

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

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GOAL

Understand that knowledge is made, not discovered

MAKING KNOWLEDGE, NOT DISCOVERING FACTS

KNOWLEDGE DOES NOT SUDDENLY APPEAR in books without an author, a subjective source. Knowledge is made by people who observe things, draw conclusions, and then report or share their observations with others using prior knowledge as a reference. The bulk of knowledge is made through this basic process of **knowledge production**. Knowledge is not discovered in the sense that people do not suddenly find knowledge in the way that one finds gold. Knowledge producers make knowledge, and everyone can be considered knowledge producers on some level. This book is an example of knowledge production.

In a broad sense we are all knowledge producers; when people post on a blog, describe a movie they have seen to friends, name a child, or tell stories of events which occurred during a vacation, people are engaging in knowledge production. There are more formal and accredited forms of knowledge production that occur in universities and schools; these kinds of knowledge production generally yield what most people consider facts. Students are knowledge producers in training. Knowledge producing experts (instructors) train students in the art of knowledge production. From a very young age, students are taught what and how to observe, how to record their observations, and how to make reports. If one goes to graduate

school to obtain a Ph.D., one receives basically a license to make knowledge independently with the authority and credentials to prove it.

The process of making knowledge can be illustrated by the simple sentence:

John sees the girl.

Subject Object

"John" is the subject of the sentence, and he is looking at the "girl," which is the object. One might say that much university activity is summed up in this sentence: **Subjects** look at objects. People study objects, and then they write about them, and many times, that information is then shared; this is the process of making knowledge. So, for the most part, knowledge is based on things people have seen. Education is simply remembering the observations of others. To take John's perspective is to be subjective, the perspective of the subject. To be the girl is to be objective, for the purposes of this book. This is not the same as taking the object's point of view because if the girl looks at John, the girl is now the subject looking at an object, which is John.

The goal of observing is to understand and know the object through observation and study. Objects can be anything that is observed and studied by a subject; objects can be material and immaterial things. Science teaches us how to be objective as if it were actually possible. It also teaches that observers must record observations without emotion and opinions; science also operates under the belief that there is objective information, or facts. However, objects are seen from a perspective by a subject. So, though some disciplines claim that their methods are objective, it is easy to see through this simple sentence that knowledge is produced from the perspective of the subject, and the knowledge that is produced is subjective knowledge, rather than objective knowledge.

Absolute knowledge is the knowledge which is produced when observing an **absolute**; an absolute is an object which when observed is observed and seen in the same way by everyone, anywhere, at any time. So, the knowledge that is produced will always be the same. Changing perspective does not change the absolute character and knowledge concerning the absolute object. In this class it is assumed that there is no absolute knowledge. Keep in mind that for individuals in their everyday lives, there will be perceived absolutes, but they will not be universal to everyone else. In other words, for the sake of argument and discussion, it is assumed that everyone sees objects from their own unique perspective that will

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generate unique observations and interpretations. It is for this reason that postmodernist deconstruction itself is subjective knowledge production; this process of critique does not produce absolute truth but is helpful as a system of analysis.

Science and other areas of knowledge production in the university often ignore the subject and pretend that it is not there making the observations and producing the knowledge. This is partly achieved by standardizing the process through which knowledge is made. This creates the impression that students are making and learning facts or the truth. This approach also creates the impression that knowledge is discovered. For example, Albert Einstein did not look up into the sky and see " $E = mc^2$ " (his theory of relativity) written in the stars. Because of the issues and problems he was pondering at the time, he made that expression using his prior knowledge to explain what he observed. Buddhists in Asia at the same time would likely not have produced " $E = mc^2$," not because they are dull, but because the questions they were asking, their prior knowledge, did not concern relativity. What they saw was interpreted through what they already knew, in a way that answered the questions they were asking. Their perspective was fundamentally different from that of Einstein. They were not concerned about the relative movement of stars in the way that Einstein was.

One should note that deconstruction does not help one decide which knowledge production is right or wrong, better or worse, productive or unproductive. This approach merely points out that all knowledge is made from a perspective, and when viewed and understood from that perspective, that knowledge is considered true. Different perspectives of the same object will yield different knowledge and different truths. For example, July 4th, 1776 is Independence Day in the U.S. However, in England, July 4th was the day the colonies seceded.

Forgetting that knowledge is made allows people to be dogmatic and intolerant of the ideas of others. The temptation to think one's own knowledge is true while the knowledge of others is subjective is great. It is for this reason students are reminded that though they might be tempted to be offended by the process of deconstruction, they must remember that it is all simply the revealing of perspective.

CONSTRUCTS

When knowledge is made, it is produced in the form of **constructs**. Theories, books, journals, magazines, TV shows, movies, advertisements, and ideas, as well as cars, buildings, and Legos are all constructs; that is, they were all made. Knowledge is taught to and learned by students in the form of constructs.

From the view of deconstruction, because knowledge is constructed from a perspective, it is never neutral and never absolute; it is always subjective. Calling knowledge fact or truth is possible only within the perspective of the original production. Knowledge is always produced and spread with an intent or goal of usage in mind. At the very least, knowledge was made to explain something that was observed for those who are interested. As a hammer was invented for a purpose, knowledge is made with a purpose. The saying "necessity is the mother of invention" describes this phenomenon where a need sparks the development of a method or tool to address that need. To put it in another way, normally someone does not make a hammer and then try to find a use for it; the use comes first and the tool is created to fulfill that use. Once the hammer is made, it can be adapted or used for other jobs and purposes. Knowledge is made because there is a need, use, and function for that knowledge. Notably, produced knowledge can be adapted and used for other purposes. The construct of race was made to explain something that was observed. It was made to teach others to see the same phenomenon the original knowledge producer saw in the way she or he saw it. Different people will observe and make knowledge about race, for example, and the content of that knowledge will be different according to the producer.

Though race is constructed, it does not mean that race does not exist. It is something that many people see, observe, and strive to understand. Declaring and pretending that race is not there does not make it go away or make it insignificant; knowledge producers of race are simply explaining what they see from their perspectives.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Knowledge is constantly being made by everyone in one form or another, as mentioned above. People make knowledge for their specific needs at any given moment. As people live their lives they observe and interpret

everything around them to make decisions and choices; they are making knowledge continuously for personal use. Sometimes others are interested in what other people think and believe because the knowledge of those other people seems to be better than what they have produced. In other words, our own knowledge-producing ability can sometimes not be up to the challenge of understanding certain situations and objects adequately to make a good choice.

In contemporary society, there are knowledge producers and knowledge users. As in the hammer example, the use of a hammer comes first, for which the hammer is made. Likewise, when there is a need for knowledge, knowledge is made. Of all the knowledge that is made, normally the knowledge that is most profitable and beneficial to others is the knowledge that is spread and used by many. If someone benefits from a piece of knowledge, then that knowledge is spread as truth. To repeat, everyone is a knowledge producer of some sort with various levels of skill. Knowledge that may be beneficial to others can be sold and marketed in different ways, e.g. through internships, schools, and books. Knowledge that is deemed unbeneficial by most is not spread and shared throughout society; people would not learn that knowledge even if it were free. People must feel that they have gained some sort of benefit to learn and live by newly produced knowledge.

Not all knowledge produced becomes knowledge others want to learn, for whatever reason. One might make a comparison with inventions or the research and development departments of large companies. People are always inventing new and wonderful things. Not all of those inventions are known or even used by others. Useful knowledge is made known and spread by word of mouth because of its usefulness. There are many groups of people who desire knowledge in order to do something; often that "something" involves making money. Because of the socially established beliefs regarding scientific knowledge production, people have adapted and modified the knowledge-producing process in a way to tailor make knowledge to legitimize or support a subjective point of view.

For example, driving in a car one day, the author heard on the radio news of a recent scientific study that detailed the benefits of drinking coffee. Not long after this report, he heard the same DJ announce a new scientific study about the benefits of drinking tea. This made the author suspicious enough to wonder, who goes to college to run up student loan debt to pursue a lifelong dream to study coffee or tea? If we could interview the scientist who did this scientific study while she or he was still in college, this scientist would probably not say that she or he is taking upper level chemistry classes to study the benefits of drinking coffee

after graduation. It is more likely that this student majored in chemistry, was unemployed around the time of graduation, and saw an ad in the newspaper for a company (maybe even the Institute for Scientific Information on Coffee, www.coffeeandhealth.org, which produced the report originally heard by this author regarding coffee), looking for scientists to conduct not just research studies on coffee but research to find *favorable* information regarding coffee consumption. Faced with the choice of continued unemployment or researching coffee for a few years to earn a wage, the graduate would probably apply for the job, and knowledge would be made.

In this particular example of coffee knowledge production, information that provides support for drinking coffee will likely be used. If the scientist concluded that there were no benefits to drinking coffee, that information would likely be discarded; the point of hiring those scientists was to produce favorable information according to the subjective view of the coffee companies. It is well known that the tobacco companies have done this in their business history, too. Only the information produced by the scientists who said that smoking was safe was shared with the public. Can it be said that those scientists were going against their training by reporting their observations inaccurately? Perhaps, but tobacco scientists were producing information from the perspective of the tobacco companies; their job was to make information favorable for continued smoking. These examples should illustrate that using science does not resolve the problem of subjectivity and subjective truth.

This is not to say that all knowledge producers simply sell themselves to the highest bidder. On the contrary, knowledge producers who do have a problem with the sources of certain funding will not apply or accept funding. Nevertheless, funding plays an important role in the determination of what knowledge is produced and shared with others. Gatekeepers of official knowledge production use their prior knowledge to determine what information is published or not. Scientists themselves are also vulnerable to politics, wealth, and prestige because they are human.

The point is that, often, the motivation or agenda that drives particular knowledge production is hidden from view. Knowledge is presented as fact. Even the word "scientific" is often intended to signal accuracy and truth to the listener/reader so that the information is simply believed. Deconstruction must be learned to help decide whether one will subscribe to or go along with particular discourses of knowledge production.¹

1 "Bootleggers and Baptists" is an expression coined by Bruce Yandle in 1983 to describe the unwitting alliance of seemingly opposing groups to get certain

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The benefit of all this is that, if we accept that knowledge is made from a perspective with intent and agenda, students, and people in general can become open to critiquing their own prior knowledge and all new knowledge. One must be willing to examine one's own prior knowledge with the scrutiny of deconstruction to understand the resistance to learning something new and different. Upon understanding this bias and resistance, students may be better equipped to make decisions and choices that are beneficial to that student, rather than making choices that would be less beneficial and likely be to the benefit of others.

SUMMARY

Knowledge is made, not discovered. Knowledge is made in the form of constructs. Knowledge is made to be used and is biased, subjective, and has agenda. Because knowledge is biased, it is in the interest of the student to know what perspective was used to create that knowledge. This is important because people can be paid to make knowledge for the purpose of making money, which may not be to the benefit of the knowledge learner.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How might the construct of knowledge production affect the understanding of religion?
2. The concepts of right and wrong and true and false are challenged through deconstruction. How might this affect the way we interact with others, particularly people who do not share our perspective and values?

legislation passed through Congress. Support for prohibition came from Baptist Christians who wanted alcohol banned for religious reasons and from bootleggers whose livelihood was made possible by the 21st Amendment.

DECONSTRUCTION

4

GOAL

Evaluate produced knowledge to better understand the subjectivity of that knowledge

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER discussed how knowledge is made and some of the implications of knowledge production. Because knowledge is made and not discovered, knowledge is subjective and made with an agenda that benefits the people who made that knowledge and share that perspective. People may like what they are learning, but there is no guarantee that the given knowledge is best for the one learning it. This is because there may be other knowledge constructs that may yield more benefits for those same learners.

Facts are facts and truths are truths only within a perspective; if the perspective changes, so does the character of those same facts and truths. Thus, all knowledge is only subjectively true in this discussion of deconstruction. It is often the case that knowledge producers master the knowledge from a particular perspective, but that knowledge becomes irrelevant to someone with a different perspective; recall the example of the two-sided piece of paper. This also makes the entire “fact checking” phenomenon one sees in politics very curious. One might imagine a playground full of children yelling to each other that their facts are better than the other children’s facts.

Because the absolute nature of knowledge is undermined, it is harder to claim knowledge of the truth when there are many competing truths in the world of knowledge. However, as has already been said, knowledge is often represented as having been discovered, which hides the subjective nature of its production; it is taught as true, rather than as subjective. Opinions become facts, and perspectives become absolutes. In light of this,

the questions become: if other perspectives have the same legitimacy as the perspectives of one's prior knowledge, how does one decide and assess the value of the various knowledge productions; and if current available knowledge is not beneficial to the learner, then how does one find knowledge that is more beneficial to the learner?

DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is the process of taking apart constructs (chapter 3). Understanding the subjective nature of knowledge requires taking that knowledge apart, or deconstructing it, to see how it was made from a perspective. There are probably much better and more scholarly ways of explaining and executing deconstruction, but for this class, we will keep deconstruction to a basic level. The author's own interpretation and simplification of deconstruction for undergraduate use is a series of steps and questions that will help students understand as much of the subjective nature of the knowledge as possible in order to make a better decision regarding whether to choose or reject a given piece of knowledge.

- Ask yourself, "As the reader, what is my agenda/bias?"
- Define the constructs being used.
- Who made that knowledge, and/or who paid for that knowledge?
- Who stands to gain the most if the knowledge is widely accepted and believed?
- Who stands to lose the most if the knowledge is widely accepted and believed?
- How were the constructs originally used? Has the use and meaning of the construct changed over time?

WHAT IS YOUR AGENDA/BIAS?

This is a step often overlooked. The student encountering new information already has an idea of what she or he would like to see as the conclusion or use of the produced knowledge. The student must admit to his or her own agenda prior to reading new information. Though prior knowledge has already been discussed, there is no way to lose the prejudice of prior

knowledge when trying to learn something new. One can only try to account for the effects and subjectivity of that prior knowledge. For example, if someone believes that the rich get wealthy by taking from the poor and are thus undeserving of their wealth, that person would favor information that supports this belief and the methods that seek to take the wealth of the rich to redistribute to the poor. At the same time this person would reject information that does not include the plundering of the rich at some point.

Remembering that one has bias before, during, and after reading new information helps in the overall deconstruction process so that a more fair comparison of subjectivity can take place. Competing ideas from competing knowledge should be evaluated as a whole. Not only is the conclusion and use of a particular body of knowledge important, but the subjectivity and assumptions of that body of knowledge must also be considered. In other words, knowledge is not right or wrong simply because it agrees or disagrees with one's already existing bias.

People should be prepared to be confronted with knowledge that has a better perspective, explanation, and conclusion of known phenomena. Resistance to better ideas reveals aspects of advocacy and adherence that may not have been considered before. It is often the case that people develop loyalty to a body of knowledge and in the process they forget the original intended goal and use of that knowledge. For example, the 2.2 billion-dollar solar energy complex in Nevada owned by NRG Energy Inc. is meant to be a cleaner and more environmentally sustainable electricity system. The fact that a bird may be killed every two minutes by the system is downplayed to focus on the appeal of solar power. In other words, in order to increase the use of solar power, other negative environmental effects are ignored. Acknowledging one's original bias assists in preventing this kind of dogmatic attitude from arising particularly in discussions of so-called religious doctrine.

DEFINE THE CONSTRUCTS BEING USED

Any and all significant terms must be explicitly defined in a way that is agreeable to all parties involved. In a conversation about difficult and complex constructs, it is easy to assume that everyone is using the same definitions and has the same understanding of those constructs. However, this is not generally, if ever, the case. As was said before, the same object could be discussed with different interpretations and meanings by people

with different perspectives. One should not assume that, when a construct is used, everyone in that conversation is using it with the same understanding and perspective. Without defining the constructs that are being used, the potential of misunderstanding and having a discussion that goes nowhere increases. In order to have a productive conversation, it is helpful to define one's constructs or have people define their constructs before trying to make a point. Examples of subjectively interpreted constructs are love, art, garbage, theft, gift, greed, and fair. A simple statement like, "That's not fair," as spoken by a child, is often not a commentary on social justice; rather, it is a way of saying, "I didn't get what I wanted." Failure to acknowledge various definitions of constructs makes a conversation general, vague, and inconclusive.

In the situation of competing definitions or when participants of a conversation have different understandings of a construct, the conversation can continue only when a definition acceptable to all participants is established. If no consensus is achieved for a definition of a construct, then it is understood that the parties are not talking about the same object. If a consensus is achieved, the agreed-upon definition should have as few exceptions in application as possible. In other words, if there are many situations where the term cannot explain or be used with that agreed upon definition, then it is likely not a very good definition. With a good definition, people can realize whether they are discussing the same topic or not and proceed to conclude the discussion through the clarity of the definition. This is particularly important when discussing wealth and what is fair.

WHO MADE THAT KNOWLEDGE AND/OR WHO PAID FOR THAT KNOWLEDGE?

It is important to know about the author of knowledge. This can be done by looking at the preface or dust jacket of a book or conducting a simple Google search. Although scholarship is supposed to be objective, the subjective training of a knowledge producer can and does make knowledge production subjective. The department and theoretical background of a knowledge producer informs what they think is, and is not, important to know. Different details are signified and discussed for various conclusions using specialized methods and criteria of evaluation. For example, in the early studies of societies around the world, scholars of religion looked at those societies and saw religion, sociologists saw culture, and business/trade-minded students saw, perhaps, economic opportunity. Information

that is recorded and shared about those societies differed because of the difference in perspective, which includes differences in signification, and eventual conclusions. Students should remember that the academic training a knowledge producer received shapes his or her perspective and influences what is ultimately produced.

Scholarship and research has always been expensive, requiring investors for academic study; this can come in the form of grants or a research budget in a large firm. For this reason, knowing who pays for the knowledge produced, is important. The source of knowledge produced in the form of documentaries or scientific studies is sometimes easy to trace because funders often want recognition for their generosity; one just has to view the credits for this information. For example, science related broadcasts on Public Broadcast stations clearly announce who provided funding for the project. Knowing who paid for production is a clue for possible bias in the final presentation.

As in an earlier example, knowing that the tobacco companies funded the early research on the dangers of smoking may cause consumers of that knowledge to be cautious about utilizing it. It is not surprising that, often, research studies are funded and sponsored by corporations that do business with the products that were researched. Energy companies often fund research on all kinds of energy projects. Though "expertise" in a field almost requires some degree of participation from those who actually conduct business in that particular field, the nature and influence of those business people should be carefully examined. Knowledge production is crucial in many marketing strategies.

If a wind energy company produced knowledge declaring the benefits of wind energy, then it is likely that none of the serious short comings of the project will be shared in the documentary or publication. Opponents of the coal industry would focus on specific details of the use of coal to create a negative impression of that industry but would leave out any details that would cause people to hesitate before joining the fight to reduce coal consumption.

WHO STANDS TO GAIN THE MOST IF THE KNOWLEDGE IS WIDELY ACCEPTED AND BELIEVED?

One must take care not to accept information prior to deconstructing it. It is important to know who will gain and benefit the most if people accept a

perspective and its knowledge as true. Who is *supposed* to gain the most and who *actually* gains the most could be different for various reasons. Note that, though many people support a particular knowledge production because of who is supposed to benefit, it is rare for the intended target group to actually benefit, even generally. For example, when a new sports stadium is planned, many promote the construction of the stadium by claiming the revenue generated will benefit the city and the local community. In reality, stadiums rarely pay for themselves, if ever, and it is the city that is stuck with a large debt. Philadelphia was scheduled to pay off the construction costs of Veterans Stadium in 2014; the stadium was torn down in 2004. Sport teams that *occasionally* use the stadium and for which the stadium was really built benefit the most by not having to pay for the construction of their playground. Though there are others who also benefit through this arrangement, it is important to note that the average person in the city does not benefit from the stadium as was advertised.

One way to find out who actually benefits from a particular knowledge production is to see who is bankrolling that knowledge production and who is paying for the advertising and marketing campaign to raise awareness about a certain issue. This information is sometimes hard to find but can be discovered with a little research. In other situations, one can figure out who will benefit through simple logic. For example, Monster Energy drinks have been accused of being the cause of a string of deaths because of their high caffeine content. Whether or not the drinks were actually responsible for those deaths is debatable. However, if there is an energy drink ban, the beneficiaries would be companies that produce other beverages with high caffeine content, since it is easy to believe their sales would rise to meet the shifting demand; Monster Energy drink sales in 2012 totaled \$2.6 billion. A Monster Energy drink ban might mean a \$2.6 billion increase in other drink companies' sales. It would probably be a good idea to consider the source of the information before one decides to spend a summer trying to raise awareness of the dangers of Monster Energy drinks, since it could be coffee companies and rival energy drink manufacturers spurring the Monster Energy drink ban. In other words, the knowledge being spread claims to be in the interest of public safety, when in reality it is likely more about market share and larger earnings.

WHO STANDS TO LOSE THE MOST IF THE KNOWLEDGE IS WIDELY ACCEPTED AND BELIEVED?

Generally, because knowledge production focuses on who will benefit if it is accepted as true, few people seriously consider who might lose a great deal if that knowledge is accepted as true. As was already said, since all knowledge production is a political process, someone always loses, and sometimes it is shocking to find out who actually loses due to a certain body of knowledge production. In our previous example, the city building the stadium is supposed to gain from the construction of it; generally, the city and the people who live there are the ones who lose the most, financially speaking. Though Philadelphia was still paying for Veterans Stadium long after it had been demolished, Philadelphia constructed two new stadiums to replace it, one for football and one for baseball. The knowledge produced concerning sports stadiums used in the marketing campaigns is clearly subjective, and those who were supposed to benefit the most end up paying the most.

In the energy drink example, the losers would not only be Monster Energy drink customers, but everyone who works for that company also suffers. This is because they will lose their jobs. Additionally, consumers in general will lose as the number of choices for energy drinks decreases. It must be remembered that the threat of energy drinks from companies like Monster Energy to the general public is subjective; some brands of coffee can contain more caffeine than Monster Energy drinks. Consideration of other perspectives is recommended before forming an opinion and conclusion on a matter.

HOW WERE THE CONSTRUCTS ORIGINALLY USED? HAS THE USE AND MEANING OF THE CONSTRUCT CHANGED OVER TIME?

This final step is a historical piece of deconstruction, which tries to understand what changes and events occurred over time that may influence the current use and understanding of particular constructs. This final step might be the most difficult and time-consuming step. It is a step that requires the most amount of research and effort. Knowledge production often sets an arbitrary chronological starting point, which gives the impression that

there is nothing important to know before that starting point. If something identified as a problem is being discussed, then the knowledge producer has the power to decide when a problem began and what events are relevant. It is possible that the understanding of current issues can be changed by setting a narrow chronological or contextual perspective. Simply defining how constructs are used now could ignore how constructs were used in the past or even how and why they were made in the past. Sometimes, constructs made in the past are forgotten and then revived with a slightly different meaning and use. Often the users of the revived construct are unaware of the problems associated with its original use.

Assimilation is an example of this phenomenon. The original application and practice of assimilation in the 1920s and 1930s is largely forgotten in contemporary America. Originally, assimilation was constructed for those living in America of western European descent. Though there were many people of Indigenous American, Hispanic, Asian, and African descent, they were not to be considered for assimilation to become American because their outward appearances would be noticeable for generations; in other words, it was believed that only white people could assimilate in America. Scholarship moved away from assimilationist ideas in the late 1950s and early 1960s with constructs such as "melting pot" and acculturation through religion. When assimilation was reintroduced after the immigration quota law (the Johnson-Reed Act) was repealed in 1965, the history and original problems of limited application of assimilation were "forgotten," and the construct is freely used and applied to many people, particularly people of color. The original use of assimilation was openly and clearly discriminatory by implying that non-whites can never become truly American. Forgetting the problems of a construct does not do away with the negative implications of its usage.¹

BENEFITS OF DECONSTRUCTION

The process of deconstruction not only helps people understand the subjectivity of their prior knowledge, but it also opens up the opportunity for people to take a different perspective or even to understand why other people believe different things. Once a "deconstructor" knows the possible source and perspective of a particular knowledge production, she or he can

¹ Jacob Kim, "Re-Writing the Silent Exodus: Reconciliation and Identity for Koreans in Diaspora Space" (PhD diss., Temple University, 2003), 72-83.

move past simple evaluations or conclusions that decide right or wrong. Instead, energy and effort are expended trying to find other perspectives that may yield more desirable or favorable results for a far greater number of people. Instead of being locked into a specific mindset, people, in general, can start to unleash a vast reservoir of creativity for better understanding or to propose better solutions to perceived problems.

Understanding the character and effect of knowledge production and deconstruction helps many to realize who actually gains or loses through a particular production of knowledge. Through this process people can choose which knowledge and perspective they will follow, knowledge that meets the needs of the learner or decision maker best.

Because everyone is a knowledge producer on some level, knowledge production is continuously happening in our minds and all around us by others, official and unofficial. This phenomenon goes largely unnoticed until and unless subjective knowledge becomes codified into law or regulation. Legislation and Regulation signify certain narrow perspectives and force choices along the lines of that knowledge; at the same time, many other perspectives fade from consideration as the regulated lines of thought rise in prominence. The topic of the "legislation of morality" is covered in the next chapter.

Knowing that knowledge is produced from a subjective perspective, individuals can understand why some details were signified and other details were not. The practice of changing perspective when a problem is encountered offers a potential that is often not considered. That potential is the unpredictable process of innovation; **innovation** can be understood as a solution proposed from a different perspective. For example, carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions are a cause for concern for many people today, particularly because of its possible role in climate change. A traditional approach to solve this problem of CO₂ emission is to reduce the amount of CO₂ produced; this is an expensive process, which is a problem for poor countries as well as many industries that provide cheap energy. An alternative approach to reducing emissions would be to do something with the CO₂ that was produced. A group of researchers in the Netherlands developed a method to produce electricity using CO₂. This approach reduces the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere while helping to provide energy at the same time.

Additionally, it is far more difficult to get angry about or be intolerant of the ideas of others when one understands the potential legitimacy of a variety of opinions and beliefs. Righteous indignation of some perceived moral lapse is mitigated by the realization that one's own perspective and values may not be shared by others or that the outrage is due to one's unique

*what if my decision hurts others?
ends deconstructs?*

perspective. One's own perspective can also be the cause of another's moral outrage. For example, one may fully support the drug war and fail to understand why anyone would oppose it. At the same time, that support for the drug war can irk many others as the unjust imposition of subjective beliefs. A proponent of the drug war who changes his or her perspective on the drug war to include not only the justification for it but also consideration of the effects and effectiveness of the war on drugs could make him or her less dogmatic about drugs and drug-related policies in society. Also, a non-violent individual who is criminalized and incarcerated by the drug war could be filled with outrage at the people who support the drug war.

PROPOSAL FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The real value of deconstruction is that it allows individuals to propose alternative solutions or courses of action simply by changing their perspectives. Knowledge production from a specific perspective makes sense and is logical and true from that point of view and possibly only from that point of view. However, that point of view is not necessarily the best or even the right choice or belief for everyone to hold. There are consequences to choices and perspectives that also must be considered that are often not seen because of the limitation of a single perspective.

An example would be the poor in other countries. One way of helping the poor in other countries is through the foreign aid policy of the U.S. It is commonly understood that the U.S. government gives money to poor countries so that they can buy the things they need to get out of poverty. This approach favors the government of that country, which receives the money and chooses who gets large portions of it, often without the interests of the poor in mind.

A student once told a joke that was supposedly well-known in Egypt. The joke is as follows: the President of the U.S. is in Egypt and sees a homeless man outside of his hotel. He gives a thousand dollars to the Egyptian President and asks him to give the money to the homeless man and to tell him that the President of the U.S. says, "God bless you." The President of Egypt looks at his aide, gives him 500 dollars, and asks him to give it to the homeless man and to tell him the president of the U.S. says, "God bless you." The aide looks at his assistant, gives him 250 dollars, and asks him to give it to the homeless man and say that the President of the U.S. says, "God bless you." Eventually, someone goes to the homeless man and tells him that the President of the U.S. says, "God bless you." This shows

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how foreign aid money rarely goes to the poor. Knowing that millions of dollars in government aid packages to other countries is largely wasted, spent on contracts to political cronies or even spent on military weapons. An alternative to the current foreign aid policy would be *private* micro-loan programs that loan money directly to poor people without the government middle man taking a piece before passing it on.

Through deconstruction we can understand how information works to the advantage of some and to the disadvantage of others, and deconstruction enables us to see just how political knowledge production really is. When there are millions and even billions of dollars at stake through government grants and awards, it is easy to see just how polarizing and political this whole process can become. To say knowledge is "political" means that what is right or wrong, better or worse, or good or bad is not as important as how profitable and beneficial that knowledge is to some powerful and influential people. It is possible that the best knowledge and perspective is adopted and used to the benefit of many people; however, given the amount of money that can be involved, this cannot be the norm. There are always people or many people who derive no benefit from particular knowledge production. Often when changing perspectives, people who enjoyed comfort and privilege through the previous knowledge production may have their perspective undermined. This is often the situation when people feel offended; people who benefit from a specific perspective get upset when that perspective is shown to be subjective and not absolute. This feeling is magnified when what has been understood as a fact-based "good thing" is actually detrimental to an unconsidered group of people.

THE OFFENDED AND DISORIENTED

When learning deconstruction, some people experience liberation of sorts. This group of people is no longer bound by the rules and moral codes that always seemed arbitrary. While some people are filled with a previously unknown feeling of freedom, many others who learn deconstruction get **offended** or disoriented. The sense is that, through deconstruction, the beliefs a person has held for many years have just been undermined, and it seems as though they are being told their beliefs are wrong. People with firm religious beliefs who were taught in terms of absolutes tend to feel particularly defensive and threatened. Still others are confused because facts that served as reference points in life are no longer there to provide context and orientation; losing context and reference can be very disorienting. The

author personally experienced both freedom and confusion after learning deconstruction.

All of this is easily resolved when one remembers that deconstruction and the idea of knowledge production are simply perspectives about knowledge and learning. It is stated and presented in this way to enable examination and discussion. The deconstruction exercise can be temporary. One can always go back to one's original perspective with which one is most comfortable, if so desired. Even if one returns to one's original perspective, there is the understanding of the existence of other perspectives, which gives rise to a better form of tolerance than is currently taught in schools.

It is hoped that, eventually, when one is ready, everything in one's prior knowledge may be examined, so that knowledge "reconstruction" may take place. This book will not discuss reconstruction in detail; however, the possibilities of reconstruction are exciting. Even small changes in perspective can open up and make visible certain things that were not visible before. Rather than getting trapped in old knowledge, which is often narrow and conservative, one may introduce truly revolutionary ideas that could change the world, how it is understood, and how people live in it. A recent example is the internet. The internet has changed how people do business, share knowledge, communicate with each other, and so much more. People who refuse to change and adapt by advancing with society are in danger of becoming irrelevant, and businesses are at risk of going bankrupt.

Technology and innovation open doors all over the world in ways people could not imagine before. This innovation and change can be frightening and destabilizing to the point that people will resist and eschew change and innovation. This is always the choice people face. There will always be knowledge that does not appeal to or favor us. However, this is the political nature of all knowledge production. It should be a comfort to all that human knowledge production is never final.

SUMMARY

Deconstruction allows students to examine the source of knowledge, which may influence their decision to keep or change that knowledge. Through deconstruction, one understands that knowledge is subjective, rather than absolute, which allows for a more tolerant, critical, and creative society. While deconstruction undermines the basic beliefs of students, they always have the option to maintain a previous point of view or reconstruct their

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personal vision of the world. With this technique for analyzing knowledge, students are no longer passive learners but become active critics and innovators of new knowledge. *what about reconstruction?*

QUESTIONS FOR DECONSTRUCTION

1. Deconstruct knowledge produced regarding Walmart.
2. Deconstruct the idea of tolerance as it is often taught and applied in secondary schools today.
3. What would be the result of deconstructing one's own beliefs?