

When I read Shaun Gallagher's recent thoughts on relational justice, which he discussed in his book *Action and Interaction* (2020), I was surprised by its reliance on the concept of blame. In comparing it with Gergen's writings on blame and ethics, I was so impressed with Gergen's refusal to associate enlightened morality with blame that I read into his work an understanding of relational intelligibility that I now realize owes more to the ethical stance of George Kelly than to Gergen's social constructionism. Below is my revised assessment (which is really a return to the thoughts I expressed in my 2002 paper on *Embodied Perception-Where is the Social*) of the relation between Gergen and phenomenologically-influenced approaches. Following this brief re-assessment I have attached my paper *Beyond the Morality of Justice*, whose conclusions concerning the advantages of Gergen's approach to ethics over Gallagher's I no longer support.

Gergen's approach to ethics appears on the surface to transcend the thinking of enactivist philosophers in that his labeling of justice as first order morality looks as though it applies to their formulation of justice as responsiveness to relational autonomy. A closer look, however, reveals that Gergen's radical relativism, that is to say his advocacy of acceptance of all cultural perspectives and transcendence of what he calls the first order morality of justice, and his apparent rejection of the sort of rhetoric of responsibility that writers like Gallagher take from Levinas, is lacking an understanding of relationality at the micro level of material relations. That is to say, his formulation of relational being in terms of the reciprocal dependence of each participant in a discursive dance is applied by enactivist and new materialist thinkers to a fine-grained level of analysis invisible to Gergen. Since Gergen does not see this microlevel of relational being, what Barad calls intra-affecting, he misinterprets this kind of vocabulary as a return to enlightenment realism. One therefore has to see this micro relationality of intra-affecting as presenting a set of ethical challenges that Gergen is only able to pass over because they are not apparent within his framework. Gergen, for instance, can either reject or ignore the issue of responsibility within autonomous relationships. Gergen's co-action has as its irreducible components two persons. Enactivism's irreducible relational components are pre-personal material elements. Gergen's co-action is devoid of the operational closure, partial autonomy and individual perspectival point of view these relational elements generate. Without the concept of personal point of view, the only autonomy and point of view available to Gergen is that of the cultural unit, the tradition. The only responsiveness or failure to response is between traditions rather than between individuals as well as traditions. The relational justice Gallagher describes takes place primarily between personal perspectives within traditions. In other words, it functions prior to Gergen's first order morality. This kind of justice involves a struggle for recognition of individual as well as social autonomy. Gergen suppresses and masks the former within the latter via his structure of co-action.

Enactivist relational justice aims to protect a felt intimacy Gergen doesn't acknowledge. The concept of intelligibility I oppose in my paper to Gallagher's notion of relational responsibility functions quite differently from Gergen's use of that term. In my paper, intelligibility operates within and prior to Gallagher's interacting elements constituting embodied, embedded individuals. It deconstructs these reciprocally acting presences to reveal a richly intricate

multiplicity hidden within each singular element. Gergen's intelligibility, in contrast with my own treatment of it, is the equivalent of Gallagher's sense-making, and his inter-group conflict and cooperation is the equivalent of Gallagher's justice-injustice binary, but in both cases devoid of enactivism's insights into the embodied actor. Relational justice is one possible result of enactive sense-making, just as for Gergen inter-group cooperation is just one possible result of intelligibility. While on the surface it appears that Gergen rejects Gallagher's idea of justice by labeling it first order morality, he merely substitutes for it a more abstractive and arbitrary form of justice in the guise of inter-group cooperation. To embrace an alien tradition in Gergen's sense is to know much less about that tradition than one learns about the other in forming the capability to justly recognize the other's autonomy. From Gallagher's vantage, Gergen's notion of intelligibility is a symptom of the sorts of distorted intersubjective processes that produce injustices.

In the absence of a recognition of the intricate level of relationality from which enactivist injustices emerge, the sort of ethical stance that Gergen produces has the ring of absolute and universal acceptance to it, and superficially resembles George Kelly's non-blameful ethics. But Gergen's ethics has buried within it its own form of blamefulness. This form of blamefulness manifests itself as an intrinsic, profound arbitrariness in the back-and-forth of relational discourse. In other words, what underlies Gergen's seemingly non-blameful stance concerning justice is an intrinsically blameful core of creative becoming. This blameful core constitutes a greater violence and arbitrariness than the approaches to justice put forth by enactivists like Gallagher. Gergen's relational 'dance' of linguistic interchange is far less capable of remaking the participants' understanding of each other in an ongoing way than is Gallagher's dance between partially autonomous organisms. For Gergen, the signs that are thrown back and forth between two or more parties are relational scenarios whose meaning is largely scripted by pre-existing social rules which barely change as a result of the actual interchange. This abstractive reification imparts to interchange a strong element of polarization and arbitrariness.

It's true that Gergen's approach does not pathologize the individual or the culture (he doesn't even recognize the former), but neither does enactivism's. Gallagher's explanation for why individuals fail to achieve relational autonomy is comparable to Gergen's explanation for why cultures fail to accept other traditions. The difference is that the enactivist explanation starts from a more intricate ground within each organism as an autonomous embodied system . Enactivist critics of Gergen's approach to social justice are right to accuse it of linguistic idealism and radical relativism. Gergen's model of relationality suffers from not being able to benefit from the philosophical resources enactivism draws from, mainly American pragmatism and phenomenology. Of the latter, Gergen (2009) writes dismissively, and inaccurately:

“they begin with the presumption of a private space of consciousness, and through various analytic strategies, attempt to escape. My hope, on the contrary, is to begin with an account of relational process and derive from it a conception of individual consciousness. Further, to appreciate the works of these philosophers one must crawl inside a highly complex and exotic world of words. The major concepts acquire their meaning largely from the way they are used within the philosophic texts. There is little exit to social practice, a concern that is central to my efforts.”

Beyond the Morality of Justice: Gergen's Radical Constructionist Critique of Relational Autonomy

Abstract:

This paper draws attention to a divergence in approach to the social between Ken Gergen's radical form of social constructionism and the more moderate constructionist approaches exemplified by the thinking of Shaun Gallagher, Jan Slaby and Karen Barad. Specifically, I argue that the latter stop just short of radical constructionism's ontological and ethical implications. The ethical question for Gergen is not whether and how we achieve just relations but whether and how we deal with the struggle between competing goods, how we manage to think beyond justice understood as singular traditions of the good, so that we can focus on enriching our traditions with alternative intelligibilities, thereby expanding the inclusiveness of our relational structures. Viewing the wayward person or group through Gergen's lens of multi-being rather than the morality of blameful justice encourages us to strive for an ethics of responsibility without succumbing to a moralism of culpability.

A common thread running through a host of contemporary discourses drawing from philosophy, the social sciences and literary theory is the notion that reality is socially constructed. In this paper I want to draw attention to a divergence in approach to the social between Ken Gergen's radical form of social constructionism and the more moderate constructionist approaches exemplified by the thinking of Shaun Gallagher, Jan Slaby and Karen Barad. Specifically, I argue that the latter stop just short of radical constructionism's ontological and ethical implications. Among this group, the ethical implications of Gergen's radical form of social constructionism remain unpopular 40 years after its inception. Instead, the need to maintain a realist remnant of the notion of individual autonomy has led to its reformulation away from that of the isolated individual and toward the autonomy of interpersonal, cultural relationships. The lingering vestiges of realism and consequent reliance on individual moral blame inhabit contemporary formulations of the material, the natural, the corporeal and the embodied. New Materialism, neo-pragmatism, naturalized phenomenology, postmodern hermeneutics and 4EA cognitive science (Jan Slaby, Shaun Gallagher, Evan Thompson, Karen Barad, Richard Rorty, John Shotter, Joseph Rouse) defang social construction's moral implications so that it may be absorbed into discourses of relational justice and autonomy.

(Footnote: 20 years ago I wrote a paper contrasting the views of Gergen, and other writers embracing the label of social constructionism, with what I have more recently come to call a radically temporal approach to the social. Although I haven't changed the position I outlined in that paper on the limitations of Gergen's approach with respect to radically temporal thinking, I have recently come to appreciate that, particularly concerning ethical matters, Gergen's radical

brand of constructionism stands in closer proximity to radically temporal approaches than do other forms of constructionism. Specifically, radical constructionism shares with radical temporality the subordination of an ethics of autonomous content (what Gergen calls first order morality of justice) to an ethics of process (what he refers to as the 2nd order morality of enrichment, collaboration and inclusion. See Gergen(2001) for more on Gergen’s distinction between content and process morality.)

In a 1997 paper, Gergen located those positions within philosophy and psychology that came close to achieving the radicality of his brand of social constructionism. He wrote about approaches which treat individuals as culturally immersed, and the self as partially constituted by the community.

“A second and smaller family of social reconstitucionalists is less obviously linked to the traditional assumptions of the field. Focal attention shifts in this case from expositions of psychological process itself to characterizing self within ongoing relationships, from internal residues of cultural experience to ongoing social process from which individual functioning cannot be extricated. In such accounts, the self-other (individual/culture) binary is virtually destroyed...For example, Edward Sampson draws significantly from both Wittgenstein (1953) and Bakhtin (1981, 1986) in arguing that "all meaning, including the meaning of one's self, is rooted in the social process and must be seen as an ongoing accomplishment of that process. Neither meaning nor self is a precondition for social interaction; rather, these emerge from and are sustained by conversations occurring between people...This more sparing account of mental process is a congenial companion to muted realism.”(Gergen 1997)

Gergen’s more extreme version of constructionism jettisons the ‘muted realism’ of these approaches.

“If this view is pressed to its extreme, one is invited to explore a terrain of theoretical intelligibility in which mental predicates never function **referentially**, and social process serves as the essential fulcrum of explanation. That is, we may envision the elimination of psychological states and conditions as explanations for action, and the reconstitution of psychological predicates within the sphere of social process. If one accepts the historical and cultural relativity of psychological discourse suggested by [radical social constructionism], then one resists resting a contemporary formulation on particular presumptions about psychological functioning. More bluntly, one might resist reconstituting the individual as a social being in the fashion of the preceding accounts, as they attempt to ground themselves in universal or transcultural ontologies of the mind.”

What Gergen referred to as a muted realism takes forms manifesting a theme common to Jan Slaby, Shaun Gallagher and Karen Barad’s contributions to constructionism, which were in their infancy when Gergen wrote that piece. This make their work relevant to the arguments of this paper, in that their writings on responsive justice reveal a key stumbling block that constructionist efforts encounter on their way to a fully relational ethical thinking. Let me illustrate this with an analysis of Shaun Gallagher’s linkage of justice with relational autonomy. In his latest book, *Action and Interaction*, Gallagher(2020) writes:

“... if Bekoff and Peirce are right that a sense of justice “seems to be an innate and universal

tendency in humans” , and continuous with certain tendencies in some non-human animals, a more basic sense than the sense of fairness may be at stake—a sense, perhaps, of just being able to respond, or being able to join in the back-and-forth arrangement of responses.”

Gallagher links justice with the enactivist concepts of relational autonomy and affordance.

“Play involves action and interaction and the ability or possibility of the participants to continue in play. It’s defined by a set of interactive affordances. When one animal starts to dominate in playful interaction, closing off the other’s affordance space (or eliminating the autonomy of the other), the interaction and the play stops. Self-handicapping (e.g., not biting as hard as the dog can) is a response to the other’s vulnerability as the action develops, based on an immediate sense of, or an attunement to what would or would not cause pain rather than on a rule. Role-reversal (where the dominant animal makes itself more vulnerable) creates an immediate affordance for the continuance of play. If in a friendly playful interaction one player gets hurt, becomes uncomfortable, or is pushed beyond her affective limits, this can generate an immediate feeling of distrust for the other. That would constitute a **disruption** of the friendship, a break in this very basic sense that is prior to measures of fairness, exchange, or retribution. Robert Solomon captures this idea at the right scale: “Justice presumes a personal concern for others. It is first of all a sense, not a rational or social construction, and I want to argue that this sense is, in an important sense, natural.”

Footnote: Solomon(1990) writes of mutual cooperation as motivated by neither a Hobbesian self-interest nor a pure other-centered altruism, but instead a reciprocal altruism.

“Reciprocal altruism, in summary, is the readiness of an individual (or a group) to aid another individual (or group), with the expectation that it will be helped in return...there can be no altruism (except in isolated cases) unless there is also a keen sense and expectation of punishment. The strategically selfish monkey must "learn his lesson". “The group is primary, and "the individual" and even "self- interest" make sense only within the group.”

Gallagher continues:

“Justice, like autonomy, is relational. I cannot be just or unjust on my own. So an action is just or unjust only in the way it fits into the arrangements of intersubjective and social interactions.”
“Justice consists in those arrangements that maximize compound, relational autonomy in our practices.” The autonomy of the interaction itself depends on maintaining the autonomy of both individuals. Justice (like friendship) involves fostering this plurality of autonomies (this compound autonomy); it is a positive arrangement that instantiates or maintains some degree of compound relational autonomy.”“Accordingly, although one can still talk of individuals who engage in the interaction, a full account of such interaction is not reducible to mechanisms at work in the individuals qua individuals.”

What sorts of distorting situational factors may prevent one party from recognizing the autonomy of the other? Gallagher points to a reification in the treatment of the other as central feature of the breakdown of just interaction.

“As reflected in the definition of interaction, in interactional dynamics recognition depends on

autonomy and is undermined by reification; that is, treating the other as an object observed from a third-person perspective. At the same time, individual autonomy diminishes without social interaction; and interaction doesn't exist if the autonomy of any of the participants is denied. Interaction, autonomy, and recognition dissipate in cases of slavery, torture, or terrorism.”

Slaby, Schütze, Jörg and von Maur(2020) provide further illumination concerning the processes of reification in the context of affective social formations. Slaby et al write:

“...what we call the conservative power of affect is grounded in the tendency that affective relations tend to reproduce their prevailing patterns and clusters into stable constellations at the discursive level, while habituating individuals into characteristic modes of relatedness and attachment. In fact, ‘the lure of the familiar’ might be the single most effective force when it comes to affect's conservative thrust. It ensures that affect relations often reinforce and sustain specific historical trajectories.” “In many of its prevailing social forms, affect operates as a sluggish glue or even an iron grip that holds practices and social routines in place. From this perspective, it is not surprising at all that the concreted social structures persevered.”

Bolstering Slaby's argument, Gallagher(2020) presumes the existence of macro-social institutions transcendent to actual interpersonal relational dynamics, which act to constrain, oppose and distort communication from beyond them.

“Standard accounts of action and interaction abstract away from the specifics of everyday life; they ignore the circumstances that are framed by social and instituted practices that often lead to **structural distortions** and injustices.” “Structural features of the specific practices or institutions within which individuals interact can **distort** human relations in ways that subtract from total autonomy and reduce the overall interactive affordance space.” “When structural features of cognitive institutional practices are **exclusionary**, closing off possibilities, or when such practices are designed so that whoever uses them comes to be **dominated by them**, with the result that their **thinking is narrowed and determined**, then again autonomy, not just of the individual, but of social interaction is compromised.”

“To the extent that the instituted narrative, even if formed over time by many individuals, **transcends those individuals** and may persist beyond them, it may loop around to constrain or dominate the group members or the group as a whole.” (Gallagher 2017)

“Collective (institutional, corporate) narratives often take on a life (an autonomy) of their own and may come to **oppose or undermine the intentions** of the individual members. Narrative practices in both extended institutional and collective structures and practices can be positive in allowing us to see certain possibilities, but at the same time, they can carry our cognitive processes and social interactions in specific directions and blind us to other possibilities.” (Gallagher 2017)

In sum, for Gallagher and Slaby, a key manner that social formations dynamics become unjust is by reifying and perpetuating themselves, thereby excluding and rejecting individuals or groups not conforming to those values. This assumption licenses a violent, pathologizing vocabulary. We must disturb, intervene in, oppose, fracture, challenge, shake up, obstruct and break ossified, unjust, unfair social formations, forces preserving the past, inertia, the mesmerizing magnetism and toxicity of the status quo. In contrast to the assumption that the

'glue' holding affective societies together orients itself via the reinforcement of habituated, reifying dominating content, for Gergen social patterns of coordination tend toward harmonization, intelligibility and coherence. In order to understand the implications of this distinction, we must inquire beyond the issue of whether a certain social organization closes down alternatives, and focus on the question of why it does so. We must ask ourselves what we are assuming concerning the motivational processes behind the emergence of conventions that exclude. The implication of Slaby's ethical position is that the content of a dogmatic social structure is in some sense self-reinforcing. This implies that the recalcitrant pull of this arbitrary dogmatism is to blame for the system's failure to act more flexibly. Radical social constructionism instead invites us to explain dogmatic, ossified social practices not as the manifestation of dominating self-reinforcing values, but as representing the most intelligible avenues of practical movement available to us within the given patterns of coordination. When people appear to stop actively questioning and evaluating their ethical practices, and seem to fall back on old conventions, this should not be seen as a sign that the community has found itself at the mercy of a vicious cycle of self-reinforcing, reifying rigidity. Instead, it is likely to signal a limit of that community's ability to make their world intelligible. At the same time, each moment of joint activity keeps the system continually changing within itself. It simply isn't changing in the direction that the critic would prefer it to change. The question of why and to what extent a social ensemble puts up barriers around their value system should be seen as a matter of how much uncertainty that system is capable of tolerating without crumbling, rather than as a self-reinforcing impetus for ossified thinking.

An important implication of understanding ethical formations in terms of intelligible process rather than self-reinforcing content is that we need no longer attribute ethical breakdown to a failure or unwillingness (reification) on the part of one party or parties to engage with and recognize another's autonomy. We are invited to reconceptualize the self-other binary underlying recognition-exclusion as a unitary relational structure. Let me flesh out this distinction between Gergen's unitary structure of co-action and a reciprocally causal subject-object responsivity with an analysis of Gallagher's incorporation of Levinasian ethics.

“As the enactivist approach makes clear, a participant in interaction with another person is called to respond if the interaction is to continue. My response to the other, in the primary instance, just is my engaging in interaction with her—by responding positively or negatively with action to her action. Although research on primary intersubjectivity provides a detailed model of elementary responsivity, it may also be useful to consider Levinas's analysis of the face-to-face relation in order to explicate what this research tells us.” “...according to Levinas, the face-to-face relation primarily registers in an ethical order: the other, in her alterity, is such that she makes an ethical demand on me, to which I am obligated to respond... In contrast to Heidegger who might speak about a system of involvements that constitute the pragmatic world (characteristic of secondary intersubjectivity), Levinas describes a direct embodied encounter with the other... the failure to enact that transcendence [recognizing the alterity of the other], as when we simply objectify or reify the other person, is also a possibility of relational contingency.” (Gallagher 2020)

Karen Barad's agential realist approach, one of founding pillars of New Materialist thought, echoes Gallagher's distinction between a priori responsivity and the responsibility to achieve autonomy in relational co-ordination. For Barad, like Gallagher, interpersonal

entanglement (exposure to the Other) is a given, but just responsiveness is not. An individual or community may practice avoidance, Othering and exclusion. The implication here is that for Barad and Gallagher a particular bounded content within the individual or group, around which the thematics of a configuration of relational practices is centered, dominates and thus potentially distorts the structure in such a way as to exclude others. Barad(2007) writes:

“Justice, which entails acknowledgment, recognition, and **loving attention**, is not a state that can be achieved once and for all. There are no solutions; there is only the ongoing practice of being open and alive to each meeting, each intra-action, so that we might use our ability to respond, our responsibility, to help awaken, to breathe life into ever new possibilities for living justly...How then shall we understand our role in helping constitute who and what come to matter? How to understand what is entailed in the practice of meeting that might help keep the possibility of justice alive in a world that seems to thrive on death? How to be alive to each being's suffering, including those who have died and those not yet born? How to **disrupt** patterns of thinking that see the past as finished and the future as not ours or only ours.”

Citing Levinas, Barad says:

What if we were to acknowledge that the nature of materiality itself, not merely the materiality of human embodiment, always already entails "an exposure to the Other"?"What if we were to recognize that responsibility is “the essential, primary and fundamental mode" of objectivity as well as subjectivity?" “Ethics is therefore not about right response to a radically exterior/ ized other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part.”

Gergen’s model of dialogical responsivity may superficially resemble enactivist approaches in this regard, but differs in important ways from these positions. For Gergen, as well as Heidegger, ontologically prior to an encounter with the other is an othering that is already built into the moment to moment production of selfhood. This transcendence is not a moving beyond myself toward the absolute other, but is immanent to the very being of selfhood. This transcendence within and as self is not optional but a precondition of experience. Enactivist entanglement , interdependence and intra-action imply a reciprocally causal model of co-determinative interactive bits. They are derivative modes of an original interaffecting. The original inter-affecting performed in co-action differs from reciprocal causation in virtue of the fact that a prior element is already changed (affected) by what it interacts with before it can simply inhere in itself as cause. Whereas in enactivist thinking it is only later that the difference made to others in discursive relation can in turn affect the “it" of a self, the fact of its being already affected in serving as the past of that present element with which it interacts deprives both past and present poles of the interaction a separate identity. Rather than there being first one element followed by its effect on a second element (a dialogical effect on the other ‘caused’ by an existing ‘itself’), there is only a single event of crossing simultaneously determining past and present, self and other, in their interaction. Each function as already cross-affected by the other. Each is determined by, and also determines the other.

Gergen(2007) writes:

“Each of the numerous ways in which I may respond will attribute or lend to your utterance a specific kind of meaning. The utterance has no commanding presence in itself. Its meaning is revealed only in the manner of my response--in the coordination between my response and your utterance. Still, we should not conclude that I create your meaning. For my responses are not in themselves meaningful or, rather, they are not full of meaning ready for transfer. Absent the utterance of your proposals, my seeming acts of disagreement lapse into nonsense.”

Even though Gallagher says actions are always part of a larger web of actions and interactions, they occupy their own place within this web as temporary meanings. This allows him to distinguish between individual and joint action. He says joint action allows us to do things we could not do on our own. By contrast, Gergen says all action is joint action, co-action. “...there is no action that has meaning in itself, that is, an action that can be isolated and identified for what it is.”

For Gallagher, temporary content intrinsic to subjects and objects acts as a magnetic attractor, dominating and distorting the direction of change. For Gergen, however, the self and other poles of a responsive interaction have no content outside of, transcendent to the interaction. The self is reflected to itself, finds itself, moment by moment in relations with others. This coming to itself from outside itself is ontologically prior to the subject-object responsive interaction which for Gallagher and Barad grounds both empathy, compassion and fellow feeling, and indifference and hostility.

Therefore, the ethical dilemma we face is not that of recognition vs reification, self-transcendence vs self-interest, the arbitrary conservative thrust of the lure of the familiar vs the compassionate embrace of otherness. When we seem to fail to recognize and maintain the other's autonomy this is not a retreat into self but, on the contrary, an experiencing of otherness which is too other to be intelligible. For Gallagher justice is maintaining the autonomy of the other, as if one first glimpses this autonomy and then decides not to honor it. Gergen argues that the other's autonomy can only exist for me to the extent that I can integrate it intelligibly within my way of life, which is itself the ongoing production of a collaborative community. The failure to coordinate harmoniously among competing relational intelligibilities results in the appearance of injustice, as though there were an intention on the part of one of the parties not to recognize an aspect of the other. However, it is not autonomous content that we strive to maximize, but intelligible process, and intelligibility is ontologically prior to the actions of an autonomous subject who recognizes or fails to recognize others. When there is disagreement between the victim and the alleged perpetrator about whether an injustice has indeed been committed, who determines, and how is it determined, that someone is closing off another's affordance space and eliminating their autonomy? If, as Gergen offers, it is intelligible ways of going on that are being protected, then from the vantage of the 'perpetrator', what is being excluded, closed off and eliminated is not a particular content (the other's affordances), in the service of reifying one's own autonomy. On the contrary, the aim is to exclude from a system of practices that which would render it nonsensical and deprive it of coherent meaning. In other words, from the vantage of the so-called perpetrator, the practices of exclusion and elimination are in the service of rendering justice by preventing the degradation of meaningful autonomy in general.

As Gergen(1995) states:

“... groups whose actions are coordinated around given constructions of reality risk their traditions by exposing them to the ravages of the outliers. That is, from their perspective, efforts must be made to protect the boundaries of understanding, to prevent the signifiers from escaping into the free-standing environment where meaning is decried or dissipated. In this sense, unfair or exclusionary practices are not frequently so from the standpoint of the actors. Rather, they may seem altogether fair, just and essential to sustain valued ideals against the infidels at the gates.”

To follow this trajectory of thinking is to understand not just that disputes over what constitutes an injustice in any specific circumstance are not amenable to resolution within the terms of justice, but that the reason for this is that Gallagher’s intertwined concepts of justice, autonomy and affordance intend to locate a real entity transcendent and thereby indifferent to the multiple traditions of meaning that jostle with each other within social situations. Just responsiveness relies on the obscuring of multiple intelligibilities in favor of constructing a particular bounded content. It picks out one relative form of intelligibility, that which is recognized by the accuser as coherent, and formulates this familiarity as an objectively just structure of relation. However, if the valuative dynamic of a relational tradition forms a center of equilibrium around which its participants’ interactive practices revolve, this is not the effect of the arbitrary distorting power of a dominating bounded content. Rather, it is testament to the fact that the relational process of reciprocal coordination tends toward coherent meaning.

“...centripetal forces within groups will always operate toward stabilization, the establishment of valued meaning, and thus the exclusion of alterior realities.”

Barad’s question of how to be alive to each being’s suffering assumes a need to resist the unjust desire or intention not to be alive to the suffering of others, that is, the unethical impetus to intra-affect with others by excluding their experience. For Gergen, however, the suffering other can only be acknowledged if they can first be identified and made sense of as a suffering other. What matters to us, what we care about, whose suffering we empathize with, is dependent in the first place on what is intelligible to us from our vantage as nodes within a larger relational matrix (first order morality). We can only intend to recognize and welcome the Other who saves us from chaos; we intend to reject the Other who offers the oppression of incommensurability. Freedom from incoherence implies a sense of liberation, freedom from the order of intelligibility and intimacy a sense of subjection. We always have intended to welcome, sacrifice ourselves for the intelligible Other, and always disliked, `chose against’ the incommensurate Other. What is repressive to us is what we cannot establish harmonious relation with. To choose to embrace the unforeseen and is to prefer that aspect within unforeseen experience which is foreseeable, which offers us the hope of avoidance of the abyss of senselessness and incoherence. To the extent that we can say that we look forward to the unknown, it is only to that degree that we ANTICIPATE the unanticipatable that there is the hope of trust and recognition in that otherwise meaningless unknowable. We cannot get beyond this link between the lovable and the recognizable without losing the basis of any ethics, which is the ability to distinguish between, even if without yet defining, what is preferred and what is not.

There is no state of being, whether in the guise of a solipsistically autonomous subject or

Gallagher's relational subjectivity, existing prior to our ensensement within multiple moral communities. There is no such original state, in relation to which a decision to act justly (for the sake of the autonomy of relationship, as Gallagher formulates it) would imply an additional step. From Gergen's perspective it is concepts such as self and other which are achievements, that is, constructions derived from a unitary relational structure more originary than subjects and objects. According to Gergen, this value-creating relational coordination prior to all active efforts to achieve a particular kind of responsivity is first-order morality, the basis of all traditions of the good in the form of reciprocally intelligible practices. What Gergen calls justice is associated with the failure to move from first to second-order morality. The question for Gergen, then, is not whether and how we achieve just relations but whether and how we deal with the struggle between competing goods, how we manage to think beyond justice understood as singular traditions of the good, so that we can focus on enriching our traditions with alternative intelligibilities, thereby expanding the inclusiveness of our relational structures.

Gallagher's assertion that other animals species have a sense of justice is, from Gergen's vantage, an admission that animals construct first order moralities but fail to achieve second order morality. That is, they produce adaptive systems of harmonious interaction but cannot adapt to alternative or deviant practices. Their justice is at the same time an injustice from the vantage of members of their species, or other species, who participate in patterns of coordination unintelligible to them, and toward whom they exhibit hostility.

Gergen(2018) offers:

"For scholars with a constructionist sensibility, social justice is not a fact in the world but a way of constructing or appropriating a given configuration."
"...to declare that injustice is an unalloyed fact is also an invitation to conflict. Such declarations suggest that there is someone or some group that is acting unjustly. It is to make claim to a moral high ground, from which the unjust may be held accountable—possibly shamed and punished. It is to invite resistance, antagonism, and retaliation against an "evil other."... In contrast to the consequences of this realist orientation, to understand that one's sense of injustice is one way of constructing a given condition—fully justified within a given enclave or tradition—is also to realize the possibility of other perspectives that may contain their own inherent justifications... Rather than creating a relationship of us versus them, it is to open the possibility of dialogue. It is to invite curiosity, mutual understanding, and possible collaboration in building a more mutually viable world."

What Gallagher and Barad consider a breach of justice, the failure to coordinate one's response compatibly with the autonomy of the other, is for radical constructionism the failure to respond to the other within a shared intelligibility. The issue of intelligibility itself cannot be considered from within Gallagher's perspective, because the former lies within a tradition of thought unavailable to the thinking of just responsivity. Radical constructionism's traditions of intelligibility are degraded to Gallagher's relations of autonomy when we assume a bounded content that dominates (and masks) multi-being. We are invited instead to discover multiple, heterogeneous processes of relationality hidden within the abstract concepts of affordance, autonomy and justice. Beneath and beyond Gallagher's singular interpersonal system of affordance space and accompanying conditions of justice are multiple worlds, multiple

competing intelligibilities. Gallagher means to capture the moving dynamics of a social system as a whole with his concepts of autonomy, affordance and justice. He might better be seen as peering out at the wider social web from the limited vantage of one among many intelligibilities or traditions and reading his perspective as the totality.

Solomon, Gallagher and Barad blame injustice in part on indifference, lack of caring and compassion. That is, on a failure of individuals to maintain the autonomy of the relational bond.

Footnote: Varela, Thompson and Rosch(1991) posit a Buddhist-influenced universal compassion as primary, but even this form of compassion implies a reciprocal notion of altruism.

“...this so-called self occurs only in relation to the other. If I want praise, love, fame, or power, there has to be another (even if only a mental one) to praise, love, know about, or submit to me. If I want to obtain things, they have to be things that I don't already have. Even with respect to the desire for pleasure, the pleasure is something to which I am in a relation.”

Putting this thinking into question, Gergen responds that social conflict is not the result of indifference and failure to care (injustice), but failure to comprehend, to make intelligible. This is not a breakdown of reciprocity between individuals, a deviance within a self with respect to the interpersonal relation, but a limit of powers of harmonization established within a group to incorporate the ‘deviant’ values of alien groups. Justice, as this limit, is inherently unjust. When we assume distortion as a possible outcome of relational communication, we are licensed and impelled to intervene, potentially violently, to ‘disrupt’ and correct the terms of the interaction. When instead we no longer find useful the notion of bounded content acting as fulcrum and criterion of distortion, we are prepared to substitute for the first-order just practices of disruption and correction the values of inclusion and enrichment.

Gergen(2011) writes:

“We commonly suppose that suffering is caused by people whose conscience is flawed or who pursue their aims without regard for the consequences to others. From a relational standpoint, we may entertain the opposite hypothesis: in important respects we suffer from a plenitude of good. How so? If relationships-linguistic coordination--are the source of meaning, then they are the source as well of our presumptions about good and evil. Rudimentary understandings of right versus wrong are essential to sustaining patterns of coordination. Deviations from accepted patterns constitute a threat. When we have developed harmonious ways of relating-of speaking and acting--we place a value on this way of life. Whatever encroaches upon, undermines, or destroys this way of life becomes an evil. It is not surprising, then, that the term ethics is derived from the Greek ethos, the customs of the people; or that the term morality draws on the Latin root mos or mores, thus affiliating morality with custom. Is and ought walk hand in hand. We may view this movement from rudimentary coordination to value formation in terms of "first-order morality." To function within any viable relationship requires embracing, with or without articulation, the values inherent in its patterns.... In effect, morality of the first order is being sensible in context.”

Fellow feeling and compassion presuppose a bond between two entities. If Buddha nature is compassionate toward all existing things, this is to say that one appreciates one's need for and dependence on others. Such dependence doesn't eliminate the distinction between subject and object, but instead sees them as reciprocally entangled. For Gergen subjects and objects are not entangled with and dependent with each other as temporary entities. Rather, the subject comes to itself from an outside, and is thus 'composed' of the outside.

Caring and mattering is not a subject reaching out to and engaging with other subjects in a reciprocal dance, because to reach out to a world is to be already affected and changed by that world one reaches out to. It is the world producing a subject moment to moment in a specific stance of relevance with respect to a previous history of subjectivization. The motivation of care does not proceed outward from an acting subject to a world. It proceeds from a never before experienced, non-objective jointly-constructed world. This co-activity produces as a derived byproduct such abstract entities as subjects and objects. If care is an attitude or comportment, it is already changed in its sense by its 'object'. Care is the way an attitude is changed by a situation, not a feature brought to a situation and projected onto it from an 'I' who is outside of it. Care is not a quality we open ourselves up to or close ourselves off from.

Gallagher's model of justice as responsivity in specific situational contexts would seem to avoid treating injustice as an unalloyed fact. And yet, his depiction of autonomous relationality makes a system of reciprocal differences immanent to something transcendent to the mutually coordinating practices defining that system. (As Deleuze(1994) wrote, "...whenever immanence is interpreted as immanent to Something, we can be sure that this Something reintroduces the transcendent."). It is this orienting valuation which grounds the identification of justice or lack of justice in specific situations. Gallagher(2020) says:

"...let's not pretend that we don't know injustice when we see it. As David Miller puts it, "[a]ll morally competent adults have a well-developed sense of justice that enables them to cope with the practical questions they confront from day to day". In very large part this sense of justice comes from the affective domain..."

What is it we know when we see something as unjust? What sort of affectivity is involved? I suggest that a central component of the determination of injustice is the affect of blame. I included within the structure of blame the following: irritation, annoyance, hostility, disapproval, condemnation, feeling insulted, taking umbrage, resentment, anger, exasperation, impatience, hatred, fury, ire, outrage, contempt, righteous indignation, 'adaptive' or rational anger, perceiving the other as deliberately thoughtless, rude, careless, lazy, malevolent, dishonest, narcissistic, malicious, culpable, perverse, inconsiderate, intentionally oppressive, negligent, repressive or unfair, disrespectful, hypocritical, disgraceful, greedy, evil, sinful, antisocial, criminal, a miscreant. Blame is also implicated in coolly, calmly and rationally determining the other to have deliberately committed a moral transgression, a social injustice or injustice in general, or as committing a moral wrong.

I blame when I am unable recognize that there is an inexhaustible range of alternative perspectives potentially available to me from whose vantage I can continue to perceive the other as having behaved coherently and justly within the bounds of the traditions they participate in. In the absence of such a vantage, the inadequate alternative explanations open to me reveal the other person's behavior only as a peculiar, disordered chaos, which, measured against the relative coherence of my original assessment of their relation to me, makes their thinking appear to me now as irrational, preposterous, stubborn, lazy, malevolent, distorted, failing to live up to my expectations of them, unwilling to recognize my autonomy. My blamefulness, then, is my attempt to salvage value from the only intelligible construction available to me to make sense of an aspect of the other person's actions. Attempting to get the wayward other to conform to my original expectations (knock some sense back into them, teach them lesson, achieve their recognition of my autonomy) is the blameful choice I must make when the alternative is dealing with a person whose behavior in a sphere of social life that is of vital concern to me I can no longer make intelligible. My hope for justice is the desire to influence the other back where I think they should have been. In sum, what we know when we see injustice is our own hostility, but this indignation is a kind of not-knowing, a failure on our part to imagine alternative intelligibilities to the one the other has violated by departing from its norms. Viewing the wayward person or group through Gergen's lens of multi-being rather than the first-order morality of blameful justice encourages us to strive for an ethics of responsibility without succumbing to a moralism of culpability. Far from this signaling a disengagement with the moral dimension of life, we are put in touch with what Gergen(2019) calls an overflowing conscience.

“...to champion relational process is to treat with respect the intelligibility of all participants, even when other views are disagreeable. It is to carry the voices of all value orientations, to respect their validity within the circumstances in which those values were created. Every voice of value, no matter how heinous to others, carries the assumption of its own good. To be relationally responsible is to defend the rights of all to make themselves intelligible. One may surely resist what is seen as 'evil action,' but with a sense of humility -with respect to both one's own lack of fundamental grounds and the realization that under identical circumstances, a similar choice could have been made. What would this expanded form of conscience mean in action? It would favor, for example, supporting movements for social justice, for minority rights, or against tyranny of any kind, but without pathologizing those who might be targets of such movements.”

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