Intersubjective constructionism

Part 2: The etymology, concept and experience of alienation

by Ian R. Owen[1]

Alienation is the focus of the second part of this paper because it shows the breaks and tears in intersubjectively constituted personal and social identity, in the relations we have to self and others, which are also collected under the interpretative terms empathy and insight. Alienation is assumed to be the sum effect of how others have treated an individual, which then becomes how that individual treats themselves and others in return. Also, for human nature to be alienated it has first to be alienate-able. This means that temporal human nature must be inherently divisible between two or more perspectives on "the same" object, and at times not be able to reconcile these experiences.

This second part of the paper concentrates on the concept of selfhood, a core issue for all forms of psychology, as assumptions of what is properly one's own are central to any notion of psychological health and illness. The paper is written in reply to the writings of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and their portrayal of human consciousness, the lived body and identity as a "sphere of ownness," potential and ability, an "I can". This can also be portrayed as a question about the ownership self by oneself which is set against other claims for ownership that could be given to human communities as wholes, rather than to isolated individuals who are thought of as existing without the influence of others. For instance, Husserl's discussion of *eigenheitsphare* and Heidegger's comments on authenticity *eigentlichkeit* (own-ly-ness) are expressed in this essay as thoughts on immanence-ownership and transcendence-otherness, the non-ownership and potential lack of understanding of others. Two questions are being debated. To what degree is one purely the product of oneself? Ownness is also connected to ideas of self-responsibility, and causation is presumed to lie within the self. Secondly, to what extent can we truthfully interpret self and other? For instance, the introjection of morals shape our acceptable behaviour with others, and these also contain assumptions of causation, responsibility and correct action.

Alienation

The temporally and intersubjectively induced effect of becoming different and estranged from oneself and others exists in the general malaise of acting out low self-esteem in cyclical maladaptive states of self-sabotage and self-harm which exist as do all other human states, as complexes of emotion, memories, behaviour, relating to others, interpreting events in the world and anticipating the future (Strupp & Binder 1984). The point being that human nature is inherently variable and may at times be self defeating and harm others, and that these possibilities should also be taken into account. The impact of this semantic analysis for social constructionism is that beliefs about true human nature contain a hidden set of ontological assumptions about what is health and ill health, what is one's own or coming from others, about what is a true or false human state.

There are also strong parallels between the semantic analysis below and Hegel's comments on individual selfhood and intersubjective community in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and this essay returns to the same themes in the commentary below (Schacht 1971: 30-64). Hegel is an important commentator here because he was the first to illuminate the tension between becoming an individual, at the expense of an alienation from community, or in becoming alienated from autonomy and gaining community with others. There is also a more subtle loss of self that is required in joining in with others. Alienation is a profound sense of lack of community, an alienation from others, and consequently a lack of a shared culture. Alienation for individuals is most obviously seen in some acute psychiatric disorders where there is a disconnection between emotion and thought, identity and relations to others, and chaotic changes in motivation. Grossly alienated persons cease to recognise themselves as others recognise them. The set of questions that are addressed in the following analysis are that there is an outside to the personal psyche which is not self. Husserl's original schema is not abandoned but used once more. Four sets of questions are attempted to be answered in the analysis of the original grouping of Latin concepts of selfhood, ownership and otherness:

Q1. What is the immanent content of the personal psyche, consciousness and its processes? What is immanent, temporal human nature? And, what does the development of human beings through the lifespan show us? What is specifically in memory as part of self?

Q2. What is ownable as self that has been introjected into self which was not originally self?

Q3. What is transcendent to our personal psyche and still within culture, between self and culture, within the sum total of socio-cultural worlds? What is not ownable as self, yet is still shared?

Q4. What is transcendent to culture and the personal psyche?

What follows below is a Heideggerian analysis of the links between the ideas of authenticity in personal identity, and all experiences of sameness and difference through time (Husserl 1991: 46). What is also addressed are the subjects of conscious choice and responsibility, versus "unconscious" habit and automatic reaction (Husserl 1981: 26), compared to actions over which people have no control and for which people do not feel responsible.

The five Latin words below each have key etymological and ontological parallels for notions of authorship and self-responsibility, in regard to a basic sense of ontological freedom and capability, the opposite of alienation and self-restriction (Lewis & Short 1958). They also have links to intersubjective behaviour, culture and the Mental Health Act 1983. The first three words share a core set of essences to do with the modern sense of alienation. As shall be explained, this original word is also linked to the Latin adjective for other.

The semantic source in Latin

Social constructionism implies that all concepts have a human history and source, none are natural. Several modern psychological concepts are rooted in these senses of *alienare*. All the Latin senses below have direct parallels in illuminating experiences of sameness and difference, authorship and control by others, within intersubjective existence. I also argue that the feelings of incapability, lack of choice and freedom to act that people often complain about in psychotherapy and everyday life is sufficient evidence for the presence of the unconscious as a felt-sense of otherness within the self. These subjects are further enacted at various times and in changing relations of person and context.

Alienation, in the modern sense, is best introduced by the Latin verb *alienare*, which has several key meanings for this social constructionist investigation. The original primary sense of *alienare* currently exists as the Marxist use of the word alienation, in meaning to make a person, a slave or a thing, another's (Schacht 1971). This is the sense of making something the property of

another, by transferring complete ownership rights, and originally the Roman practice of selling a child or a slave to another family.

Q1. What is the immanent content of the personal psyche and its processes? Answer: What is indubitable self-givenness to the senses and logical reasoning from first principles.

Authenticity is an important concept because it is an assertion of the true nature of human beings and like any fundamental assertion or assumption, it should be critically considered. To say something about human nature is true is to say that it is an authentic capacity of human beings to be such a way and there are moral consequences for if some persons do the required acts particularly well, then they may be seen as being particularly desirable. However, if there are those who do not or cannot achieve desired minimum levels of performance then sanctions may be taken against them or moral indignation may be chosen. In psychotherapy an authentic-inauthentic distinction may lead to normative and iatrogenic meanings and actions as it sets up an impossible tension between which parts are counted as true self and false self, a riddle which can often not be solved.

This paper asks readers to reconsider the experiences that phenomenologists point to afresh. In Husserl, authenticity and alterity are implied in comparison to the idea of sameness (Husserl 1982: 83, 100/101). Whatever the word *self* points to, it is the same throughout a number of psychological acts and is contained within one physical body in a single life time. As regards changes through time, it is easier to point to difference than sameness in experience. There seems to be a surfeit of difference and a lack of sameness by which human being can be known with certainty. It is interesting to wonder why people do not suffer sudden discontinuities in their sense of self more often (suddenly awaking one morning to find they feel they have turned into a giant cockroach). Two contradictory effects exist: People succeed in remembering their pain and acting out their neuroses, and do not become other people. However, on the other hand, sudden positive and negative change can occur.

In a secondary sense within this first cluster of uses, *alienare* also means to become entirely other than, or different from what something was. This second sense of *alienare* also has a cluster of psychological meanings to do with making mental objects be given over to another person in projection, transference or interpretation. The key psychological senses at the root of alienation that have been passed on from the Latin include the mental state of becoming separated or removed from one of one's own experiences, in the sense of removing from the mind, banishing, or forgetting

danger. *Alienare* also conveys the sense of casting off, alienating or becoming estranged, and neglecting and discarding some state that had previously been one's own. The additional meanings along this line of thought include becoming at variance, rendering averse and making enemies with what had been previously one's own. By extension, a further use within this cluster is to use *alienare* to express repugnance and the act of shunning.

The core psychotherapeutic concept of defence is also related to immanency, as defensiveness is a destruction of part of one's own thoughts and feelings to maintain a self-concept, rather than allowing oneself to feel the full extent of something worse which would entail another self-realisation. Freud's concept of repression of immanent instinctual urges is also similar because sexuality and aggression, if acted out, would invoke unpleasure from others. Immanent-temporal human nature, seen within the context of the history of cultures and the development of human beings through the lifespan, shows us that multiple experiences through the passage of time can be noted within the Latin senses of *alienatio* which are contained within Freud's idea of the splitting of the ego where consciousness is bifurcated between taking socio-cultural reality into account; while at the same time disavowing it. A similar theme is Freud's ideas of cathexis and decathexis which are the Freudian way of describing changes in the "psychological energy" that is attached to ideas, parts of the body or specific persons or objects. Similarly, the Latin verb had further medical uses by metaphorical and ontological extensions. *Alienare* also indicated the death of parts of the physical body, and was also used in the sense of keeping a distance from something, being disinclined, avoiding, or having an aversion. Hysterical paralysis and conversion phenomena are also examples of this concept in psychopathology.

Defence and the splitting of self, into different senses of identity, are about an either/or situation of personal being, as some aspects of self are felt and interpreted to be not self or not worthy of being self, as they are things which have been chosen which are later felt to be inappropriate actions by the person. The immanent/transcendent distinction in the philosophy of psychology means that there is a limit to what comprises one person's psyche.

Q2. What is ownable as self that has been introjected into self, which was not originally self? Answer: All learned abilities, memories and the introjection of culture and otherness into self via the mediation of language.

What is specifically in memory as part of self are the most inherent psychological processes

and capabilities of the child and the adult. These develop through time and eventually go into decline with old age or illness. The signs and gestures that are passed down to us from culture are the subject of Freud's theory of the superego and the internalisation of the superego of one's parents and morals of culture. The superego also concerns self-awareness and self-reflection, and the fundamental ability of human consciousness to change and make reactions to itself. The personality type of the overly conventional rigid, restricted character can also be seen as belonging to others by letting their moral values and ways of life predominate in an abdication of selfhood.

Otherness and the minds of others are outside of personal experience and yet are given to us intimately in everyday knowledge. Others can also be a blank space for projection, introjection, identification and the evocation of complementary roles. This is the mass of co-socialisation that is intersubjectivity. The subject of others and others' minds can also be linked to the adjectival form of the Latin, *alienus,* which is also associated to a set of meanings to do with belonging to another person, place or object. Therefore, it includes the senses of being strange, foreign and alien; of not belonging, not related or allied, estranged and unfriendly.

Another relevant sense of the verb *alienare* is still contained in the tangle of uses to which modern languages use alienation in the sense becoming psychotic. *Alienare* was used to describe the process of depriving someone of reason, or driving someone mad, and by a further extension, being deprived of "reason" and reasonableness. The psychoses, however they are caused, borderline persons who cannot contain their anxieties and babble with "psychotic transference" and the type of irrationality that goes with madness, all come under this designation. The voices of auditory hallucinations most often belong to other people. Also, anorexia and bulimia have similarities as they are both conditions with psychotic and obsessional features, where grossly underweight persons wish to lose even more weight as they feel too fat, and only feel in control of themselves the thinner they get. Obsessionality is also a clear example of person's who feel out of control of their own behaviour. These people try to control only a single aspect of their behaviour. Again, following the psychological use of the verb, the noun *alienatio* referred to aberrations of the mind, loss of reason and delirium. Its other psychological meanings concerned the senses of an internal separation within self, such as desertion, aversion, dislike and alienation; or the withdrawing of the feeling of good will and friendship from others. Following the sense of slavery, the noun could also be used to refer to transferring oneself, in going over to another.

The Latin for the adjective "other", *alius*, also has insightful connections to an ontological

discussion of the alleged nature of human being. *Alius* has primary senses of other and another, and includes a use in the sense of other things, or something else. Its allied uses include senses of being other than, different from, and being very different; and, in other respects. It was also used in the sense of listing; first the one, and then the other; now this now that; and led to uses of, one after another; of another kind, of a different nature; and hence, change or transformation, becoming different or wholly changed. *Alius* also had lesser senses of that which remains, and dissention, being of a contrary opinion. This same word also had an adverbial form *alias* which meant at another time; or, at one time then another; elsewhere or otherwise; and, at one time in one way and at another in another way. This finally gave rise to the modern usage of *alias*, as being one person at one time, and another at another time.

In psychiatric illness the psychological and intersubjective states which are most closely related to alterity are genuine multiple personality disorder, and amnesia or fugue states where people forget who they are. Cyclothymic personality disorder and manic depressive psychosis are where a person alternates between depressed and manic behaviour, staying in one or another state for several months or years.

Q3. What is transcendent to our personal psyche and still within the sum total of socio-cultural worlds? Answer: Language, culture, history, signs and gestures that we use. Others and their minds are also outside of the personal psyche, yet we are directly connected to others through language and empathy, our ability to interpret the feelings, thoughts and motivations of others.

Alienus could also be used as a noun to mean a stranger. The other adjectival meanings of *alienus* surrounds the psychological senses of being strange or unfamiliar with something; or not understanding, versed or acquainted; being unsuitable, not at home with, incongruous, inadequate, inconsistent and different from. *Alienus* also maintained the semantic links to psychosis by meaning to act wildly or like a psychotic, as well as meaning talking strangely or talking nonsense. It also had links to aversion and hostility, as well as retaining the medical sense of a dead, paralysed or corrupted part of the body. Freud's idea of turning against the self is also a part of alienation, as well as the psychiatric terms of depersonalisation, derealisation and dissociation where people feel no longer alive or the world appears dead to them. Also, it is easier to see what is not owned as in "projection" where the word is used to describe the process of interpreting another's qualities, wishes and feelings, where one's own material is seen in the other, outside of oneself.

Q4. What is transcendent to culture and the personal psyche? Answer: That which is the consciousness of others, animals and things.

To complete the story, the related adjective, *alienus* could be used in a series of senses to do with the property of strangers, or particularly the property of a free man. *Alienus* was used to mean not of one's house, family or country, or to indicate an alien. Its associated senses were to do with being unrelated; the interests and activities of strangers; another person's money; foreign things; debts and the debts contracted by oneself in the name of others; and receiving a wound that was meant for another. This gives an intimation of the sense of exclusion that occurs in society when some cultures and races are marginalised, seen as unclean or out of place and are taboo, a lower order. But in a more fundamental sense the consciousness, feelings and lives of others are not accessible to us no matter how hard we might try to understand.

Consequences for social constructionism

Social constructionism needs to be better argued or it will fail in achieving its own project. The semantic analysis above that takes the original conceptual distinctions within the Latin for alienation tries to point out the aspects of selfhood and community, integration and holding apart, sameness and difference that exist within the ego of all persons. This analysis is just one possible form for sifting through the core concepts of social constructionist theory in which the core terms must be grounded in definite experiences that are clearly understood by all within the field. Intersubjectively testable methods for qualitative and descriptive work must also be able to describe truthfully and empathically the experience of others and show the principles by which social practices, processes and products arise.

Currently social constructionism is in some disarray. The specific project which it has set itself needs further refinement and definition or it might run aground without being able to reach its aims. These points are major ones so I shall number them: (1) Any definition of social constructionism must surely be based on the observation that human behaviour is regular, patterned and motivated by the current choices and values that are open to people due to the historical accumulations of previous generations who considered the possibilities, actualities and consequences that were open to them. Social constructionism is a human science that tries to

understand and investigate the human nexus of meaning and intersubjectivity (social praxis) by acknowledging how ideas and social institutions of all sorts have evolved through time. (2) It is imperative that social constructionism does not fall into the chronic lack of self-awareness that is encouraged by falsificationism and the behavioural science approach. It should therefore account for itself and clearly state its own qualitative methods and starting points. It must demonstrate how the processes of historical sedimentation, the evolution of meanings, concepts and social practices take place by citing the evidence, listing its interpretative procedures an giving detailed examples of the intersubjective dimension to the knowledge and truth claims that it produces.

If social constructionism does not achieve these points mentioned above social constructionism does not satisfy by the barest minimum standards for a rigorous descriptive -interpretative inquiry. The principles by which it operates and the truth claims it produces should be made evident as pieces of indubitable understanding. If this is not achieved then more mystificatory meta-narratives will accrue which contain hidden ontological agenda and propose hypothetical-explanatory principles that are based only on interpretative viewpoints that are held true by a small number of persons which cannot be accepted by the community of co-workers as a whole.

In order to achieve these aims social constructionism ought to enumerate its own "grounding", its own ontological, hermeneutic and methodological perspective by which it begins its process of accumulating knowledge as opposed to being a journalism of the social history of ideas. The processes of hermeneutics that it employs must be made fully explicit, and this would give it a lead over the other human sciences which are naive in this respect. Eventually, it might be able to hypothesize how differing interpretations arise within specific cultures at specific points in history.

The consequence of the above etymological and semantic investigation for psychology is that assumptions of an isolated individual selfhood need to be acknowledged within various forms of theory, research and practice. These distorting sets of interpretations and claims about the truth of human nature, make a picture of the mentally healthy human being as a selfish self, who believes itself to be entirely self-contained and cut off from the other individuals who populate the world. Contrary to these naive beliefs and assumptions, this paper emphasizes all the ways in which humanity is intersubjective and interconnected, making a nexus of complexity that defies simplistic descriptions. As Heidegger's hermeneutic insights point out, how a problem is formulated and initially thought out, goes along way towards deciding what solution will be found. Psychology,

psychotherapy and the human sciences have little reflective consideration of their truth claims. They need to discuss their claims and what grounds them, otherwise their discourse will float forever on a sea of relativistic uncertainty, far from the shores of absolute considerations for grounding their relative knowledge. Neither conventional psychology nor social constructionism are currently grounded in any meaningful sense. These projects float disconcertingly and are most often based on relative-subjective assessments within an unfolding shared history.

As a final note to this essay I would like to make an appeal to readers who may be interested in creating a network of writers and researchers who are interested in investigating the experiences of psychological health and illness to contact me at the address below. My own work in this area is born of the medical anthropology literature. I am also interested in applying the work of the existential-phenomenological philosophers to psychotherapy and investigating the lived cultural assumptions of mental health in all its forms.

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