

The Uses and Abuses of Citation: A Reply to Green

Adrian Brock

University College Dublin

I met a man upon a stair
I met a man who wasn't there
He wasn't there again today
I wish to God he'd go away

Regular readers of the *History and Philosophy of Psychology Bulletin* will recall the purpose of the special issue in which my paper, "Why I Am Not a Historian of Science" appeared (Brock, 1995). It was titled, "A Tribute to Kurt Danziger," and was issued in recognition of the role Danziger played in establishing the History and Theory Option at York University and of his work for Section 25 [Canadian Psychological Association] (Dzinas, 1995).

The paper was part of a symposium, "A tribute to Kurt Danziger," which Barry Kelly had organised for the CPA meeting in 1995. As a former student of Danziger, I was asked to contribute a paper to the symposium. I was specifically asked to give the paper a personal focus and to talk about the influence that Danziger has had on my work. After giving the matter some thought, I decided to talk about the aversion I developed towards psychology as an undergraduate and how Danziger convinced me to stay in the discipline. The paper would draw attention to an aspect of Danziger's work that is often overlooked and would also be of relevance to the then-current debate over where Section 25 should meet (Danziger, 1994; Kelly and McDonald, 1995).

Given this background, I was surprised to see my autobiographical remarks being taken out of context in the article by Christopher Green, "The uses and abuses of history and philosophy of psychology" (Green, 1996). Not only are the remarks taken out of context, they are twisted and distorted in a manner that is reminiscent of tabloid journalism rather than scholarly critique. I can only speculate on what the object of this exercise was.

Green opens his article with the following words: Adrian Brock (1995, p. 27) says, 'It was only

sheer determination that enabled me to get a first-class honours degree in a subject that I detested.' The subject in question was of course psychology and it seems that his feelings in this matter continue to the present day. In particular, what he detests about psychology is 'the intellectual poverty of the discipline. Carrying out trivial experiments and applying 'recipe-statistics' seemed to me to be no different from standing behind a machine in a factory (p. 27).' (p. 20)

A linguistic change has been made in this paragraph. While talking about my experience of psychology as an undergraduate, I said that I "detested" the subject (past tense). Having made the totally unfounded statement, "it seems that his feelings in this matter continue to the present day" (p. 20), Green changes this word to "detests" (present tense). At no point did I say that I "detest" psychology (present tense). Had I wanted to say make this statement, I would have done so. I did not. I also did not give Green the authority to speak on my behalf.

The distortion continues as Green proceeds to outline my views:

He now argues that, unlike historians of the natural sciences, historians of psychology belong in psychology departments because it is there that we can best work to change the discipline. Change it to what, precisely, is not spelled out, but given his endorsement of the work of Rom Harré and John Shotter (Brock, 1995, note 1), it is not hard to imagine what sort of changes Brock has in store for his colleagues. (p. 20)

It would take several paragraphs to deal with the false statements that are contained in these two sentences but I will confine myself to just one: I did not endorse the work of Harré and Shotter. While talking about my disillusionment as an undergraduate, I mentioned in a footnote that I became interested in psychology after reading their work (Brock, 1995, p. 30). It was

merely a point of clarification and that is why it was included in the notes. As for imagining what sort of changes I have in store, it is my understanding that scholarly criticism is supposed to address the views that authors have expressed and not the views that one imagines that they hold. Once again, Green is putting words into my mouth.

Having offered this fictional account of my feelings and views, Green tries to generalise them to other members of Section 25:

I have, in the past, regarded Section 25 as an organization primarily concerned with soliciting scholarly work on the history and philosophy of psychology, whether or not that work has immediate implications for the transformation of psychology into something radically other than what it currently is. I sometimes believe I have miscalculated somewhat on this score. It may be that these aims are better served by organizations outside of psychology, and that Section 25's primary function is, rather, to serve as a launch pad for revolution in psychology. This seems to be the belief, at least implicitly, of many of its members. (p. 23)

I am not aware of anyone who has professed this belief and neither is Green. It is a belief that many members seem to hold implicitly. Given that the belief is only "implicit", Green appoints himself as the spokesperson for these members and makes it explicit on their behalf.

Green returns to the topic of my alleged feelings in his conclusion: "I do not *detest* psychology, like Brock" (p. 23). The original qualification, "it seems that his feelings in this matter continue to the present day" (p. 20) has now disappeared and it is merely stated that these are the feelings that I have. The reader may have forgotten at this point that the sole basis of this statement is the linguistic change ("detested" to "detests") that Green made in the opening paragraph.

Green also returns to the topic of my alleged views:

Interesting and provocative as the works of Brock's champions are - people like Harré, Shotter, Gergen, Sampson and Polkinghorne - I see little there that appeals to me as a model of how psychological studies *should* be, in the

main. (p. 23)

The original qualification, "it is not hard to imagine what sort of changes Brock has in store for his colleagues" (p. 20) has now disappeared and it is merely stated that these are the views that I hold. The reader may have forgotten at this point that the sole basis of this statement is Green's faith in his ability to imagine what my views on psychology might be.

It is one thing to criticise the work of one's colleagues. It is another to set up imaginary 'straw men' and to give them the names of people who exist. This is what Green has done with my name. He does not criticise the views that I expressed (Brock, 1995). He talks of feelings that I *seem* to have, beliefs that are held *implicitly* and to *imagine* the views that I hold. He then goes on to criticise them. It is easy to triumph over the views of imaginary opponents since the critic gets to decide what the views of his opponents will be.

References

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Adrian Brock is a college lecturer in Psychology at University College, Dublin and a part-time lecturer in Psychology at Trinity College, Dublin. He is currently the Chair of the Psychological Society of Ireland's Special Interest Group for History and Philosophy of Psychology and the coordinator of graduate studies in History and Philosophy of Psychology at University College, Dublin.