

Book Review

DE RIVERA, JOSEPH, & SARBIN, THEODORE R. (Eds.). *Believed-In Imaginings: The Narrative Construction of Reality*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1998. Pp. xii + 345. ISBN 1-55798-521-9.

The constructionists are coming! The constructionists are coming! The last few decades have become increasingly difficult for positivists, realists, objectivists, and their ilk. Social constructionism, in various guises, brings into question the possibility of anyone ever knowing a world that exists independently of knowers. Depending on one's biases, psychology is being either humanized or undermined by infusions from the humanities featuring postmodernism, deconstruction, discourse analysis, narratives (story telling), dramaturgical perspectives, and hermeneutics. After first being impressed with the radically naturalistic and humanistic interbehavioral psychology of J. R. Kantor, T. R. Sarbin was prepared to pursue an alternative to mainstream thinking exemplified by the lineal mechanistic outlook and its associated encouragement of the pursuit of positive knowledge and the absolutisms of subjectivity-free truths. G. H. Mead's sociodramaturgical framework provided Sarbin with a way of treating human conduct as dramaturgical action or role enactment.

Sarbin's construct of believed-in imaginings is the subject of this book. One beginning to study believed-in imaginings might do well to translate the construct to "beliefs." We find some beliefs of which we can be quite confident and others of questionable status, with various levels in between. Given this, the problem immediately presented concerns beliefs over which different knowers disagree. The contributors to this edited book address a variety of ways in which different knowers ascribe conflicting "truth status" to the same beliefs—believed-in imaginings. Several alleged phenomena from the contemporary scene, in or bordering on the occult, provide interesting fodder for the book's contributors. These include UFO abductions, multiple personality disorders or dissociative identity disorders, satanic ritual abuse, recovery of repressed memories of childhood sexual abuse, and facilitated communication. Chapters cover topics such as cross-cultural considerations, uninstructed imaginal coping responses in childhood chronic illness, development of imagination and belief, volition and automaticity, and belief in fatherhood.

Sarbin abjures mental representations in a Cartesian mind in favor of belief and imagination as human action—believings and imaginings. He takes a sociolinguistic perspective according to which knowledge of the world, including the part called "self," is inseparable from linguistic acts built up in transactions with others and their products. Thus, although one might make initial contact with believed-in imaginings by way of the vernacular's "belief," the major message of the book is the active participation of knowers in claimed knowledge by way of linguistic acts.

The book is a valuable resource for those seeking some general considerations for assistance in understanding claims of occult, supernatural, and paranormal phenomena. However, the various contributions seem to be held together by little more than the assumption that knowledge claims are naturalistic linguistic acts. On the surface, believed-in imaginings bind the book's content, but the construct is largely just

that—a construct—not a coherent scientific framework. Given the contributors' explicit emphasis on linguistic acts, all might profit from incorporating a naturalistic theory of such behavior into their repertoire. Certainly, one interested in knowledge claims can do well to begin by taking into account their origin in knowers' interbehavior with things, including other people. Not to be ignored, also, for a clear understanding of believed-in knowledge claims is the availability of scientifically adequate descriptions of reasoning or inferential action. Contributors to this book did not systematically consider the role of inferential interbehavior in believed-in knowledge claims. As such, they may have overestimated the linguistic component of their topic. (*Dennis J. Delprato, Eastern Michigan University*)