BYU Studies Quarterly

Volume 26 | Issue 1 Article 7

1-1-1986

Comment on C. Terry Warner's “What We Are”

Ivana Markova

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq

Recommended Citation

Markova, Ivana (1986) "Comment on C. Terry Warner's “What We Are”," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 26 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol26/iss1/7

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in BYU Studies Quarterly by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Comment on C. Terry Warner's "What We Are"

Ivana Markova

Much present psychology is based on cognition rather than emotion, and even subjects such as morality and agency are usually associated with cognitive assumptions. For example, morality has been explored in psychology virtually exclusively in the context of cognitive development, with moral judgment and moral reasoning in a child unfolding alongside the changes in the child's structure of knowledge. Emotions, on the other hand, have been viewed as disruptive, interfering with the child's operational thinking and causing him to focus on irrelevant aspects of situations.[1] The dramaturgical approach to the study of human action, favored now by many of those concerned with agency and self, also disregards emotions, since, as Harré maintains, they are not admissible as causes of actions.[2] The role of emotions in psychology has been traditionally relegated to the realm of pathological or at least disruptive behavior to be treated by therapy or controlled by the individuals who suffer it. Indeed, psychotherapies often explain emotions cognitively—as attributional, cognitive, and Gestalt therapies do—or conceptualize and acknowledge them, as humanistic therapy does.

Professor Warner makes a very valuable contribution to psychology by bringing the subject of emotions to the close attention of psychologists. Using both persuasive arguments and pertinent illustrations, he demonstrates that emotions are essential to many of our daily interpersonal interactions and to the views we have of ourselves and thus that their study should become the subject matter of mainstream psychology.

Warner identifies the problem of contemporary psychology in pointing out that the dramaturgical model of man that is now replacing the traditional model of man as a natural being, although it appeals to human agency, does not, in fact, leave much space for agency. Support for Warner's claim can also be found in the theory of the agency-oriented social construction of self-knowledge, in which the information we get

Ivana Markova is professor of psychology at the University of Stirling, Scotland.

BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 26, Iss. 1 [1986], Art. 7

from others is a main source of our self-knowledge.[3] This view is based on an interpretation of Mead, according to whom "we are in possession of selves just insofar as we can and do take the attitudes of others towards ourselves and respond to those attitudes."[4] But both the dramaturgical approach and the social-construction-of-knowledge approach seem to have difficulty in pinpointing exactly what the agent is, and it appears that the fact that human beings take on and play different roles and do various things is sufficient for the agency metaphor. Playing roles and taking the attitudes of other people, Warner argues, does not suffice to define agency, for we are more than this. We are, first of all, beings who are morally responsive and who have moral expectations of ourselves. The agency of human beings, according to Warner's view, is independent of the role-playing ability; it is a "quality of our own." The question arises, though, what part society does play with respect to human agency as it is defined by Warner. If moral responsiveness leads to internalization of the expectations of a morally ordered community, what, then, can be the individual's contribution to his agency? If, on the other hand, moral responsiveness is an independent quality of each individual on his own, then it is not clear whether moral responsiveness bears any relation to society except in the sense of being thwarted by it, as Warner makes clear in the latter part of his paper.

Warner points out that through socialization we learn to be self-betraying actors since we are raised in a culture of collusion. Is the effect of society only negative? Warner's position on this issue is not obvious. According to Hegel, humanity is not given to human beings naturally. Rather, potential human beings, in order to become really human, must fight for their humanness in the process of anthropogenesis. It is in the process of interpersonal interaction—that is, in the mutual encounter of one conscious being with another conscious being—that self-consciousness eventually emerges: "I that is We and We that is I"; thus they recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another.[5] These two characteristics, the recognition of other human beings for what they are and a desire to be so recognized by others, form the basis of humanity. Warner, on the other hand, seems to be saying that honest self-consciousness is given to human beings rather than being the result of their striving.

If self-betrayal is learned through the process of socialization, as Warner maintains, one would expect that it would be possible, through appropriate guidance, to delearn it. This is not so, however. Warner claims we cannot change our feelings by strength of will; neither can we change our emotions step-by-step. The only possibility of giving up self-betrayal is to start, from now on, "to be emotionally honest." It seems to me that there are at least two problems with this solution:

Markova: Comment on C. Terry Warner's "What We Are"

the first is related to Warner's claim that self-betrayal is lived, and the second is related to what one can mean by emotional honesty.

On the first of these problems, the answer of philosophers to the question as to how self-deception is possible has usually been based on the assumption that since people try to protect their self-image and self-esteem they either avoid facing the facts, or reinterpret the information available to them, or divert their attention from damaging information, and so on. In other words, at some level of preconsciousness or consciousness they "know" what is true and what is not true about themselves, and as a result they choose a suitable strategy to protect their threatened self-images. If I understand him correctly, Warner says, on the other hand, that it is not reinterpretation of information or denial or anything else that mediates between the damaging information and ourselves. Rather, we actually experience information as painful or damaging; we actually suffer accusing emotions; we feel others as being at fault. In other words, it is not that information is over there in the world and we respond to it emotionally. Instead, we experience it directly and so actually live a lie. This idea is thought provoking, and it appears that Warner's position is similar to Gibson's theory which holds that a percept is directly perceived rather than derived through reconstruction and internal representation. But if one senses the pain of self-betrayal directly, with no mediator intervening between the truth and the lie, how can one stop betraying oneself? How can I stop doing something if I do not know there is anything I should stop doing? What criterion does a self-betraying person have that he is betraying himself? We may, of course, still be responsible for our distorted view of reality just as we are responsible for our attempt to protect our self-image.

The second problem with Warner's solution is how to distinguish, conceptually and empirically, between immature childish retaliation and an honest emotion. Warner, as I understand him, calls for a return to what we were before we started betraying ourselves. But is this possible? Just as evolution cannot go back, one cannot become what one was before. Even spontaneity changes during one's life. Childish spontaneity is immature and to be rejected, but it seems to me that the other kind of spontaneity, an unspoilt, honest presocialization emotion, is impossible because it is impossible to go back. Experience, gained through our socialization, cannot be rubbed out. Warner's position would mean that, in some way, human beings are static and unchangeable, which would contradict his agency model.

The question of the relationship between self-knowledge and self-deception arises in this context. Self-knowledge is gained through a process of active engagement in the world with other people and physical objects. Self-knowledge gained in the process of interpersonal interaction is due both to the knower's interacting with the other person and to

Published by BYU ScholarsArchive, 1986

BYU Studies Quarterly, Vol. 26, Iss. 1 [1986], Art. 7

his reflecting upon such interaction. When does one stop gaining self-knowledge and start betraying oneself instead? Taking Warner's position, it would be when one attempts to justify one's actions rather than just understand and evaluate them. Self-justification is an accusing emotion, and it takes over either when one does not take deeply enough the role of the other person (one is not empathic enough) or when one does not reflect deeply enough upon one's own action. We could say that an accusing emotion is a shortcut for not enough role-playing because one is too egocentric. Could we not say, therefore, that self-betrayal may arise both from cognition and emotion?—although talk about cognition and emotion separately is for convenience only, since there is no evidence of two separate compartments of cognition and emotion in the mind.

Warner's views as expressed in his paper have important consequences for social skills training. The general philosophy in social skills training in clinical, social, and educational psychology, and in mental handicap, is to raise the trainee's social competence to a normative level. It is assumed that competence in interpersonal interaction is closely related to the ability to follow rules of behavior, such as the amount of eye contact, physical distance, and other definable elements of behavior. A successful training program can improve a person's general social effectiveness and role-playing abilities. Such programs, however, do not offer much opportunity for a person to develop his agency. If Warner's agency position is to be taken seriously, any attempt to help people become socially efficient must be based on the individual's agency and not imposed from outside because this would reflect a mere role-playing model that is passive and static.

NOTES

[1]Thomas Lickona, ed., *Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1976).

[2]Rom Harré, *Social Being: A Theory for Social Psychology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).

[3]Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Social Construction of Self-knowledge," in *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues,* ed. Theodore Mischel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 139–69.

[4]George Herbert Mead, "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control," *International Journal of Ethics* 35 (April 1925): 251–77.

[5]Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* [1807], trans. J. B. Baillie (New York: Macmillan, 1949), 226–29.