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*Chapter Eight*

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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONTROL  
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The American Psychological Association states that one of the primary rationales for the science and profession of psychology is its role in promoting human welfare. It is apparent that this justification for the whole field of psychology applies with equal if not greater vigour to the subfield of social psychology, much of whose history has been written on behalf of serving the interests and benefits of society (e.g. McGrath 1980).

While the precise meaning of human welfare is nowhere stated, it is reasonable to suggest that any view of human welfare must rest on certain assumptions about the nature of personhood. When we deconstruct the prevailing conception of personhood (see Sampson 1983b, 1985), its political side is revealed. The dominant western understanding of personhood is based in great measure on a liberal individualist framework; the latter turns out to be rather inconsistent with the professed goal of attaining human welfare (e.g. see Cahoon 1988; MacIntyre 1984, 1988; Sampson 1977, 1983a, 1985, 1988; Sandel 1982). It is my intention to examine this contradiction and suggest an alternative view which is more in concert with the professed goals of genuine human welfare.

DECONSTRUCTING PERSONHOOD

Heelas and Lock's (1981) extensive review of the cultural dimensions of personhood helps us begin our deconstructive task. They suggest that all cultures differentiate between self and nonself and between the degree to which the self is 'in control' (i.e. autonomous) or 'under control' (i.e. subjected to external [118] control). Cultures vary significantly in their manner of locating persons along these dimensions and thus in their very conception of the person. The currently preferred western form emphasises firm self-other boundaries and argues for a relation of personal mastery and control over self and the environment.

Social psychology's understanding of human welfare mirrors this cultural view of personhood. We cherish persons who stand out from the group, who chart their own course, who are the masters of their own fate (e.g. Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn 1984). Our terms of esteem highlight such concepts as independence and autonomy while devaluing being 'under control' rather than 'in control'. We would be hard pressed to find instances in current social psychological work that argued, for example, that human welfare could best be achieved by blurring self-other boundaries or by valuing conformity to others.

The conformity tradition in the American version of social psychology, for example, stands as clear testimony to the manner by which we both understand personhood and cherish independence (e.g. see Moscovici 1976 for an alternative view). We pay lip service to

interdependence, but invariably insist that the parties to this interdependence must first clearly and firmly define themselves independently (e.g. see Lykes 1985). I previously referred to this version of personhood by the term self-contained individualism (Sampson 1977, 1985, 1988). This describes a character whose clear boundaries separate self from other, and who is thereby able to function independently.

Although this view of the person seems to highlight personal autonomy, it is my intention that this cultural and social psychological understanding is actually a part of the mechanisms of societal control that have been effectively masked under the guise of individuation. Space limitations prevent me from providing a detailed historical examination of the evolution of this current formulation of personhood; it should be apparent, however, that the view I am espousing here is consistent with the position represented by the Frankfurt school (e.g. Adorno 1967, 1973; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Marcuse 1964, 1966); and is also congruent with several more recent critiques of the liberal individualist tradition (e.g. Cahoon 1988; MacIntyre 1984, 1988; Sandel 1982).

In order to deconstruct the prevailing conception of the person [119] and so reveal its political underside, we need to move backwards somewhat in time to examine the context within which the modern science of psychology emerged. This was the period, roughly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the traditional order of society yielded to the modern period, and in which the process of *individualisation* appeared, both creating the modern concept of the individual (i.e. its self-contained formulation) and with it, a different regime of societal control.

### *Individualisation and control*

In psychology, the concept, individuation, emphasises a developmental process whereby the presumably undifferentiated and thoroughly merged infant separates from significant others to stand apart as an individual, distinct and separate from the world (e.g. Mahler, Pine, and Bergman 1975). Individualisation refers to a parallel social and historical process (see Foucault 1977, 1979a; also Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). Historically, the creation of this free standing, detached individual, brought along with it the need for systems to examine and learn about this newly created social being. Free standing individuals, cast adrift from the traditional forms of behavioural management had to be managed by means of the knowledge that could be discovered about them. A new regime of societal control emerged based on knowledge that would provide the power to manage this new social character.

It is neither surprising nor coincidental that a discipline such as psychology began to develop within this context. Designed to fathom the deep secrets of the individual and chart the course of individuals behaviour, psychology's roots lay in the arena of societal management and control. Given these roots, we might rightly wonder about psychology's actual role in promoting human welfare.

## REGIMES OF POWER AND TYPES OF PERSONHOOD

To speak of regimes of social power is to suggest that different societies and different historical epochs emphasise different modalities for managing people and integrating them into the social and moral order. Each regime both presupposes and helps create a different conception of personhood. Weber (see Gerth [120] and Mills 1946) and Foucault (1977, 1979a) have provided

us some important insights about the shift in the dominant regime of social power between the traditional and the modern western world. Each account permits us to infer a different kind of essential personhood required for that regime to operate effectively.

Weber's conception of traditional rule emphasised the role of group loyalties as the basis for achieving control over the populace. This traditional regime both created and required persons defined by their embeddedness in networks where self interpenetrated other selves. In other words, for an appeal to collective bonds to work effectively, persons had to be defined in and by their connections with others: they could not be freestanding entities.

Such individualisation had the effect of fragmenting (Tuan 1982) this embedded quality and created the disembodied nomad, the self-contained individual. Appeals to collective loyalties are less persuasive when persons are defined primarily by their separateness from others: where, for example, yielding to the group is seen to be a loss of personal autonomy rather than a mark of esteem.

The regime of social control suitable for free-standing nomads had to be based on different kinds of appeal. Weber referred to this modern form of rule as rational-legal, stressing its impersonal and universal qualities. Rules were to be applied equally to all persons and were based on principles presumed to be universal, free from the taint of any particular point of view. Thus the bureaucratic form of social organisation was born and with it the process of rationalisation.

Rationalised appeals do not stress collective bonds and loyalties which require an embedded or constitutive conception of the person (e.g. see MacIntyre 1984, 1988; Sampson 1988; Sandel 1982). Rationalised appeals are based upon impersonal rules applied with indifference to everyone. Rationalised rules presuppose the existence of self-contained individuals even as such a system helps to create and to sustain this kind of person hood.

### *Shifting objects of surveillance*

Foucault's version of the transition from traditional to modern society and the consequent change in the regime of social power [121] revolves around the concept of surveillance. We learn that in the traditional regime, power emphasised public spectacles designed to affirm the power of the monarch to exercise his authority over the people. These public displays helped to cement the social bond by giving the onlookers a sense of sharing the same community-wide experience and simultaneously directly revealed the monarch's power over people's very bodies: that is, the power to spare or take life.

With the creation of the self-contained individual, the object of visibility and surveillance was transformed. In traditional society, the only person possessing genuine individuality was the monarch. The new order saw individuality transferred from the monarch to the now individuated person. Surveillance thereby acquired a new meaning. No longer was the surveillance of the ruler by the people the dominant form; rather, surveillance of the people by the ruling state emerged to become central to the modern world. Documenting all facets of individual life became a modern fixation. Anonymity shifted: the once anonymous masses became objects of careful documentation and scrutiny; the ruling bureaucracy became the anonymous figure of modern society.

## KNOWLEDGE AND POWER

Foucault's analysis provides us with a basis for understanding how knowledge about the individual plays a key role in processes of societal control. In the first place, surveillance demands gathering and filing extensive knowledge about the public. Testing and assessing individuals and evaluating public opinion, for example, are especially important as ways of gathering and storing information essential for societal management. In the second place, however, lest it appear that the only role for knowledge in social control involves discovering what already exists within individuals, a possibly more significant role involves the actual constitution of realities about persons. Once again, the social and behavioural sciences are central in this endeavour. To discover something about the individual in this latter instance has the meaning so aptly described by Snell (1982) in examining the discovery of the mind by the Greeks. This was not a discovery like the explorers discovery of America, but involved the conceptual [122] constitution of a kind of mind: in effect, knowledge created a social reality. One of the key roles played by the social sciences in the modern regime of power based on knowledge, thereby, involves constituting social realities, which in their design help to further the societal regime of management. This argument has been developed more fully by Deleuze and Guattari (1983), for example, who have argued that one of the functions of Freudian psychology has been less to discover inner secrets of the human psyche than to furnish the individual with inner secrets that play a part in justifying certain kinds of social practices designed to manage those secret impulses.

In like manner, social psychologists have provided their own set of internal personal qualities - attitudes, beliefs, values, personality types such as authoritarianism, external vs. internal locus of control, cognitively simple or complex persons, and so forth - which are helpfully understood as discoveries that constitute the shape of personal reality. Kitzinger's (1987) examination of the social construction of lesbianism is based on much this same kind of argument. This position is also similar to the framework of ethnomethodology (e.g. Garfinkel 1967), which examines how certain social practices constitute particular realities rather than assuming that these realities exist independently of those practices.

## LIBERATING SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

To this point I have argued that both the creation of the self-contained individual and the constitution of particular qualities presumed to describe that individual must be seen within the context of the larger social process of modernism with its particular regime of societal control. In this view, therefore, the social and behavioural sciences, including social psychology, emerged within a context that required their kinds of service in order to assure improved forms of management over the newly created social character, the self-contained individual. What is clear from this perspective is the actual role that the social and behavioural sciences, including social psychology, play in constituting the realities of everyday life, which in turn, play a part in the modern regime of social control. [123]

What then are the possibilities for developing a social psychology that is non-denominating in its social role? Two issues need to be addressed. First, we must establish a basis for human welfare that does not rest on the welfare of the self-contained individual. In other words, we must mount a challenge to the liberal individualist conception of the person, seeing both its internal contradictions and its inability to deliver on the promises of human wellbeing that it makes. Second, we must develop an alternative social psychology that flows from this revised view of the person. Both tasks are deconstructive insofar as they require undoing the currently dominant

frameworks of understanding.

### *Welfare beyond self-contained individualism*

Although the arguments are complex, I can summarise the conclusion of the positions I previously developed (Sampson 1977, 1983a, 1983b, 1985, 1988). In brief, my position is that there is an inherent contradiction between human welfare on the one hand and self-contained individualism on the other. In saying this, I am aligning myself with such current writers as Sandel (1982) who has persuasively argued that Rawls (1971) theory of justice is incoherent given its current conception of the individual; and with MacIntyre (1984, 1988), who has similarly suggested the virtual impossibility of achieving the liberal individualist project without so radically revising its understanding of the individual that the project no longer hangs together. In brief, an alternative to the self-contained individual, based on a more embedded and constitutive framework, is required for human welfare to be achieved.

### *Types of individualism*

Self-contained individualism is a special breed of individualism, not its only form (see Sampson 1988). The hopes for contributing to human welfare require that we go beyond our current conception of individualism, moving towards a formulation that was not designed under the auspices of improved societal management. The idea that there are varieties of individualism forms the centrepiece of several other's works: for example, the writings of Gilligan (1982) and Lykes (1985) within the western [124] feminist tradition; Miller (1984) and Shweder and Bourne (1982) have provided cross-cultural representation of a viable alternative. Lykes, for example, defines a kind of 'social individuality' with its emphasis on self-in-relationship. An individualism that derives from this kind of connectedness not only differs from self-contained individualism, but also introduces an alternative principle on which to found the social order. To be an individual by virtue of one's connections and interconnections, introduces a constitutive view of the person that I believe can more adequately include the possibility of human welfare than the current self-contained formulation allows. The embedded or constitutive kind of individuality does not build upon firm boundaries that mark territories separating self and other, nor does it abandon the connectedness that constitutes the person in the first place.

## A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF EMBEDDED INDIVIDUALITY

While most deconstructive projects engage in an incessant undoing of all forms of identity, I admit to having used the deconstructive approach in order to constitute a differently structured kind of identity. While this opens my works to their own deconstruction, I find I must take that risk in order to affirm a kind of individuality better suited than the current self-contained form to the actual attainment of human welfare.

Embedded individuality requires a constitutive view of the person, re-embedding free standing modern individuals in their social worlds and thereby emphasising ensembles of relationships and communities of belongingness rather than isolated nomads. This reformulation of the individual does not take us out of the business of gathering knowledge. Furthermore, the reformulation is a perfect example of seeking to use our discipline in order to constitute a different kind of social reality. But, I persist in believing, along with Sandel (1982) and

MacIntyre (1984, 1988) among others (e.g. Cahoon 1987), that an embedded individuality is not designed with current conceptions of societal management in mind; rather, it responds to a different kind of historical urgency. [125]

## GLOBALISATION

I believe that the western world is currently undergoing a dramatic historical transformation of the same order that catapulted us from the traditional into the modern world. In this case however, we are moving rapidly from the modern into the postmodern era. Numerous harbingers of this change have already appeared: (1) social and political movements that range from the feminist perspective on personhood to the increasing sensitivity to non-western alternatives to the dominant western world view; (2) demographic patterns that force an awareness of cultural and ethnic diversity and that challenge the possibilities of homogenising that diversity under one dominant view; (3) communication technologies that make it possible to encounter world-wide events and peoples and to experience multiple realities, not just one; (4) the growing shift in human thinking from linear to non-linear, systematic modes; (5) the emerging linked world economic system, which will be in place formally in 1992 for the European Community, but is already apparent in the vast world-wide economic networks that make the economic wellbeing of any one person the result of activities and policies developed somewhere else in the world; (6) the world-wide linking in matters of pollution, health, disease, and in matters of war and peace; (7) intellectual and academic movements in diverse fields which have compelled us to review our current conceptions of the individual, led in great measure by the post-structural turn to deconstructionism and its challenge to the individual as author and subject.

I believe that all of the preceding, and undoubtedly other trends I have not noted, are harbingers of a significant transition in world history. The portents for an era of interdependence are upon us. That transformation will create a transformed conception of the person: away from the no longer viable free-standing, self-contained formulation and towards something more like the embedded individuality I have sought to describe.

The tasks for the social and behavioural sciences and especially for social psychology are clear. While we continue to chart our current world, we must become visionaries open to the future that looms near on the horizon. We need to supplement our [126] dedication to the immediacy of today with attention on tomorrow. This would give us a more future oriented social psychology, but one which as importantly places us in the forefront of the coming changes and truly in concert with issues of human welfare. [End of page 126]