

Construction & Strangification

The Philosophy of
Friedrich Wallner

Edited by Jan Brousek

Jan Brousek (ed.)
Construction & Strangification

Edited by
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For my “Doktorvater” Fritz Wallner and my grandson Mathys

Dedication

The idea for this book project was born at the end of 2020, the year in which Friedrich Wallner celebrated his 75th birthday. However, neither 2020 nor the following years were characterized by major festivities. The originally planned celebrations for his golden doctoral jubilee in 2022 also fell victim to the pandemic.

Although the legal framework for celebrating festivities has at least been in place again since 2023, the global political situation still offers limited cause for joy and peace of mind. This is due to the fact that the fear of the pandemic has been overshadowed by other uncertainties, such as unrest and even wars.

These crisis-ridden years, which my generation as well as my own had been spared up until then, do not necessarily provide the basis for boundless optimism, but they do make it all the more clear how crucial it is not to rest on the laurels of previous generations, and that critical thinking, skepticism and the ability to reflect must be constantly trained. Even though thinking takes place in structures, it remains a process, a path that must be continuously followed. And this is precisely what Friedrich Wallner created with the Vienna School of Constructive Realism a basis for looking optimistically into the future. In doing so, he prepared the ground and equipped us with the tools – the “intellectual footwear” – that enables us to leave the beaten track of thinking and set foot on new, albeit strenuous or even unpleasant but more than ever necessary paths of thought. In this context, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Fritz Wallner on behalf of the contributors to this book.

Although Professor Wallner is going to celebrate his 80th birthday – on July 21, 2025 – in the year this book will have been published it is not intended to be a *Festschrift* in the conventional sense of a commemorative publication. This anthology not only aims to look back, but also, or rather, to look to the future against the backdrop of the current situation and develop new perspectives on current challenges and creating solutions.

We are therefore looking ahead and hope that this book will provide future generations with another tool in the toolbox of problem solving – and “All Life is Problem Solving” (Popper). The fact that my first grandchild, Mathys, had his first birthday in the same year as this book was published is highly symbolic to me. This book should also be dedicated to him, as a representative of the coming generations with their still unforeseeable challenges.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank the donator of this book project, the Science Department of the City of Vienna's Department of Culture (MA 7), for their financial support, without which this project would probably not have been realized. Although the majority of the work involved in such a project often remains unpaid or at least underpaid anyway, it still makes a big difference whether at least part of the financial costs are covered by a funding body. It also makes a difference insofar as a positive response (commitment) from a funding body is always of great symbolic importance in terms of motivation to actually take on this project. At this point, I would also like to mention that the MA 7 always responded to my questions and showed understanding for my concerns, not least the extension of the project duration.

In this context, I would like to thank all the contributors to this anthology in general. Specifically, I would like to thank them not only for their wonderful contributions, but also for their patience, as the road to completion was much longer than I had expected or hoped for. In this context, I would especially like to thank those for their patience who submitted their contributions very soon and/or almost ready for printing. For the aforementioned, the process may have seemed incomprehensibly long.

In the course of this, the jubilarian inevitably also had to be patient. However, patience was not his only contribution to this book. During the preparatory discussions with Friedrich Wallner it soon became clear that this book was not to be a mere *Festschrift*. He did not only take on the role of a *peer-reviewer*, but also wrote commentaries on individual contributions that are printed in this book, for which I would like to express my gratitude, as it represents a certain peculiarity; and is at least to some extent reminiscent of Paul Arthur Schilpp's approach. Most of all, however, I would like to thank Friedrich Wallner for giving me the opportunity to discuss the potential and actual contributions to this book in detail with him; which I consider a great gift for a philosopher – received from a great philosopher.

Sincere thanks are also due to another great philosopher, Hans Rainer Sepp, the series editor, for his willingness to include such a volume in the *Libri Nigri* series from the very beginning. If you look at the list of works published in this series (see the last pages of this book), there is no doubt that the present volume would not be in better hands in any other book series not edited by Friedrich Wallner himself. Nevertheless, or all the more so, I would like to thank Professor Sepp for the trust he has placed in me to carry out this task in an appropriate manner. Finally, I would also like to thank him for the editorial

assistance he always used to provide me on short notice – with a speed and precision that is inexplicable to me.

Further on, I want to thank my mother, Irene Megyery, a retired English teacher, who laboriously struggled with me through my attempts to translate my two contributions, which originally appeared in German, into – hopefully – generally understandable English – many thanks to you!

The greatest thanks, however, go to Lukas Nagl, whom I have counted among my friends for over a quarter of a century and who has become my best and closest friend over the last few years. Up to now, I have had many – but mainly private – projects with him. That has changed with this book project. Without him, this book would have been a pile of wildly more or less formatted manuscripts at worst, or a dilettantishly laid out book at best. Thanks to him and his tireless work over days and nights based on his extensive know-how as a graphic designer, he provided me with invaluable help – thanks a million!

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Preface

As the title suggests, this book project aims to provide a comprehensive examination of Friedrich Wallner's philosophical life's work, focusing on the *Vienna School of Constructive Realism*, which he founded (see Slunecko 1997, among others).

The main interest of this book is a method of philosophy of science that was born at the University of Vienna some 35 years ago. From 1987 until his retirement in 2010, Friedrich (G.) or Fritz Wallner was a full professor of philosophy with a special focus on the philosophy of science (epistemology) at the University of Vienna. During that time he developed the *Vienna School of Constructive Realism*, as evidenced by more than 200 articles, around 40 anthologies or editorships and a good 20 monographs.

However, Constructive Realism (CR) was not only founded geographically in Vienna, but also emerged significantly in the debate with Viennese philosophical schools of thought; namely in critical debate with – and differentiation from – the *Logical Empiricism* of the *Vienna Circle* (see Carnap 1934) on the one hand, Karl Popper's *Critical Rationalism* (see Popper 1935, 1994, see Miller 1974) on the other, as well as Paul Feyerabend's *Relativism* (see Feyerabend 1986, see Schulz 2012). Probably the most significant influence on the development of CR, however, came from Ludwig Wittgenstein's work (see Wittgenstein 1953, 1969–75). With recourse to Wittgenstein's concept of language-game, the CR succeeded in developing a Viennese constructivist school of thought that has overcome the deficits of the *Constructivisms* that had become popular in the second half of the last century (cf. Reich 2002) – such as *Radical Constructivism* or the *Bielefeld School* (see Förster 1985, Glasersfeld 1997) and *Methodological Constructivism* or the *Erlangen* or *Marburg School* (see Janich 1992, 2006; Lorenzen 1969) – and offers solutions to the resulting epistemological dilemmas (see Janich 1993, Schelberger 2012, Schulz 2014).

This epistemological position has met with lively interest in non-European and, in particular, Asian countries for decades, especially in the context of intercultural debates with culturally different knowledge systems.

Through countless text studies, conferences and lecture tours by Friedrich Wallner and his companions, this approach has been made accessible in various cultural and disciplinary contexts. The intensive cooperation with colleagues from numerous countries, especially China, Korea, India, Iran, Morocco, Brazil and Chile, not only increased Vienna's level of awareness and

high reputation in these countries, but also made the scientific achievements of this city internationally visible and thus enhanced Vienna's reputation as an international center of science. Wallner's works, especially monographs on CR, were translated from German and English into many languages: Arabic, Chinese, Farsi, Japanese, Portuguese/Brazilian as well as Spanish and Urdu. In the course of awarding the Cross of Honor of the Republic of Austria for Science and Art 1st Class, the then Head of the Section for Science at the Ministry of Science logically described Professor Wallner as the person who intensively studied and interpreted Wittgenstein's work and made it famous throughout the world.

Surprisingly, Wallner's work was far less well received in Europe and the USA, i.e. the so-called "West". Although his early work on Wittgenstein in the 1980s also met with lively interest in Europe – especially in Italy (see, among others, Wallner 1983a, 1983b), the retrospectively far more significant conclusions drawn from it for the field of philosophy of science (see, among others, Wallner 1992a, 1992b, 1997, 2002, 2011; cf. Pietschmann/Wallner 1995) are still not being adequately discussed in European countries. This has been at best the case for Spain and Portugal.

In Vienna, the place of origin of CR, Wallner's concepts and methods have established themselves as an epistemological basis in individual disciplines, such as psychology and psychotherapy science in particular (see Greiner 2020, Greiner/Jandl 2015, Greiner/Jandl/Wallner 2010, Slunecko 1996), but there are many academic fields in which the potential of this philosophical school has not yet been fully recognized. This is somehow disappointing, as Friedrich Wallner shares the credo that *philosophy must become effective* with Karl Raimund Popper, to whom he maintained personal contact for many years. In this sense, this book project is meant to contribute to the visibility of the *Viennese School of Constructive Realism* and the *effectiveness* of its philosophy.

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Introduction

How to make philosophy effective or how to make one's bubble burst

Jan Brousek

„Bringen Sie Ihre Blase zum Platzen“

Alexander Van der Bellen

In his opening speech at the Salzburg Festival in July 2023, the Austrian Federal President, Alexander Van der Bellen, made it clear that we need to burst the bubbles of our thoughts, actions and activities because the decreasing acceptance of other opinions and the lack of respect for other world-views is becoming an increasing threat to liberal democracy:

“Too often we miss respectful interaction. We hardly discuss with each other anymore, we often only confirm our own opinions, and if someone disagrees with us, we hardly hear him or her because they are too far away: on the other side of the rift that runs through our society, soundproofed and protected in the bubble of social media.” (A. Van der Bellen cited in Völker 2023b, translation JB)

With the rift “that runs through our society”, Van der Bellen is referring to the question of how to deal with contradicting world-views in general, and in specific he refers to the social consequences of the pandemic and the increasingly noticeable tendencies towards political radicalization since then. By breaking open hermetic spaces of thought, or as he puts it, *bursting our bubbles*, Van der Bellen was the first to point to a strategy for how the social reconciliation process can succeed, which was grandly announced by the Austrian Federal Government at the beginning of 2023 (Völker 2023a, Seidl/Völker 2023) but has since then gradually degenerated into an empty phrase.¹ Van der Bellen

1 In this context, it should be mentioned that the Austrian Academy of Sciences published a study on the socio-political implications and effects of the pandemic that is well worth reading (see Bogner 2023). It is indeed positive that this undertaking was accompanied by a dialog process to which random samples of people from all over Austria were invited and in which 319 people actually actively were participating. However, it is a political misconception to assume that this can replace a broad-based social reconciliation process, comprehensively supported by political actors and widely disseminated by the media in order to involve broader sections of the public – in other words, an approach that would meet the requirements for an adequate reappraisal of a once-in-a-century-event. Unfortunately, all

advises us to “confuse algorithms” by “following those whose opinions perhaps don’t quite match our own” in order to “see sections of reality that we would never see otherwise” and, based on this, to “develop a common point of view” (Völker 2023b, translation JB). What Van der Bellen thus demands of people can be understood in the language of Constructive Realism (CR) as “strangification” – and therefore as the central method of CR for gaining knowledge. This book, which aims to provide an overview of Friedrich Wallner’s philosophical work, can also be seen as a guide to the implementation of Van der Bellen’s vision to *burst our bubbles*. In this sense, *bursting our bubbles* challenges us to reflect on our own thinking mode and tread new paths of thinking, which – as the result of an open-ended process – can lead to the development of new perspectives on reality.

At this point we can reconnect with the need for philosophy (of science) to become *effective*, as central concern of both Karl Raimund Popper and Friedrich Wallner. When a philosophical school of thought claims to be *effective*, the question inevitably arises as to what this means and in what different spheres of human life this should be the case. As the core concern of CR is a profoundly epistemological one, the greatest hope for *effectiveness* would probably be that CR could provide an answer to the “demarcation problem” that has remained unresolved for more than 100 years: the problem that the boundary between *knowledge* and *belief* or *science* and *pseudoscience* cannot be clearly drawn. However, CR does not so much provide an answer to the question of what science is and what it is not. It rather shows that the question in this form is misleading because the formulation of the question suggests that there could be a – *placeless* and *timeless* – universally valid answer to this question. From CR’s point of view, this is about as absurd as the idea that there would be a universally valid concept of beauty that all past, present and future inhabitants of planet Earth would share. In this sense, most of the representatives of CR would probably agree with the epistemologist Larry Laudan in so far that the demarcation problem is a problem for which there is no solution (cf. Traxler 2023). However, this does not mean to stop at this point, nor does it mean to give up the philosophy’s need to be effective.

How philosophy can become effective shall be answered in this anthology by using the example of CR. To be more precise, *being effective* in this

these important measures have not taken place by now. Another fact is that the right-wing populist party, FPÖ, has constantly been gaining votes since then. The extent to which these facts are related remain to be explored. Be that as it may but in order to return to the activities of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, from an epistemological perspective, particularly interesting are the “Vienna Theses on science-based advice for politics and society” (ÖAW/Leopoldina 2023).

context means to show how a certain philosophical position can contribute to an *improvement* in living conditions by overcoming sociocultural and/or disciplinary shortcomings. In this context, “improvement” can probably be understood most accurately in the sense of expanding the possibilities of human action. The philosophical examination of (scientific) concepts, based on CR’s inherent process of “strangification”, should not only lead to philosophical reflections. Rather should (scientific) concepts be deconstructed and reconstructed with new or at least additional facets of meaning. This is to be done by revealing the prerequisites that legitimize a certain interpretation of a specific term or concept. Referring to the concept of beauty, this would mean that we become aware of the conditions that lead to something being qualified as beautiful, i.e. the cultural or whatever kind of preconditions that lead to a consensus within a certain socio-culturally – or also disciplinary – defined group about what is beautiful and what is not. With regard to medical science, the critical examination and – if necessary – conscious adaptation of medical concepts widen the possibilities of therapeutic interventions in the event of illness and ways of maintaining health. The same is true in the context of politics: such an endeavor enables a far more critical and context-sensitive examination of political positions and their causes as well as implications for peaceful coexistence.

This points to the fact that the problem of demarcation within philosophy of science is not just a problem in the philosophical ivory tower. The case of the pandemic has even shown that the question of how to draw the line between science and non-science or between *knowledge* and *belief* is one with serious socio-political explosive force. Therefore, a (scientific) structure of thought is needed that avoids both cultural relativism and universalism, in the sense of a return to supposedly *supra-culturally* valid concepts. A way is needed to raise general awareness of the fact that science and scientific findings can claim to be binding even if they are not valid without restriction in every context. In other words: even if scientific theses are not valid in all possible worlds, they can still claim commitment. Science is a human construct and is therefore no more *placeless* and *timeless* than human beings can be *placeless* and *timeless*. However, this does not mean that scientific theses get “scientifically” less *credible*, quite the opposite: according to CR ensuring “scientificity” or *scientific credibility* means to gain scientific knowledge in the sense of becoming aware of the limits of the validity of certain systems of propositions.

In this context it is enlightening to refer to the so-called *problem of universals*, which has been discussed since the beginning of philosophical thinking. With the development of philosophical-constructivist positions, at least

the dogmatic idea of *universals* and universally valid interpretation of scientific “findings” was thought to have collapsed. Yet somehow, dogmatic thinking and the desire for *universals* seem to crop up again and again, at least against the backdrop of European culture and the socio-political challenges currently facing Western societies. In this regard, the phenomenon of political radicalization can be seen as political manifestations of supposedly needed *universals* or ultimate universally valid truths in order to make political positions appear binding in the sense of providing commitment. Consequently, the widely known polemical statement by the famous physicist and Nobel Prize winner Richard Feynman that philosophy of science is as important for the sciences as the scientific discipline of ornithology is for birds (see Trubody 2016) proves to be as pointed as it is wrong. The absence of epistemological reflections either leads to an absolutistic interpretation of scientific “knowledge” or to a relativist one, which is implicitly absolutistic as well (cf. Brousek 2017, 2020a, 2020b). Science cannot stand for creating knowledge without a critical (re-)appraisal of the meaning of science and its claim to truth as well as the scope of its findings.

In this respect, science needs philosophy of science in order to make its “findings” understandable as such. Otherwise even scientific findings can take on the character of arbitrariness. In extreme cases, they can even become “meaningless”, as the poor political performance in the course of the coronavirus-crisis in many countries, not least in Austria, has shown. Quite a few of the measures taken at the time to contain the pandemic were “understandably” not (or no longer) supported by the population due to their incomprehensibility.² In this context, we have experienced that the combination of epistemological reductionism on the one hand and dilettantishly argued political action on the other hand is an optimal breeding ground for political radicalization (cf. Brousek 2020a ; Brousek/Wallner 2018).

2 The self-critical reappraisal of the biggest mistakes and failures on the part of politicians and the media, which is at least to some extent taking place five years after the outbreak of the pandemic, clearly points in this direction. See respectively “listen” to the radio programs “Das Virus und die Medien” (“The virus and the media”) by Stefan Kappacher and Viktoria Waldegger (2025) as well as “Wie die Pandemie unser Leben veränderte” (“How the pandemic changed our lives”) by Monika Feldner-Zimmermann (2025), both broadcasted by the public Austrian radio station Ö1, which is regarded as Austria’s “cultural channel”. See also the newspaper commentaries (“Kommentare der Anderen”) by Martin Sprenger (2025) and Klaus Kraemer (2025) in the Austrian daily newspaper *Der Standard* from March 29/30, 2025.

Constructive Realism can serve to overcome such fundamental intellectual challenges of our time, due to the development of a new type of thinking structure for the sciences (in an interdisciplinary sense). The special feature of CR is that it offers an alternative to universalistic claims to absoluteness on the one hand and relativistic viewpoints on the other. In this respect, CR positions itself beyond (radically) constructivist as well as beyond (naively) realist viewpoints, whereby scientific propositional systems can nevertheless claim to be binding despite their qualification as constructs (see e.g. Brousek 2017, 2020a, 2020b; Greiner 2005; Wallner 1990, 2002). Following and further developing Wittgenstein's (1953) concept of *language-game*, CR and its epistemological method of "strangification" have made it possible to develop a procedure that takes into account the increasing awareness of the cultural dependency of science (see Wallner 1997). Moreover, it also serves scientists as a reflection tool for understanding their own scientific constructs (see Greiner 2005; cf. Wallner 1992). "Strangification" means to place a statement or system of propositions – such as a scientific thesis – in a different disciplinary or cultural context and to understand it from the perspective of that context. The irritations that may result from *strangifying* serve to gain knowledge about unreflected assumptions and presuppositions, so to speak disciplinary blind spots, which underlie the *strangified* sentence system.

The basic idea of this procedure is based on one of Wittgenstein's (1953) central findings with regard to the human capacity of language: a *language-game* cannot become comprehensible by itself. It requires a different context, a translation so to speak, in order to become comprehensible (cf. Ochoa 1995). The implicit methodological or disciplinary blind spots that come to light throughout the process point to the paradigmatic, cultural or even life-world limits of the applicability or validity of the claimed "scientific" statements. This method of translation is necessary in order to take account of the complexity of (the) reality of our lives and not to reduce "the" world and "reality" to just a single (methodological) perspective. However, by definition, this is only possible through dialog between people from different scientific disciplines, cultural or subcultural contexts; in order to – interdisciplinary and interculturally – explore their subjective perspectives and life-worlds with each other (cf. Bohm 1996; Brousek 2017, 2020b; Hashi 2011, 2015).

It should be clear from the above that the process of strangification is by no means just an epistemological instrument, but rather a hermeneutic tool for the "improvement" of human communication and, above all, socio-political pacification. As for politics, such a "strangifying" dialog can work as de-radicalization program (see Wallner/Brousek 2018). In the very best case

it can even foster reconciliation between people with contradicting political positions or people who represent incompatible narratives, such as historical ones (see Brousek/Pirker 2016; Brousek/Grafenauer/Wintersteiner/Wutti 2020). In the context of historical research and its communication, it should be noted that the subjective micro-histories offer a possibility to connect incompatible macro-histories.³ Consequently, we need subjective micro-histories in order to be able to understand the scope of validity of supposedly objective macro-histories. This train of thought can probably be better understood with reference to Wittgenstein's metaphor of "family resemblance": micro-histories function as the *interlocking fibers of a thread* that connects the partly incompatible narratives of macro-history. In such an understanding, a specific historical narrative can still be binding despite the presence of a contradictory narrative, namely by *commitment* through *connectedness*.

The epistemological concept on which these explanations about history and politics are based, are founded on a deeply democratic understanding of science, in which the scientific qualification of a statement can be understood as the result of a (democratic) process of negotiation; in contrast to the autocratic assertion of supposedly unquestionable objectivity. In order to prevent science from degenerating into an autocratic or even dictatorial system or a substitute religion with eternally valid truths, openness and awareness of the central importance of subjectivity for the creation of knowledge are required.

In this respect, the book project aims to demonstrate the experiences and possibilities of a *constructive-realist* methodology for different disciplines and the exchange between them. The associated training in *constructive-realist* thinking is intended to raise awareness of a critical and self-reflective approach to "knowledge", not least in order to counter any misuse of science in the public sphere. To this end, long-time companions from different phases of the development of CR, as well as current research colleagues from various disciplines from all over the world, have been invited to shed light on different aspects of Wallner's work from several disciplinary and cultural perspectives. The nineteen contributors from Asia and Europe as well as North and South America explain and evaluate Friedrich Wallner's work and show the numerous fields of application and possibilities for further development, but of course also point out the vagueness and limitations of CR. Accordingly, the book with its eighteen contributions is divided into five sections.

3 Cf. the project "Dialogisches Erinnern – la memoria dialogica – dialoško spominjanje" (dialogical remembrance) in the course of which teaching materials that use micro-histories to convey and understand macro-histories have been created. For further information see the trilingual website: <https://dialogischeserinnern.at>

The first of these sections, *Intellectual situatedness, related currents and discussion of central basic concepts of Constructive Realism*, serves first and foremost to situate the school of thought of Constructive Realism in the context of both Eastern and Western thought. Furthermore some basic concepts of CR are explained and critically reflected.

The first of the four contributions in this section is written by Vincent Shen, a long-time companion of Friedrich Wallner. Although Shen had already died, before the idea of this book was born, it was Friedrich Wallner's firm wish to include Shen's essay in this volume. "*Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism*" offers a very precise outline of the thought structure and clearly illuminates the thought motifs of CR. Entirely in the spirit of strangification, this is done from a cultural perspective that does not correspond to the one CR has developed from. The fact that Shen attempts to understand CR against the backdrop of Confucianism and Taoism is particularly interesting, as CR is often said to be quite close to Far Eastern thought. And yet the attentive reader may ask themselves whether Christian thought motifs can be detected within Vincent Shen's discussion of CR. His descriptions namely suggest that he is trying to guide the ship of thought, floating on the high seas of uncertainty, into the safe harbor of "universalizability".

The contribution by historian and philosopher Helmut Reinalter, "*Aufklärung, Vernunft und Vernunftkritik*" (*Enlightenment, reason and critique of reason*), is of a completely different nature. It does not attempt to entangle itself in constructive-realist thinking, but rather acts from a meta-perspective in order to better locate CR in the current discourse on enlightenment and reason. In contrast to Vincent Shen this happens against the background of Western thought. In this context, Reinalter critically examines in how far the Enlightenment of the 18th century influenced some negative developments of modernity. Reinalter raises the question whether the Enlightenment's central concepts do not even carry a hidden tendency towards totalitarianism, fascism and fundamentalism; which, incidentally, is directly related to the introductory considerations outlined above. In this context, CR is shown as one of several critical approaches to reason. In this regard, it is not only possible to identify overlaps between Wallner's CR and Wolfgang Welsch's motifs of *Transversal Reason*. It also shows potential for development in the direction of Carola Meier-Seethaler's or Ronald de Sousa's approaches, for whose integration CR certainly offers points of contact.

Nicole Holzenthal is not only one of the most distinguished experts on CR, but also on Gustavo Bueno's *Philosophical Materialism*. In her article "*Voraussetzungen für Wissenschaften – Ansätze von Mach und Husserl, Herder*

und Fichte aus heutiger Kritik” (*Prerequisites for science – approaches by Mach and Husserl, Herder and Fichte from today’s criticism*), she delves deeply into the thinking of CR and challenges some of CR’s central basic concepts. With recourse to Mach, Husserl, Herder and Fichte, Holzenthal discusses the problems that arise from the use of the terms “culture” and “lifeworld”. According to her such hypostatized terms should be handled more carefully in order to avoid conceptual blurring; not least with the intention of better addressing cultural plurality.

The first section concludes with a contribution by Gerhard Klünger, who, in addition to numerous editorships in the field of Constructive Realism, has rendered great services to CR, above all with the publication of the *Dictionary of Constructive Realism* (Klünger 2011). The starting point of Klünger’s reflections is what he sees as the CR’s unsatisfactory answer to the question of the possibility of knowledge. And to a certain extent, this is quite understandable. For the CR presupposes that there is an ontological reality (actuality), but refrains from addressing the question of its “nature”; precisely, because it is assumed in a constructive-realist approach that the “actuality” is not accessible to our human instruments of cognition. In his contribution, “*Constructing a model that enables insight*”, Klünger nevertheless attempts to bridge the gap between epistemic and ontological reality. To do so, he draws on the concept of an *absolute spirit*, which Wallner threw overboard in the course of conceptualizing CR, rejecting metaphysical concepts. However, falling back on such a concept does not have to be a step backwards. If the *absolute spirit* is understood as a condition of possibility for the emergence of *relationality*, or as the “Field of ‘Between’” (Hashi 2011, 2015) of interpersonal communication, it could indeed open up new paths for the emergence of binding knowledge. In any case, Gerhard Klünger’s as well as Nicole Holzenthal’s contributions show that even within the school of Constructive Realism there is a vital need for further critical and even more in-depth discussion of CR’s implicit presuppositions itself.

The second section, *Constructive Realism in medical research*, is aimed at the question of how cultural plurality can be dealt with in the context of different medical systems.

This section starts off with the article “*Constructive Realism: Biomedicine and Classical Chinese Medicine*” by Keekok Lee – a philosopher who is very familiar with both Western analytical and classical Chinese thinking. It should be emphasized that Keekok Lee and Friedrich Wallner have only been in philosophical exchange for a few years. But both, independently of each other, have come to quite compatible conclusions in their examination of Chinese

medicine and the challenges posed by the coexistence of culturally different medical systems. This is exciting insofar as Lee's approach to this problem was primarily inspired from analytical philosophy, whereas Wallner tended to abandon this school of thought; because in his view – at least in its early stages – analytical philosophy did not offer sufficient potential for adequately dealing with the challenge of interculturality. It is therefore all the more exciting to approach this question through the eyes of an analytical philosopher, like Keekok Lee.

The starting point for my own contribution in this section is the seemingly mysterious results of acupuncture studies. My article's main point of criticism is that the mysteriousness of the results of such studies does not lead to a questioning of the methodology on which the studies are based. On the contrary, it leads to a questioning of the scientific credibility of acupuncture – despite the evidence of its effectiveness. Consequently, the paper *“The map is not the territory – or: the function of Constructive Realism to understand Chinese medicine”* demonstrates the urgent need for rethinking the idea of commitment in the context of research at the interface of different cultures. As an alternative a concept of “relational” commitment is being propagated.

Ephraim Ferreira Medeiros and Fengli Lan are two proven experts in the theory and practice of Chinese medicine. As can be seen from the selected bibliography (see appendix), at least Fengli Lan is also a long-standing research colleague and companion of Fritz Wallner. In their article, *“Visual Representations of the Body and Constructive Realism – The case of ‘Der Mensch als Industriepalast’ (Man as Industrial Palace) and the Neijing tu (內經圖)”*, Medeiros and Lan discuss two images of human physiology which were created in the same era of world history but still are completely different and largely incompatible. Although their approach is characterized by a comparative methodology, it can and should be understood as an invitation and guide to cultural “strangification”. In this way, the unreflected assumptions which lead to interpretations that may be hardly or not at all compatible with the original texts can be revealed.

This brings us right to the heart of the topic to which Andrea-Mercedes Riegel's contribution is dedicated. In her article *“How to deal with Chinese medical texts”*, the sinologist and practicing TCM therapist analyzes the difficulties that arise when the cultural context remains unreflected in the course of a text's translations. In her paper Riegel analyzes translations of Chinese medical texts that appear “strange” and incomprehensible due to a lack of reflection on cultural factors. By doing so, Riegel impressively shows what may happen when a text gets involuntary “strangified” throughout the process of a

translation. From the point of view of heuristics such an irritating translation offers at least a *necessary* condition for strangification in a constructive-realist sense. However, in contrast to the translators of the discussed texts, Andrea-Mercedes Riegel takes the step from the *necessary* to the *sufficient* condition of strangification. This is the case as Riegel consciously reflects upon the “strangifying” irritation of the discussed texts. And by doing so, she offers knowledge in the sense of implicit preconditions which were unconsciously constitutive for a text's specific interpretation and translation.

The third section *Construction and strangification as core methodologies of psychology and psychotherapy* aims to reveal the significance of CR for this field of research and practice. As the topic of health is a domain that is considered a natural science, at least in Western latitudes, it is clear that CR cannot only contribute to a reshaping of the relationship between different cultures, but also between *nature* and *culture* and thus between *nature* and *humans* – including their own “nature”. Significantly, the disciplines of psychology and psychotherapy, which are located at the interface of human *naturalness* and “*cultural naturalness*”⁴, are those for whose epistemological self-understanding CR was and is of the most lasting influence (see e.g. Greiner 2020, Greiner/Jandl/Wallner 2010, Greiner/Jandl 2015, Slunecko 1996).

The renowned and widely known psychologist Giseler Guttman provides the introduction with his very personal, but nonetheless scientifically enlightening contribution: “*Inventing instead of discovering – Neuropsychology expressing thanks to Fritz Wallner*”. Guttman specifically refers to the role of Wallner's CR as an important epistemological basis in order to overcome blind spots in psychology in general and experimental psychology in specific.

Kurt Greiner is probably Friedrich Wallner's most long-standing “student” – if one may put it so pointedly – and probably the one who understood the process of strangification like no other and, above all, made it comprehensible to others (see e.g. Greiner 2005). Consequently, in his contribution „*Freuds Wallnermorphose – Vom Verfremdungsimperativ im Konstruktiven Realismus zur irritationslogischen Analytik in der Experimentellen Psychotherapiewissenschaft*“ (*Freud's Wallnermorphosis – from the imperative of strangification in Constructive Realism to irritation-logical analysis in experimental psychotherapy science*), he shows how Wallner's epistemological imperative of strangification can be implemented in the context of psychotherapy science. For this

4 This refers to a coinage by Franz Martin Wimmer, which reads “Kultürlichkeit” in German language (see Wimmer 2007: 7).

reason, he uses the example of an *irritation-logical model of reflection* which reveals how reflexive knowledge production can be achieved through a strangification of psychotherapeutic theorems.

Erwin Parfy can also quite rightly be described as one of Wallner's early students. Working as a practicing psychotherapist, he devotes his contribution to answering the question "*How 'Strangification' can help to orientate in the field of psychotherapy*". Readers interested in psychotherapy will find it exciting to see how the skills acquired in dealing with CR can be applied in psychotherapeutic practice. On the basis of a constructive-realist approach an integration of a variety of psychotherapeutic concepts can succeed, even if they are partly based on incompatible assumptions.

The compatibility and/or incompatibility of approaches can also be seen as the initial question of Martin J. Jandl's contribution "*Die Philosophie der Dauer und die Subjektwissenschaft*" (*The philosophy of duration and the science of the subject*). According to Jandl, the intention of linking the works of Henry Bergson and Klaus Holzkamp may seem absurd. However, Jandl is not interested in using one to argue against the other. Rather does he see the attempt to generate a position by comparing the two different discourses as a possible strategy for strangification. This is especially the case as the undertaking is based on the intention of looking beyond the two thinkers and the implicit propositions of their work.

Following the discussion of the significance of CR for psychology, psychotherapy and psychotherapy science, the fourth section, *Constructive Realism as epistemological basis for cultural studies and politics*, opens up the field of the humanities in the direction of social and cultural sciences. The first of the contributions in this broad field of CR applications is that by Kwon Jong Yoo, who has been working with Friedrich Wallner for around twenty years. Referring to this, the contribution "*Prof. Wallner's Constructive Realism and East Asian Studies of Philosophy in Korea*" oscillates between personal memories of walking philosophical paths together and outlining these paths; and not least the significance of the CR in its application to East Asian philosophy.

My own contribution in this section applies constructive-realist thought motifs to questions of political science; and therefore attempts to use CR as philosophy of political science. In contrast to the pessimistic tone of the title "*The failure of democracy as the failure of conventional concepts of commitment*", the contribution rather aims to use CR as epistemological basis to find a way out of the current crisis that liberal democracies are increasingly confronted with. Its main hypothesis is that the currently observable phenomenon of growing populism and political radicalization tendencies within western

democracies can be regarded as a problem of commitment of knowledge. As previously done in my contribution in the section on medicine, I also advocate a *relational* concept of *commitment*, beyond universalism and relativism, as philosophical basis for political practice.

The following article almost seamlessly follows the methodological reflections above. However, “*Die Corona-Krise als Krise der politischen Praxis*” (*The corona-crisis as a crisis of political practice*) is written in a strongly essayistic form. It deals with the often unfortunately – from an epistemological point of view – dilettantish political action in times of the pandemic. As it is written in present tense out of the perspective of that time it reads like a strangification from a today’s point of view. However, the article does not only address constructive-realist thought motifs through a strangification in terms of time. Rather, the concept of strangification becomes clearer by criticizing common – but reductionist – forms of interdisciplinarity in the course of the political and media debate on the phenomenon of the pandemic. With recourse to CR, a form of “*strangifying*” *interdisciplinarity* is propagated.

The philosopher Giridhari Lal Pandit enters a completely different field with his contribution and even opens up a new “world”. In his article “*Unravelling the existence and mystery of the World-4 of works of music: a core-contextual structural approach to research in music education*”, he undertakes nothing less than to expand Karl Raimund Popper’s well-known theory of “three-worlds”. By developing the idea a fourth “world” in Popper’s sense, he enables a completely new approach to understand the phenomenon of music and its meaning. From an epistemological perspective, the various interpretations of musical pieces, according to Pandit, face similar challenges to those in the case of linguistic translations of texts; based on the assumption that the linguistic landscapes of a language are comparable to the landscapes of a country. Pandit’s contribution is deliberately placed at this point because his approach represents a kind of transition to the last section of this anthology.

The fifth and final section of this book, *Strangification as implicit tool in other philosophical streams: a creative outlook*, is dedicated to related streams of thought which offer the exploration of new fields or the integration of other methods in the context of CR.

And this is precisely how Fernanda Bernardo’s contribution “*The challenge of compassion against sacrificial war – Derrida and the passion of the animal*”, can and should be read. The proven expert on Derrida’s deconstructivism draws parallels with the strangification motif through her deconstructivist approach. The starting point of her reflections is Derrida’s statement that “the animal looks at us”. This challenges the reader to undertake a change of per-

spective that is ultimately capable of questioning the foundations of Western thought. This endeavor shows parallels to the process of strangification, as it also aims to make us aware of unreflected presuppositions with the goal to *deconstruct* certain patterns of thought and action.

Overcoming traditional patterns of thought and action can also be seen as the motif of the last contribution "*The dialectic of faith-in-life of S. A. Kierkegaard*" by Tran Van Doan, one of Fritz Wallner's longest and oldest companions. In his article, Tran does not only deal with Kierkegaard's process of constructing and reconstructing his faith in life. He also discusses parallels of Kierkegaard's approach to Confucius' self-cultivation as a path of self-transcendence. Although Tran Van Doan's contribution does not draw obvious overlappings with Constructive Realism, he sees the project as inspired by CR. This should contribute to inspire others to explore parallels between other schools of thought and CR and its thought motifs.

The appendix brings the book to a crowning conclusion. Barbara Agnese, who was also an early companion of Friedrich Wallner, and her assistant Francis Tremblay offer a selected bibliography to help readers find their way through the wide field of Wallner's publications.

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INTELLECTUAL SITUATEDNESS,
RELATED CURRENTS AND DISCUSSION
OF CENTRAL BASIC CONCEPTS OF
CONSTRUCTIVE REALISM

Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism¹

Vincent Shen (1949-2018)

Introduction

In this chapter, I am going to respond to Constructive Realism through the eyes of Confucianism and Taoism. By “response” I mean a way of doing strangification which, as proposed by Fritz Wallner, consists in translating the language of one’s discipline into the language of another discipline, that is, from one microworld to another microworld. But what I am doing here is not only a strangification between interdisciplinary microworlds, but rather a strangification between different cultural worlds.

Constructive Realism is a new philosophy of science recently appears in the context of Western culture, whereas Confucianism and Taoism are two schools of philosophy developed in the context of Chinese culture. What I am going to do here is to take Confucianism and Taoism from their original context in Chinese culture, in order to conduct philosophical reflection on Constructive Realism. By thus doing I try to enlarge the strategy of strangification from its original domain of application, the scientific microworlds, to the larger domain of cultural worlds. But I retain the same spirit of doing reflection by changing the cognitive context. The epistemological principle implicit in both kinds of strangification (that is, microworld strangification and culturalworld strangification) is that we cannot fully understand ourselves except in strangifying ourselves to the context of other world and in understanding others first.

But I will not enter here into the details of both Confucianism and Taoism, except when they are relevant for my philosophical reflection on Constructive Realism. And I have to point out also that when I speak of Confucianism and Taoism. I do not envisage them as they were in the history of

1 This contribution is an identical reprint of chapter 7 of the book with the same title “Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism” (Shen 1994: 117-133). In this regard, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Facultas, respectively Wiener Universitätsverlag for the permission to reprint this paper; especially, as it was an explicit wish of Friedrich Wallner, to include this text. A very similar version of this paper (Shen 1994: chapter 7) was also published later on as “Confucianism and Taoism in response to Constructive Realism” in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* (see Shen 1996: 59-78). At this point, I would also like to express my sincere thanks to Ephraim Ferreira Medeiros and Gao Yuan (高媛) for decoding the handwritten Chinese characters in the original text and providing a printable version.

Chinese philosophy. They are presented here as already creatively interpreted by myself through my appropriation of both Western and Chinese philosophical languages.

There exists a long tradition of interpretation both in Confucianism and Taoism in which creative interpretations were considered as a way of philosophical development. Therefore I will consider my interpretation of Confucianism and Taoism, within the context of my philosophy of contrast, and my putting them into a confrontation with contemporary Western philosophies, such as Structuralism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theory and Constructive Realism, as my way of developing them.

Generally speaking, we can characterize both Confucianism and Taoism as systems of philosophy with practical orientations. Confucianism emphasizes more on the philosophy of man and on moral philosophy, and is less interested in metaphysical speculations. Taoism emphasizes more on philosophy of nature, and is intensely interested in metaphysical meditations, especially concerning ontology and cosmology, all in criticizing anthropocentrism, human values and ethical norms contained in Confucianism. On the other hand, Constructive Realism is proposed, up to now, as a new approach in philosophy of science, with epistemological as well as social interests. Its development into a system of philosophy is still to be desired.

Therefore, the first moment we try to conduct strangification between Confucianism, Taoism and Constructive Realism shows immediately their difference and their mutual need. On the one hand, Confucianism and Taoism do not have their philosophy of science, though their philosophy of knowledge in general is quite well developed. In this perspective, Constructive Realism is quite helpful in developing their theories of knowledge into a philosophy of science. On the other hand, Constructive Realism, which is limited to philosophy of science, also needs to be measured in the context of general philosophy; it can also strangify itself to the context of other cultures; otherwise some of its potentialities would be neglected and not realized. Here, some philosophical principles of both Confucianism and Taoism would be very helpful.

In the following, I will first present briefly the philosophical positions of Constructive Realism. And then I will conduct some reflections upon them one by one in referring to the philosophical resources of both Confucianism and Taoism.

Philosophical positions of Constructive Realism

As I see it, Constructive Realism, as it is conceived by Fritz Wallner and his Viennese colleagues, is a recent philosophical alternative to Logical Positivism which denied any meaning in metaphysical discourse and refused to talk about reality. Instead, Constructive Realism thinks it is inevitable to talk about reality. The first concern of Constructive Realism is therefore to envisage this fatal lack in Logical Positivism and to take into account the truth contained in Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. It has inherited some elements of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, for example, that we can speak about reality only in language, therefore there is no need of meta-language. Besides, Constructive Realism also takes Wittgenstein's position in *Philosophical Investigations* that to each language game corresponds a form of life (*Lebensformen*). The first concern of Constructive Realism with these problematics gives birth to is theory of two types of reality.

The second concern of Constructive Realism is to envisage the need of an epistemological strategy in nowadays interdisciplinary research works. Because of social as well as epistemological reasons. interdisciplinary research works become now inevitable in science. But up to now there is no good strategy epistemologically well founded for the organization and the self-understanding of interdisciplinary research. Because of this concern, Constructive Realism proposes the strategy of "strangification".

The third concern of Constructive Realism is to do a philosophy of science which will be based on an inside knowledge of what scientists are really doing and which can react properly to the need of action in the Environment. Very often philosophy of science neglects the practice of scientists and the results of their research has no impact upon scientists. But Constructive Realism maintains the position that a philosophy of science should base its own discourse on the real practice of scientist and is should be able to guide science in the domain of practical actions. This practical concern gives birth to a pragmatic vision of science.

To sum up, there are three essential positions in Constructive Realism:

First, the theory of two types of reality, which distinguish between *Wirklichkeit* and *Realität*, the one represents the Reality itself, the other represents Constructed Reality.

Second, the strategy of strangification for interdisciplinary research works. There are three kinds of strangification: the linguistic, the sociological and the ontological.

Third, a pragmatist vision of science and its role in the society.

In the following, I will explain each position point by point and in the meanwhile conduct my reflection upon each position in referring to the philosophy of Confucianism and Taoism.

Theory of two types of reality

Constructive Realism distinguishes Wirklichkeit from Realität. Wirklichkeit represents the Reality Itself, whereas Realität represents Constructed Reality. This distinction reminds us of the Kantian distinction between Ding an sich (Thing Itself) and phenomena, but without presupposing Kant's transcendental philosophy which posits the correspondence of Ding an sich to a transcendental ego. But like Kant's Ding an sich, the Wirklichkeit according to Constructive Realism is unknowable. What is knowable is those microworlds constructed by our scientific as well as non-scientific experiences and languages. But Wirklichkeit, although unknowable, is posited by Constructive Realism as the Environment (Umwelt) in which we live and practice science. Environment is therefore identified with the Life-world, no conceptual distinction is made in Constructive Realism of these two concepts.

On the other hand, the Realität is seen as the sum total of microworlds. The idea of a microworld comes to Constructive Realism as the philosophical consequence of Wittgenstein's thesis that we can only speak about reality with our language and that to each language game corresponds a form of life. The term "microworld" is therefore invented by Constructive Realism to designate the reality constructed by different kinds of language. But Constructive Realism supposes that there is a sum total of all microworlds which could be named the "Realität"

The theory of two types of reality constitutes an ontology in Constructive Realism. The distinction it makes between Wirklichkeit and Realität has the following consequences:

1. Philosophical discussions about Reality Itself and about question such as whether Reality Itself is knowable or not does not bring us any new knowledge. It suffices to posit a Reality Itself.
2. In this situation, we had better to address one to another and to interact one with another through the strategy of strangification, thus bring us new knowledge about other microworlds and help to construct together the Realität.
3. Thus the theory of two types of reality offers an ontological foundation

for the strategy of strangification, and it encourages strangification. We will analyze the strategy of strangification in the next section.

Now, we will conduct some philosophical reflections upon this theory through the eyes of Taoism and Confucianism.

1. Taoism

Apparently speaking, Taoism seems to accept the distinction between Reality Itself and Constructed Reality. Lao Tzu said that “Tao could be said, but that which is already said about Tao is not the Eternal Tao.” The distinction between Tao and the said seems to confirm the distinction between Reality Itself and Constructed Reality. But, in Taoism, this distinction is not posited for negation of the epistemological status of microworld. It is rather posited, on the one hand, to point out the necessity of tracing back those microworlds’ origin to Tao, the creative resource of all knowledge and action. On the other hand, this distinction points out the insufficiency of all languages. In this perspective, Taoism is quite different from Constructive Realism.

Compared with the ontology of two types of reality in Constructive Realism, Taoist ontology is much richer in philosophical meaning. According to Taoism, Tao is a spontaneous creative Being Itself which gives birth to all beings through the process of self-manifestation and self-differentiation. But there is an ontological difference between Tao, the self-manifesting Being Itself, and beings. If we say Tao equals to what is said, then in that moment Tao becomes a “being said”, or a conceptual being, not Being Itself. Although Tao is understandable, its understandability does not equal to sayability, thereby Taoism sets limit to our language. If Wittgenstein’s thesis “that which cannot be said should be kept in silence” is interpreted by Constructive Realism as positing the Constructed Reality in language and the denying of all meta-language, Taoism would add the thesis that what should be kept in silence is still understandable, which is not to be “said” but rather to be “shown”.

For Taoism, Tao manifests itself in Nature, which is a spontaneous process not to be determined by human being’s technical intervention. Human beings are considered by Taoism as only part of nature, their ontological status are just like plants, animals and others beings in nature, all taken to be sons of the same Mother Tao. This vision of human being and nature is quite different from modern science and technology.

In modern times, science defines nature as the totality of phenomena to be explained and predicted by natural laws, whereas technology treats nature as the totality of material resources to be manipulated and transformed by technical process. The consequence of this concept of nature is that ecological disequilibrium, pollution and other environmental problems become more and more serious now, even to the menace of human existence.

But Taoism teaches us how to respect the spontaneous process of nature. Human being's knowledge should be constructed in such a way that it unfolds the spontaneous dynamism of nature. He should avoid human-centered or even ego-centric construction of knowledge.

This position is more ecological and it tends to construct knowledge and Umwelt in a natural way. To sum up, we can reformulate Taoist propositions in the following manner:

1. Tao, the Reality Itself, and nature, the manifestation of Tao, and human beings in nature, all three are co-related and co-natural
2. Tao, as co-natural to human beings, is understandable to human beings through a cognitive procedure worthy of Tao (see chapter 3 in this book [refers to Shen 1994, note JB]).
3. What we understand should not be equalized to what is said.
4. Human being should be aware of the limit of his language and keep his mind open to the spontaneous dynamism of nature.
5. Human being should construct his knowledge and Life-world, not according to the structural constraint of his language, but according to the rhythmic manifestation of nature.

Microworld, as constructed by different languages, should not be equalized with Life-world, which is partly constructed by human beings, partly constructing itself spontaneously with the rhythm of nature. But both microworlds and Life-world could not be equalized with Tao, which is Reality Itself.

2. Confucianism

Confucianism is a kind of open humanism, which takes human being as center of cosmos. Nevertheless Confucianism is also open to the dynamism of nature. This openness is based on the fact that human beings are interconnected to others, to nature and to Heaven. This interconnectedness, which Confucianism expresses by the term "Jen" (仁), serves as the ontological foundation of