CHAPTER 13

ON RECTIFYING CONCEPTUAL ECUMENISM

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This brief commentary is testimony to Maddux's resilient sense of efficacy. Because of a burdensome load of commitments, I repeatedly thwarted his requests to prepare a commentary for this edited volume. An editor of lesser efficacy would have long accepted the futility of further enlistment efforts. However, as the clinching efficacious act, Maddux sent me the complete manuscript with the implication that his failed attempts called into question a central tenet of self-efficacy theory, namely, that an unshakable sense of efficacy enables one to find a way to succeed in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Reading the concluding commentary with its serious misconceptions about the nature of human efficacy created an additional self-persuasive influence to put pen to paper. Because of time constraints I will confine my remarks mainly to Kirsch's concluding commentary.

Kirsch begins his commentary with the view that variations in beliefs about the contingent relation between performance and outcomes represent fundamentally different types of outcome expectancies. The belief


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that outcomes are contingent on certain performances is presumed to be a
means-end belief at the general level, but a personal outcome expectancy at the
personal level. These two sets of expectations are said to represent different “constructs.” In point of fact, the structure of the assumed contingency between performance and outcome is the same in both instances. Consider, for purposes of illustration, the outcome expected to result from academic performances. If attaining a superior level of academic performance qualifies students for distinguished social recognition and scholarships, the belief about the means for securing those outcomes is the same for oneself as for one’s academic peers. In contending that expected outcomes for oneself and for others represent different constructs, Kirsch seems to be confusing expected outcome contingencies with belief about whether one can produce the performances required to gain the outcomes. A student performing mediocrely would not expect to be showered with academic commendations and scholarships. But the same applies to other students as well. Nor would peers who perform mediocrely expect to be showered with academic honors and the valued coin of the academic realm. Stellar grades by self will bring expected honors; stellar grades by others will bring expected honors. In short, the performers differ but the performance–outcome contingency is identical.

The outcomes that result from a given performance may, of course, vary depending on the age, gender, race, social status or other attributes. In such instances, individuals expect the same performances to produce different outcomes for themselves and for dissimilar others. An example would be women receiving lower pay than men for performing the same occupational role equally well. However, this variation simply reflects different expected payment values within the same basic contingency operating between occupational performance and paychecks, not different constructs as Kirsch contends. In situations where individuals expect to be punished for actions that others are rewarded for, the difference is one of contingency, not of construct. The construct of conditional relation between action and outcome applies equally to self and to others.

It only creates needless conceptual confusion to treat expected performance–outcome contingencies as representing dissimilar constructs bearing different names when the performer is oneself or others. Readers are informed in italicized emphasis that there is no “logically necessary” relation between beliefs about the contingencies operating for oneself and for others. Why would anyone ever expect them to be logically related? That is not the way societies structure their contingency systems. When women were disfranchised, the differential performance outcomes a woman expected in many areas of life for herself and for men was dictated not by logical necessity, but by prejudicially structured contingencies. Nor