movements in circulation today, regardless of my remonstrations of its sterility when it comes to dictating practice. I have spent so much time on this topic only because the main justification and attraction for social construction these days seems to be with its emancipatory potential for practices, particularly those marginalized through traditional forms of inquiry. Gergen's newest book, *An Invitation to Social Construction*, is no exception. It should be noted, however, that as far as Gergen's discussion of the problems inherent in traditional empirical assumptions and methodology go, as well as with the impact of postempiricist, hermeneutic and postmodern thought, Gergen offers some of the most seething and incisive critiques within

current psychological literature. Although it is a late hour, it is worth noting, for it is some time now. However, the centrality of much table pounding in this review of social constructionism as either a theoretical position (the list could go on) and its subsequent practice. It is to this end that I feel I must increasingly take seriously its own theoretical doing, address its own utility more fully, and space for just such an inquiry, and a flag waving for critical reflection on theory and practice.

Note

1. As it will become obvious, much of this collection of essays concerned with the foundations of foundationalism.

References

- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Clarendon University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammatology* (G. C. Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ellis, J. (1989). *Against deconstruction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fish, S. (1989). *Doing what comes naturally: A theory in literary and legal studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gergen, K.J. (1994). *Realities and relationships: A social constructionist perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hacking, I. (1999). *The social construction of reality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Searle, J. (1995). *The construction of social reality*. New York: Norton.

Biography

NEILL KOROBV is a doctoral student in the Philosophy Program at Clark University. His broad philosophical/critical approaches to knowledge, theory, social constructionism and postmodernism. Currently, his primary research concern is with an emphasis on the relationship between theory and discourse as *method*. ADDRESS: Neill K. Korobov, Clark University, 950 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610. [nkorobov@clarku.edu]

current psychological literature. Although this lauding comes at such a late hour, it is worth noting, for it has been Gergen's trademark for some time now. However, the central concern of which has led to so much table pounding in this review concerns the relationship between social constructionism as either a theory, code word, slogan or practice (the list could go on) and its subsequent ability to marshal a change in practice. It is to this end that I feel constructionist scholars should increasingly take seriously its own central assumptions, and in so doing, address its own utility more carefully. Gergen's book creates space for just such an inquiry, and as such stands as an indispensable flag waving for critical reflection on the relationship between theory and practice.

Note

- 1. As it will become obvious, much of what I have to say here parallels Fish's collection of essays concerned with the consequences of anti-foundationalism.

References

Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Derrida, J. (1976). *Of grammarology* (G. Chakravorty Spivak, Trans.). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Ellis, J. (1989). *Against deconstruction*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Fish, S. (1989). *Doing what comes naturally: Change, rhetoric, and the practice of theory in literary and legal studies*. Durham, NC/London: Duke University Press.
Gergen, K.J. (1994). *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Hacking, I. (1999). *The social construction of what?* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Searle, J. (1995). *The construction of social reality*. New York: Free Press.

Biography

NEILL KOROBOV is a doctoral student in the Developmental Psychology Program at Clark University. His broad areas of interest are: philosophical/critical approaches to knowledge construction, hermeneutics, theory, social constructionism and poststructural views of language. Currently, his primary research concerns the discursive production of identity, with an emphasis on the relationship between discourse as theory and discourse as method. ADDRESS: Neill Korobov, Department of Psychology, Clark University, 950 Main Street, Worcester, MA 01610, USA. [email: nkorobov@clarku.edu]

of the relational nature of all knowl-
ledge when I set out to answer an
one's theoretical convictions form
practice rather than serving as the
ation. This may fly in the face of so
who would swear that they changed
g to constructionism's theoretical
s, as Fish (1989) notes, is that while
constructionists' new list of vocabu-
this is not to say that they have now
tion itself. If we say anything at all
social constructionist, it is less that
can that constructionism is a kind of
slogan'. As a slogan, its insights can
turned into conference themes, and
ing cry.
we may ask, what else is there? As
ly, as a practice itself, construc-
ind of theory which can direct and
nothing will negate the effects it will
tal constructionism can continue to
do: attempt to persuade us that its
for a more progressive, liberal and
ife. This supposed intellectual tour
effective in the way that slogans
ent. And, to its defense, this type of
one may not be able to refuse.
to regarding what social construc-
of the most intellectually poised and
n today, regardless of my remon-
es to dictating practice. I have spent
because the main justification and
these days seems to be with its
es, particularly those marginalized
y. Gergen's newest book, *An Invitation*,
ption. It should be noted, however,
n of the problems inherent in tra-
d methodology go, as well as with
neutic and postmodern thought,
thing and incisive critiques within