Rethinking the Meaning of "Social" in Educational Research: On What We Call the World and the Scheme-Content Dualism

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1. Introduction

To illuminate the so-called nature-nurture issue is a central task of the study of education, or so non-specialist citizens expect. A prevalent lack of rigorous attention to what is really at issue in the misleading dualism between nature and nurture, has yielded bipolar paradigms in educational research. On the nature side of the dualism, there exist educational researchers who call for natural-scientific understanding of human beings by identifying them with the human animal. Seeing human beings exclusively in terms of their ‘animality’ is exemplified in the ideas of, say, brain-based learning and neuro-pedagogy, which make it look as if it is the brain that thinks rather than human beings. On the nurture side of the dualism, there are educational researchers who, unlike the opponents they abhor, refuse to align human beings with non-human animals. They emphasise the importance of something social or cultural as a distinguishing mark of humanity. Given that education, however defined, is a practice in which human beings are engaged, bringing something social into focus appears a genuine approach to the study of education. It is lamentable, nevertheless, that such attention to the social in educational research is often brought at a price: questions concerning whether, in what sense and to what extent human beings are social beings are left aside or presupposed without due recognition of how we are social animals.

There is, no doubt, a great deal of further philosophical work to be done with regard to the nature side of the dualism. But in what follows, with the contention that what is most at stake in the nature-nurture debate is human nature, I shall mainly consider the other side of the dualism, though addressing it often necessarily concerns both parties to the dualism. The central ambition of this paper is to examine the philosophical substance of what is largely categorised as ‘social constructionist accounts’ that are highly influential in educational research, ones that offer discussions
of what it is for something to be socially constructed. I will thereby urge that what seems unexplored in much work on the nature-nurture issue in particular, and in contemporary educational research more generally, is thinking of a philosophical kind. This is to suggest that future work in the philosophy of education can and should include much more than conceptual analysis and watered-down contemplative versions of enquiry into the subject matter of empirical sciences.

I begin the following section with reference to Richard Pring’s distinction between two paradigms of educational research—‘Paradigm A’ being (post-) positivistic and ‘Paradigm B’ being social constructionist. Surely there is a plethora of ‘isms’ regarded as components of Paradigm B such as constructivism, constructionism, radical constructivism and social constructionism. In § 3, however, I will try to show that most of those forms unwittingly commit themselves to an implicit assumption that has been a subject of heated controversy over the long period of philosophical enquiry: an assumption about a putative gap between appearance and reality, that is, between what we cognise and what that is supposed to really represent. In § 4, I will argue then that the shared assumption can be crystallised as their some commitment to the dualism of scheme and content, which Donald Davidson points to as the ‘third dogma’ of classic empiricism. Reflection on the scheme-content dualism makes us rethink how we are justified in having world views at all. To that question, however, neither Davidson nor W. V. Quine, who attacks the two antecedent dogmas of empiricism, provides a sensible answer. In § 5, thus, I will draw attention to John McDowell’s argument, which offers a rather different picture both from the picture that emerges from Davidson’s repudiation of empiricism and from the picture that emerges from Quine’s privileging of questions of causation above questions of justification. As McDowell points out, under the dualism of scheme and content, lies the dualism of reason and nature, which has characterised modern thinking. In the picture McDowell
suggests, the worry that the domain of reasons stands outside of what we call the (natural) world dissipates. He defuses the worry by making a convincing case that we can retain the core thesis of empiricism while delineating a richer conception of nature. In § 6, I will, drawing insights from McDowell, make clear that the capacity to be responsive to reasons is an essential prerequisite of what it is to be a human being and that is the deepest sense of being 'social'. The way we live our lives as human agents is shaped by the interconnectedness between nature, education and the human condition. I end this paper by highlighting the significance of philosophy in the study of education as a vital discipline that can shed light on the distinctive features of human beings as rational agents; and by suggesting a promising programme for educational research as a refined form of the nature-nurture issue, in which educational researchers will no longer fall into the dualistic splits between quantitative and qualitative research, between scheme and content, and between nature and reason.

2. Richard Pring’s Distinction between Two Paradigms of Educational Research

In ‘The “false dualism” of educational research’, Richard Pring critically analyses the dichotomy prevailing in contemporary educational research and the philosophical assumptions behind it (Pring, 2004). Referring to Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln’s classic text, Pring illustrates what he calls ‘Paradigm A’ and ‘Paradigm B’. They are of two contrasting kinds: Paradigm A retains the positivist modes of assumption that there is an objective (ontological) reality and quantitative methodology works best to uncover the reality; Paradigm B denies the positivist assumption and instead claims that reality is a ‘social construction of the mind’; hence multiple realities. To perceive the uniqueness of each reality, qualitative methodology serves best.

Pring renounces both paradigms. To keep us from falling victim to either camp of the dualism, he maintains:
Far from individually constructing the world, we acquire those constructions which (although socially developed) are possible because of certain features of reality which make them possible. It is not that there are multiple realities. Rather are there different ways in which reality is conceived, and those differences may well reflect different practical interests and different traditions (Pring, 2004, p. 236, italics added).

It may seem that this is not in dispute. But Pring’s well-argued criticism of the paradigms (which of course I find of use) here seems to take an unnecessary step to adding one more view on the murky matter of realism by adopting the terms that have, in unsatisfying ways, framed those debates. His version, in other words, could be taken as endorsing the idea that ‘reality’ and, at least ‘certain features of reality’, have one determinate structure, independently of our modes of understanding. This well-balanced position between Paradigms A and B can seem to elude itself from being a target of attack. Yet such a view strikes me as unfulfilling, though not plainly wrong. This is, first, because I do not think the question how many realities there are makes sense, for a conception of reality does not make sense without some individuation of properties of beings, both material and immaterial; second, because the above apparently venerable position often seems to presuppose that entities count only so long as they are physical and, at most, causal. Such a presupposition already shows some implicit commitment to the underlying Kantian ‘Ding-an-sich’ behind the world we live in and, perhaps, to the idea that the empirical approach of the natural sciences is the most valid and appropriate way of investigating the existence of thing-in-itself.

It is simply false to charge Pring with the second line of thinking. On the other hand, however, it seems that Pring’s cautious positon also takes a step towards counting realities, even if it is one. What follows from his line of criticism of Paradigms A
and B is at best that good educational research needs a well-balanced mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods, where the latter is supposed to figure out which aspects of reality are brought to the surface in such-and-such research and in what ways. This lesson is of course important. In this sense, therefore, my objection is not so much a criticism of Pring’s claim as a symptom of my uneasiness with the task of philosophy in educational research, for many reasonably sophisticated empirical (both quantitative and qualitative) researchers may readily acknowledge that importance, prior to philosophers’ pedantic advice on the work of empirical researchers.

I think philosophers can more genuinely help our empirically-minded colleagues get out from under the unappealing binary opposition between Paradigms A and B, not by muddying the waters of realism, but by making it possible to see what underlies the issue in question. My suggestion thus is to stop thinking of the real issue as a matter of realism, one that is too often framed in terms that make seem plausible the question whether there is one reality or multiple realities. We could instead think of it as a matter of reframing the context of the nature-nurture issue, thereby putting educational researchers in a position to break out of the dualistic framework of Paradigms A and B and to address the issue of realism in a much more credible way.

Before elaborating this picture, however, a glance at some of the notable variants in Paradigm B and their influence on the study of education would help, for my scepticism about the common-sense belief that what is real is already there may seem like a kind of Paradigm B.

3. Variants of Social Constructionism and Their Common Tendency
Since the appearance of *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the term social construction has been widely dispersed in social sciences disciplines and other relevant areas. Stretching from Michael Young’s edited
book *Knowledge and Control* (1971) through the rise of a series of claims made by the ‘postmodernist’ to Ernst von Glasersfeld’s ‘radical constructivism’, the education community has also witnessed the burgeoning influence of those ideas, both as an approach to educational research and as the substance of teaching in teacher training courses. Such ideas evidently gain intellectual currency in education. Pring’s criticism above (which was originally published in 2000) has not yet brought the prevalence of Paradigm B to a stop. According to Derek Louis Meyer: ‘The British Education Index lists 22 articles on Constructivism in 2000, 30 in 2001, 36 in 2002, 57 in 2004 and 85 in 2005’ (Meyer, 2009, pp. 333-334).

A wide variety of positions can be viewed as a species of Paradigm B and terms for those positions are varied—such as constructivism, constructionism and social constructivism. I will not try to chart all directions of the positions, but instead I here want to follow Ian Hacking’s lead in clearing up this terminological puzzle, so that it can be shown why the term ‘social constructionism’ fits better for present purposes than other rival ‘isms’. And then, I will argue that despite their differences in emphasis and outlook, ideas classified as Paradigm B imply a common tendency to be unmindful of how they put their fingers on the philosophical question as to the relation between appearance and reality.

Two things should be noted about terminology. First, ‘social’ is surely redundant. In his influential book, *The Social Construction of What?*, Hacking observes: ‘Most items said to be socially constructed could be constructed only socially, if they are constructed at all. Hence the epithet “social” is usually unnecessary and should be used sparingly, and only for emphasis or contrast’ (Hacking, 1999, p. 39). I find this convincing, but I want to use the adjective ‘social’ in this paper for emphasis, for as shown in the title of this paper, I have good reason to favour the wordy expression. Second, the terminology ‘constructionism’ fits better with the central purpose of this
paper than other rival ‘isms’ like ‘constructivism’ and ‘constructionalism’. For, on the one hand, although ‘constructivism’ is now used most frequently in discussion of the reality construction, it would be appropriate, following Hacking, to leave that label to mathematics, where L. E. J. Brouwer’s intuitionism in the early 20th-century led to many forms of what are called constructive mathematics of which ‘[m]ost constructionists have never heard’ (Hacking, 1999, p. 48). On the other hand, I want to avoid ‘constructionalism’ that Hacking mentions ‘refer[s] to the philosophical projects of Russell, Carnap, Goodman, Quine, and their associates and followers’ (ibid., p. 47), because I have reservations about this alignment. It deserves detailed scrutiny whether to put those philosophers together as well as whether to align them with the same camp as the constructionism in question. But, this issue is large enough for separate treatment. This paper therefore includes little substantive engagement with the ideas offered by ‘constructionalists’, unlike Hacking’s treatment of them.

Hacking is profoundly right, however, in proclaiming that the basic thrust of social constructionism has long been a subject of extensive thought and discussion in philosophy: ‘All construct-isms [constructionism, constructivism and constructionalism on Hacking’s view] dwell in the dichotomy between appearance and reality set up by Plato, and given a definitive form by Kant. Although social constructionists bask in the sun they call post-modernism, they are really very old-fashioned’ (Ibid., p. 49).

The gist of social constructionism in the relevant sense is epitomised in the following sentence:

Hence by constructionism (or social constructionism if we need, on occasion, to emphasize the social) I shall mean various sociological, historical, and philosophical projects that aim at displaying or analyzing actual, historically situated, social interactions or causal routes that led to, or were involved in,
the coming into being or establishing of some present entity or fact (Hacking, 1999, p. 48, italics in original).

As I have adumbrated, philosophy qualifies as the primary discipline which can clear the way for a fuller understanding of pivotal elements that social constructionists of various stripes are trying to bring out—namely, the social nature of human beings and of the reality we experience. I take it that by revisiting what is known in philosophy as the scheme-content dualism, we can work on the task of articulating the recognisable sense in which human beings are social animals.

4. The Scheme-Content Dualism as a Dogma of Empiricism

Donald Davidson identifies the dualism of scheme and content as the third dogma of empiricism (1974/2001). Empiricism in the theory of knowledge is a broad tendency to see experience (commonly sensory experience) as a source of our knowledge. Not surprisingly empiricism also has many forms. But the common empiricist thesis is that we can, through sensory experience, have certain 'empirical' knowledge about a mind-independent world. Sensory experience works as foundations for our empirical knowledge and that ensures that we stay in touch with what there is independently of our modes of understanding in the sense of the world-directness of empirical thinking.

A major source of difficulty in social constructionism, as I have argued, is its failure to account for the extent to which and the ways in which our thoughts bear on the world, thereby making the nature of reality a mystery. Earlier I asserted that the question how many realities there are does not make sense because counting requires some individuation. It may well be objected that the issue is just thrown back on to the question of whether such initial individuation is impressed by, or immune to, social factors. To address fully this question, it is necessary to see what it is that makes the
scheme-content dualism captivating and its complex relationship to the core idea of empiricism, the absence of consideration of which makes social constructionism superficial and inadequate.

In fact, Davidson proposes to reject the scheme-content dualism and empiricism altogether. After concurring with Quine that both the analytic-synthetic distinction and reductionism should be abandoned, Davidson writes:

I want to urge that this... dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. The third, and perhaps the last, for if we give it up it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism (Davidson, 1974/2001, p. 189).

This dualism of scheme and content lends credence to conceptual relativism and leads to social constructionism of the versions I have rehearsed. For, in the dualism, schemes are construed as ‘systems of categories’ by which senses are given (empirical) form; and such schemes are not in place prior to forms of human activity. Schemes, that is, are socially, culturally, historically conditioned. If content takes shape through such schemes, then the scene is set for social constructionism, since what we live with is always schematised content and/or contentful scheme.

It is inviting to associate scheme with ‘organizing system’ and content with ‘something waiting to be organized’. Yet, even if it may not be too difficult to imagine the latter, which would probably be something like part of what we call the world, it is peculiarly difficult to imagine the former. Put differently, ‘organizing system’—namely, scheme without content—is not clearly intelligible, for scheme cannot be a world view. Indeed, a world view is an immediate outcome of both constituents of the scheme-content dualism. Scheme is, by definition, a world view devoid of content. Given this,
likely candidates for scheme in social constructionism such as language, culture and social convention do not meet the requirement. The root of inadequacies of social constructionist approaches to realism lies, I think, in their failure to appreciate the philosophical question about the very idea of world views: how is it possible to have a world view at all?

Classic empiricism avoids this problem because it presupposes that we have world views (through the agency of our senses). It easily invites, however, the sceptical challenge concerning the agency’s epistemic soundness and, often, its epistemological primacy. In addition, the empiricism tempts us to the dualism of scheme and content by highlighting the contrast between ‘organizing system’ and ‘something waiting to be organized’. Davidson’s proposal to relinquish empiricism as well as the scheme-content dualism in favour of his well-known coherentism is his way of defusing these familiar worries. Still, the nature of reality may be all the more vulnerable in this proposal, for it seems unwarranted in his coherentism that our conception of reality stands in a dependent relationship to reality itself. It is John McDowell’s revised form of empiricism that can avoid these worries.

5. The Scheme-Content Dualism Reconsidered: The Case of John McDowell

McDowell calls into question Davidson’s identification of scheme with world view. Scheme must be distinguished from world view, not least because the latter ‘would be the result of the supposed interaction between the two sides of the dualism’: ‘A scheme would be, not a world view, but what is left when content is subtracted from a world view—what Quine speaks of as ‘man’s net contribution” (we might say “reason’s net contribution”)’ (McDowell, 2009, p. 119).

So the problem of the scheme-content dualism is far more deep-seated than the case Davidson considers. For, as McDowell sees things, what is really at issue is the
very idea of world views. McDowell tersely claims: ‘Within the dualism, it becomes unintelligible that we have a world view at all’ and thus ‘[t]he dualism, on my reading, generates a much more radical anxiety about whether we are in touch with reality’ (Ibid., p. 121). The concerns expressed by critics of social constructionism are many, but the most pressing one is, I think, with the issue of ‘social’ reality, as it were. The character and plausibility of social reality is a central source of controversy. But such a huge controversy provoked by social constructionism about realism would miss the point of what underlies the scheme-content dualism, if both adherents and critics ignore the issue of how we have world views at all.

McDowell shows a richer notion of empiricism, offering a sustained philosophical critique of the scheme-content dualism, but without inclining our thinking to lose touch with what we call the world. He is perturbed neither by the worry how it is possible to have a world view at all nor by the worry of its epistemic authority. What makes McDowell untroubled is his revised view of empiricism, with the upshot that perceptual experience has conceptual content (already). To make sense of this, we need to understand his impetus for turning our attention to a distorted way of modern reception of pre-modern thinking on nature, which McDowell claims has impoverished the conception of nature itself, thereby generating the nature-reason dualism that underlies the dualism of scheme and content.

To help us appreciate more fully how the issues concerning the scheme-content dualism are deeply woven into modern thinking, McDowell returns us to the ‘familiar Kantian tag’: ‘Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind’ (Kant, 1986, p. 93), in which the conceptual and the sensory stand opposed to each other and, thus, in which thought cannot be non-empty. Through a meticulous analysis, McDowell sets out to discredit the picture and persuade us that intuitions as such are not without concepts.
McDowell makes explicit two distinctive features of modern thinking embedded in the scheme-content dualism. The two independently tempting thoughts are:

- A thought about the conditions for it to be intelligible that we have *world views*, suggesting that experience must constitute a tribunal, and a thought about the *naturalness* of the idea of an impact on the senses, suggesting that experience cannot constitute a tribunal (McDowell, 2009, p. 128, italics added).

The ‘tribunal’ metaphor of sense experience, which originally appeared in Quine’s ‘Two Dogmas’ (p. 41) as an exposition of what has become known as ‘the Duhem-Quine thesis’ against reductionism, illustrates the domain of *reasons* where rational fabric reigns. The trouble, however, begins when the second thought comes in, the thought that the naturalness of the world’s impact on our senses is such that reasons are not brought to bear on the world—that is, sensory experiences that are supposed to occur in nature are ‘intuitions without concepts’. The trouble is, of course, that these two thoughts seem incompatible: ‘According to the dualism, experience both must and cannot serve as a tribunal’ (McDowell, 2009, p. 125).

This is a broad picture in which the scheme-content dualism operates and to which it has made its contributions. The dualism has not just set the familiar agenda for modern philosophy—the place of mind in the natural world; it has also accompanied modern thinking itself—the disconnection between reason and nature, or between the normative and the natural, which, McDowell tells us, underlies the scheme-content dualism. Putting these points together then: the defining feature of modern thinking is to mark a contrast between two kinds of intelligibility:

- It is indeed an achievement of modernity to have brought into clear focus the
contrast between two modes of understanding: one that involves placing phenomena in the framework of natural law, and one that involves placing things in the domain of rational interconnectedness (McDowell, 2009, p. 129).

This passage obviously runs parallel to Wilfrid Sellars's well-known formulation of 'the space of reasons'.

[I]n characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says (Sellars, 1997, p. 76).

To give proper credit to the achievement of modernity without creating the tension between reason and nature, we need a proper understanding of ourselves as social beings in the natural world. The way out McDowell shows is what he dubs 'a coherent empiricism' (McDowell, 2009, p. 129), the thesis that perceptual experience has conceptual content.

6. The Deepest Sense of Social, Reconceptions of Nature and the Realm of 'Be-Causes'

The way out is to view that impacts from the world not only exert a causal influence on the workings of the mind in the realm of reasons, but also set ‘rational constraints’ (McDowell, 2009, p. 125, italics in original). This view, I think, warrants a proper place for the mind in the natural world without thereby cutting it off either from naturalness or from rationality. On this picture, something natural is no longer restricted to what is expected to be made comprehensible in ‘the sort of frame that is characteristic of the natural sciences’ (McDowell, 2009, p. 129); it is also what is operative in the domain of
rational interrelatedness. It is only in this context that McDowell's esoteric thought that 'reasons might be causes'\(^{10}\) (McDowell, 1996, p. 71, n. 2, italics in original) should be understood. This line of thinking reminds us that the space of reasons is the space of 'be-causes' where (à la Robert Brandom) we give and ask for 'becauses', i.e. reasons. We are in a chain of 'becauses', that is, of reasons and justifications. A being who is in that kind of chain cannot be just a natural being in its narrow, natural-scientific sense, but must be a rational agent. Such an agent is the kind of animals we are. This is how we are natural and social animals. In other words, to be responsive to reasons is the deepest sense of 'social'; and to be able to be responsive to reasons is the precondition for our having world views.\(^{11}\)

It is wrong, however, to assume that we are \textit{eo ipso} natural and social beings in the above sense. Human animals need to be initiated into the chain of 'becauses'; that is, they need to be nurtured and educated for the space of reasons, since newborn babies and human children are yet to be adequately initiated into it. McDowell connects this educative process with his reinvigorated (Aristotelian) notion of second nature and \textit{Bildung}. The following passage reflects his central idea that links nature, education and human nature.

Our nature is largely second nature, and our second nature is the way it is not just because of the potentialities we were born with, but also because of our upbringing, our \textit{Bildung}. Given the notion of second nature, we can say that the way our lives are shaped by reason is \textit{natural}, even while we deny that the structure of the space of reasons can be integrated into the layout of the realm of law. This is the partial re-enchantment of nature I spoke of (McDowell, 1996, pp. 87-88, italics added).

McDowell's broader conception of nature discredits the familiar modern thought
which privileges natural scientific forms of knowing above all others. Instead, it allows us to study human nature not exclusively in the framework of natural sciences that leaves nature disenchanted (in the Weberian sense), for the richer conception of nature can place human beings in the realm of meaning which is perfectly compatible with, though not integrated into, the realm of (the narrow sense of ‘natural’) law. Viewed in this way, the nature-nurture issue can be reframed from the perspective of human nature.

7. Concluding Remarks

The implication I want to draw out of the discussion thus far is not to aggrandise the role of the philosophy of education. Yet, it is necessary to recognise the distinctive features of human beings as rational agents for the development of educational research, a large part of which is currently stifled, as Pring argues, in the false dualism of the quantitative/qualitative distinction affected by Paradigms A and B. To break out of this dualistic framework, I have explored how far philosophy can contribute to a healthy understanding of such distinctive features of human beings by focusing on the social nature of ourselves and of the reality we experience. I have argued that social constructionism of various kinds, whatever the details, takes for granted the dualism of scheme and content, without due acknowledgement of how it in turn is a by-product of the underlying dualism of reason and nature which is characteristic of modern thinking. In McDowell’s argument, I have claimed, there lie some clues to a quite different mode of understanding of the profound meaning of ‘social’: to be able to be responsive to reasons. This is to imply an essential link between nature, nurture and human nature. To complete McDowell’s picture, we need to advance our understanding of education as the cultivation of second nature, for, without that perspective, the space of reasons, the space of causes and the realm of ‘natural’ law would never intersect, let alone
facilitate the flourishing of the space in which we lead our daily lives. A proper appreciation of education as the cultivation of second nature will, I believe, involve a rejection of the dualism of nature and nurture, and thus illuminate the context in which the nature-nurture issue is to be addressed, in view of human nature which makes us the kind of beings that we are.

Notes

1. To formulate the issue as ‘nature-nurture’ is misleading, because the formulation encourages the mistaken impression that what matters in it is to specify or quantify the relative influence of nature and nurture and thus the issue is an empirical question. But, as early as 40 years ago, John White argued, and I agree, that: ‘The “nature-nurture” issues cannot be settled by empirical research’ (White, 1974, p. 50). How much sense does it make to say and even ‘prove’, for instance, that 60 percent of one’s intelligence is determined by nature (genes) and 40 percent by nurture (environment)? White effectively makes open to serious criticism the oft-made unjustified assumption built into the empirical research. In many twin-studies, for example, it is assumed that a high correlation between the IQs of monozygotic twins who were reared apart in different ways by different people demonstrates that their genetic make-up overrides their environments. White illustrates, however, how questionable this assumption is: ‘suppose, to make the issue more clearcut, there is even a correlation of 1.0: each twin has exactly the same IQ as his [sic] co-twin. This in itself would not support the genetic case. For suppose one twin from each pair were given intensive coaching in answering intelligence tests and as a result, when both these twins and their co-twins were retested, the coached twins scored on average 20 IQ points above their co-twins. This would, of course, significantly reduce the correlation between IQs’ (Ibid., p. 49).

2. Culture can be conceived as a social phenomenon. So I think the term ‘social’ is sufficient for my purpose which is verbally articulated in the title of this paper, though more exclusive attention is paid to ‘culture’ by such thinkers as Jerome Bruner.

3. To go into details, we need to address more thoroughly the issues alluded to at the beginning of this paper: the nature-nurture issue. That means that it would become a live question whether and in what sense we can draw or collapse a distinction between natural kinds and what might be called ‘social kinds’, the latter being recognised through some ‘social construction’ of a set of categories.

4. Often no clear distinction between these ‘isms’ is made—justifiably so for the purposes concerned, as in the cases of David Bakhurst’s handling of ‘social constructionism’ and of Jan Derry’s treatment of ‘constructivism’ (Bakhurst, 2011; Derry 2013). But sometimes the difference is emphasised, of course. Kenneth Gergen provides a helpful distinction. According to his mapping: radical constructivism is ‘a perspective with deep roots in rationalist philosophy, that emphasizes the way in which the individual mind constructs what it takes to be reality’ (represented by Claude Levi Strauss and Ernst von Glasersfeld); constructivism is ‘a more moderate view in which the mind constructs reality but within a systematic relationship to the external world’ (represented by Jean Piaget
and George Kelly); social constructivism argues that ‘while the mind constructs reality in its relationship to the world, this mental process is significantly informed by influences from social relationships’ (represented by Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner); social constructionism places primary emphasis on ‘discourse as the vehicle through which self and world are articulated, and the way in which such discourse functions within social relationships’ (represented by Gergen himself); sociological constructionism places emphasis on ‘the way understandings of self and world are influenced by the power that social structures (such as schools, science, and government) exert over people’ (represented by Henri Giroux and Nikolas Rose) (Gergen, 1999, p. 60, n. 30). Cheu-Jey George Lee’s account of similarities and differences between the weak and strong versions of social constructivism and social constructionism also merits some consideration (Lee, 2011).

5. One of the two antecedent dogmas that W. V. Quine criticises is the belief that there is a fundamental distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions; the other is the belief that reductionism—‘that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience’ (Quine, 1951/1980, p. 20)—is true.

6. Coherentism is the idea that ‘nothing can be a reason for holding a belief expect another belief’ (Davidson, 1983/2001, p. 141). This is to mean that experiences themselves do not justify beliefs.


8. The description in this and the following sections heavily relies on McDowell’s ‘Scheme-Content Dualism and Empiricism’. The point of this article is what he has undertaken to reveal over a long period of time, for example, in his masterpiece Mind and World (1994/1996) and more recent work Perception as a Capacity for Knowledge (2011).


10. This is to mean that McDowell denies the view that reason is contrasted with cause. Calling into question such a contrast implied by Richard Rorty, McDowell argues that ‘the right contrast for the space of reasons is not the space of causes but …the realm of law’ (McDowell, 1996, p. 71, n. 2).

11. McDowell further takes the capacity to be a Kantian idea: ‘responsiveness to reason is a kind of freedom’ (McDowell, 2009, p. 114), which lies on the opposite side of a modern dichotomy from nature. There is much room for discussion about active roles education can play here, but another paper is needed to explore this.

References


