

Economic Rationalism in Action

Keith Tuffin, Mandy Morgan, Karen Frewin and Andrew Jardine

Massey University

In February 1998 the New Zealand Government distributed the draft code of social and family responsibility as a public discussion document. The code addressed eleven social issues and called for public responses to the document. In assuming the document constitutes political communication we have used discourse analysis to examine its rhetoric in terms of practical ideologies. Focussing on subject positioning, discourses and warranting devices we identify the constraints of economic rationalist discourse in constructing notions of social and family responsibility. We conclude that the code relies on individualised constructions of social problems and their solutions.

Early in 1998 the National/New Zealand First coalition government printed 1.4 million copies of a booklet *Toward a Code of Social and Family Responsibility: Public Discussion Document, February 1998*. A copy was delivered to every home in the country. The booklet purported to stimulate public discussion on eleven issues including welfare, health, education and employment. Readers were invited to discuss these matters and forward written responses to the Department of Social Welfare. The response rate of 6.7% yielded an impressive (by the standards of most social scientists) 94,303 responses, limited analysis of which is provided in a 125 summary document available on the web (www.dsw.govt.nz/comms/publications.htm).

Not all reaction to the code took place through the official channels. The day public submissions closed was marked by protests involving a wide range of community groups (Alley, 1998). The protesters accused the government of a fiscally driven attack aimed at beneficiaries and other already marginalised groups. Weeks prior to the

closure of public submissions social scientists had attacked the code, and a group of psychotherapists criticised the code for the effects it was likely to have on those who were already victims and/or marginalised in some way. The debate and controversy surrounding the code included two main critiques, one concerned with the content of the code, and the other with the 'consultation process' in which it claimed to engage. In relation to the code's content, community groups and individuals expressed alarm at the extent to which the document focussed on those receiving welfare support. It was suggested that "the code will create two tiers of law or regulation in New Zealand - one for workers and one for those receiving state support" (Shaw cited in Mathews, 1998, p. 7). Concern about the code's lack of attention to bicultural and multicultural issues was also expressed. Thickpenny (1998), spokesperson for the New Zealand Psychological Society, commented that the document ignored Treaty implications and multicultures within New Zealand. In addition, "the Code is blatantly directed at individuals and families when the issues raised are essentially government driven" (p. 25). It appears clear that a number of commentators (for example, Boston, Dalziel & St John, 1999) saw the notion of 'social' responsibility presented in the code as minimising government responsibility and reducing the 'social' to individual and parental responsibility. Indeed, Boston (1998) suggests the code is misnamed as seven of the eleven expectations are parental responsibilities.

Reservations about the process of consultation were also expressed, with Thickpenny (1998) suggesting that the techniques for collecting and analysing responses were flawed in both research design and methodology. Visiting deputy-director of the London-based Institute of Public Policy Research, Anna Coote (cited in Mathews, 1998) criticised the process, suggesting that "the Government has earned 0 out of 10 for the way it has carried out consultation for the code" (p. 7).

We share the concerns of these commentators in relation to the content of the code and the process of 'consultation'. But as social psychologists, we are more

concerned with the effects of the code in making the practical ideologies supporting economic rationalist conceptions of 'the social', 'the individual', 'the family' and 'responsibility' more widely accessible and legitimate within the New Zealand sociopolitical context. We view the publication of the draft code as an opportunity to examine how economic rationalism is put to work in practice and how it might impact on our shared understandings of social and individual responsibility. Such an examination involves a close analysis of the text which goes beyond drawing attention to the 'targeting' of particular groups, the exclusion of specific issues, and flaws of the consultation process.

Our concern is with the social psychological effects of direct political communications from the New Zealand Government to members of the public. Specifically, we focus on the practical ideologies reproduced in the code. Without doubt, the document did promote debate and discussion and later in 1998 it became clear that the Government would not introduce an 'official' code of social and family responsibility. However, we believe that the document did not simply 'promote discussion' because text inevitably frames 'issues' in particular ways, opening up some interpretive options while constraining others. The practical ideologies and particular ways of talking about the world reproduced in the document are afforded an increased currency despite the absence of an 'official' code. In this paper we aim to critically analyse the ways in which language has been used to highlight the particular ideology of economic rationalism. Indeed, we argue that the code document has formalised and legitimised a set of assumptions which promote the understanding of social issues as being (ironically) accountable in terms of individual responsibilities.

Our interest in the code of social and family responsibility is partly based on the requirement we have as academics to act as conscience and critic of society. As social psychologists we have an inherent interest in all notions which might inform practices related to social and family responsibility. We therefore regard this document as part of a political communication exercise which deserves rigorous scrutiny and analysis, in much the same way as earlier health reform advertisements (Morgan, Tuffin, Frederikson, Lyons, and Stephens, 1994).

Political Context

Our particular analysis of the document draws on our shared understanding of the political context in which it was produced. During the 1960s, successive New Zealand Governments emphasised the promotion of an egalitarian society, characterised by state provided health, education and social welfare. These services were universally available and funded through general taxation (Dalziel & Lattimore, 1996). In contrast to these ideological practices, government policies since the mid 1980s have been dominated by the doctrine of 'economic rationalism'. This doctrine can be characterised by an emphasis on economic efficiency, market driven adherence to 'user pays' philosophies, and monetarist approaches to social services. Kelsey (1997) provides detailed documentation of the

privatisation and corporatisation of state owned enterprises and assets which have now shifted into the hands of American and Australian ownership. In the tertiary sector fee-paying students have accumulated massive debts, tertiary institutions have been driven to adopt market regulated approaches to learning and trade training has been neglected to the point of underskilling the labour force. The health system has undergone "reform" (Morgan et al., 1994), and the mental health system has been turned over to the "community" (Tuffin & Danks, 1999)

Concepts of culture and society are subjugated within this doctrine. As Hazledine (1998) writes: "Like Margaret Thatcher, the rationalists 'don't believe in' society, maintaining that individuals are the building blocks of the efficient economy" (p. 10). In the rationalists' ideological repertoire society is metaphorised as a market, where economic efficiency is paramount and 'market forces' drive decisions. Individuals are seen as "living in psychological isolation from one another, engaging only in commercial relations with each other" (Shotter, 1989, p. 136).

A Version of Reality

Our ontological, epistemological and methodological position with respect to this project owes much to the social constructionist movement within social psychology (Gergen, 1985). Traditional mainstream research approaches are based on empirical epistemology and ontology, from which it is possible to view the draft code as a 'misrepresentation' of social psychological reality and a 'misappropriation' of research methodology. The 'corrective' to such 'misrepresentation' and 'misappropriation' is adherence to strict methodological prescriptions to determine the 'facts' of social psychological reality. A cornerstone of the constructionist movement is a stance toward epistemological scepticism (Gill, 1995), which questions the assumption that the nature of 'reality' will simply give itself up to the trained observer who uses prescribed methodology. Indeed, for social constructionists a perceptually mediated ontology is replaced by a linguistically mediated ontology. One of the foundations of constructionist approaches is the view that language does not uncomplicatedly reflect the 'reality' it is claimed to portray. Drawing on the linguistic philosophy of Austin (1962), constructionists regard language as constitutive rather than representational. By this account the draft code neither misrepresents nor misappropriates. Instead it constructs a particular version of reality and reproduces the linguistic and ideological resources which make that version possible. In viewing text as constitutive, social constructionists also advocate alternative approaches to analysis of social and cultural phenomena. These alternatives are consistent with contemporary critiques of mainstream methodology which have recently found a new voice in the form of critical social psychology (Pancer, 1997). Our approach is closely aligned with those who would seek to challenge the validity of searching for 'reality' in decontextualised cause and effect relationships, artificially distilled from the manipulation of variables of interest (Frewin & Tuffin, 1998). Rather, we are informed

by the recommendations which derive from discursive psychology (Edwards & Potter, 1992). In particular, we have followed the suggestion for a contextualised approach to the analysis of 'naturally' occurring data. Discursive analysis of this kind is an interpretive activity for which we claim partiality, and acknowledge the possibility of alternative readings. We agree with Wetherell's (1995) suggestion that the strength of discursive work is that it privileges the social and linguistic over what has previously been thought of as the psychological. The broad aim of such work is to examine the dynamics of discourse as social practice, and to identify the linguistic resources which facilitate such practice (Potter, 1996). In short, the deployment and utilisation of certain linguistic resources will foster particular understandings which carry with them strong implications for matters of accountability, attribution and responsibility. In this way our explanations of the social world are inevitably framed by the currency and acceptability which particular discourses are afforded.

Our analysis is organised around a number of devices which we have identified as working in the text to privilege a specific world view: economic rationalism. Therefore, in keeping with our understanding of the document's sociopolitical context, we have looked for: (1) instances in which the discourse of economic rationalism constructs both objects and subjects of responsibility; (2) how the subjects of responsibility are positioned through the text and; (3) how aspects of the code are warranted.

Discourses are pervasive, imbued with social meaning, and may be read or analysed through texts. When we use the term 'discourses' we refer to a heuristic device which enables us to talk about configurations of metaphors, analogies and connotations. These work together to construct a coherent worldview and promote certain social relationships. Potter (1996) notes the emphasis placed on both discourse as social practice, and the linguistic resources which facilitate those practices. In this analysis we have concentrated on identifying the linguistic resources which facilitate social practices supporting economic rationalism. In its simplest form this analysis seeks to examine the psychological implications of casting social problems, relationships and responsibilities within the ideology of economic rationalism.

Positioning theory highlights the way in which discursive resources make positions available for subjects (Van Langenhove & Harré, 1993). These subject positions each include a set of rights, duties and obligations for the subject, and a location for persons within this set of rights (Davies & Harré, 1990). We have focused on the rights, duties and obligations associated with particular constructions of 'responsibility'. For example, in our analysis we examine how the government positions itself, and correspondingly how New Zealanders are also positioned. Broadly, our interest here is in studying the positions which are made available to New Zealanders and the positions which the government has elected to take up.

Warranting (Gergen, 1989) privileges particular versions of events. In the competition for legitimacy some accounts will be afforded greater validity than others. For

example, claiming 'factuality' is a warranting convention which is a major rhetorical device used within the code. Just as particular experiences entitle a speaker to make proclamations about matters relevant to the experience, warrants provide a reason and basis on which to make claims.

Analysis

The Introduction

The draft code document consists of an introduction and eleven sections each devoted to a particular 'issue'. Our analysis begins with a close reading of the introduction focusing on its positioning of readers and the government. This is followed by an analysis of the structure of the document. We pay particular attention to the ways in which structure and discourse function together to construct specific 'versions' of the issues, exclude alternative interpretations and position readers, government and those 'subject' to the code. We conclude with a close reading of the section devoted to health.

The document is introduced to readers in the form of a letter signed by both the Prime Minister (Jenny Shipley) and the Deputy Prime Minister (Winston Peters). Through warranting by political office, such endorsement adds significant authority to the point and purpose of the document. The document combines what is typically a personal format, (a letter) with the formality and authority which goes with any missive coming from the office of the Prime Minister. We read the combination of 'personal approach' and authority as a rhetorical strategy functioning to reassure the reader that their opinions on the issues are valued by those in office.

The document is addressed "To all New Zealanders, we need your help". In addressing "all" the government is positioned as acting inclusively through seeking assistance from the broadest possible audience. In appealing for help the government takes up a position of need which is an important rhetorical step in making an 'appeal' to readers. The request for assistance could equally have been framed as a wish, a desire, a request, or an invitation. However, the notion of need carries with it the implication that what is sought is of fundamental importance and urgently required. New Zealanders are thus positioned as being able to meet that need through producing responses which are implicitly valued.

The exact nature of the help sought is specified in the third paragraph of 'the letter'.

"We need New Zealanders and their families to help decide what responsibilities are theirs and what responsibilities the taxpayer should pick up by funding programmes which will make a difference."

The addition of 'their families' to 'New Zealanders' is tautological and emphasises the inclusive nature of the appeal. Furthermore, the rhetoric evokes a 'family' discourse which has a positive ideological loading.

The appeal itself is for assistance with a decision: discriminating between 'personal' and 'taxpayer'

responsibilities. The particular use of the term 'taxpayer', and the reference to 'funding programmes', construct a notion of 'responsibility' which emphasises 'financial' over 'moral' or 'ethical' responsibility. We read this construction as drawing on an economic rationalist discourse in which the 'personal' functions to signify the individual and the 'taxpayer' functions to signify the 'social' in as much as 'social programmes' are their financial responsibility. Given that the 'government' spends on behalf of the 'taxpayer', it is possible to read the terms as occupying similar positions. However, in this paragraph the 'government' is not mentioned in terms of responsibility - not even in relation to 'accountability' for spending taxpayers' money. In this context, the decision that 'New Zealanders and their families' are asked to 'help with' is a choice between taking personal/individual responsibility for identified social 'problems', or taking financial responsibility as taxpayers for socially funded programmes.

In the construction of responsibilities above, we also notice how responsibilities are allocated rhetorically. The responsibilities of 'New Zealanders and their families' are allocated with a possessive - "what responsibilities are theirs". It falls to taxpayers to 'pick up' the rest. The metaphor of responsibility as "picked up" suggests that taxpayers do not themselves 'own' responsibilities but merely deal with 'leftovers'. The use of 'pick up' carries with it at least two connotations: that the taxpayer should take responsibility only for those matters which exceed the individual's capabilities, and secondly, that taxpayers - in picking up after individuals - are 'burdened' with the cost that individuals have not met for themselves. This construction also draws on economic rationalist discourse, where taxpayers need to be 'unburdened' by 'user-pays' economic programmes.

The introductory letter also includes a significant positioning shift with the government appearing as needy and then as knowledgeable. In particular, the claim: "We know New Zealanders are worried about social issues" illustrates the shift to the position of being 'knowledgeable'. The claim to knowledge about New Zealanders' worries remains unwarranted implying that the government occupies a position of such authority that the need to warrant is unnecessary. Importantly, this 'knowledgeable' positioning constructs the government as empathetic and taking account of the concerns of New Zealanders. We note that the traditional hierarchical positioning of governance is reversed by casting the government as 'needy' while it is reasserted in a claim to authoritative knowledge. These positioning shifts afford the rhetorical flexibility between neediness, authority and empathy. In addition they may function to mask interpretations of the document as political manipulation and agenda setting (see also, Morgan et al., 1994).

Our analytic reading of the introduction to the draft code highlights the rhetorical flexibility afforded the government in positioning and some of the constructions which evoke an economic rationalist discourse. Effectively, readers choices are not simply guided but constrained by these constructions. In the following section we show how

the structure of the code works to position readers as rational decision makers.

The 'Issues' Sections

Each of the eleven 'issues' covered by the document is addressed through the same format: the naming of the issue, the presentation of 'the facts', notes on the government 'helps', an expectation of individual responsibility, a statement of why the expectation is important, notes on current law, and questions for discussion.

In constituting the issue in terms of 'the facts', the document relies on a socially shared construction of 'facts' as 'objective' and 'value-free'. Facts are commonly understood as the products of unbiased observation of real world phenomena. They are distinguished from opinions and feelings - even from individual thoughts - which may be 'biased'. Facts provide information which is free from the contamination of a subjective viewpoint. Beginning with the facts serves to demonstrate the government's 'unbiased' stance in relation to the issues. It also serves to provide a 'reasonable' and 'rational' foundation for understanding the issues. By providing the 'facts' the document provides readers with the information they need to make reasonable and rational decisions about responsibility. The implied relationship between facts and responsibility assumes that readers will make a reasonable and rational decision. This structure positions the reader as a subject who makes rational decisions based on a process of reasoning uncontaminated by emotion, bias or subjective point of view - a unitary rational subject.

Beginning with a presentation of 'facts' also works to construct each issue in a particular way. For example, in the first section, labelled "looking after our children", the facts include: statistics on how many families are "at risk" of their children not "doing as well as they could" and statistics on neglect, abuse and injuries to children. In each case the statistical 'facts' are constructed within a discourse of familial love and protection, with only "a few" parents having difficulty looking after their children. One of the effects of this construction of 'the facts' is to confine the issue to individual matters of abuse and neglect. This serves to obscure other matters which could be considered in relation to the care of children including (but not limited to): social and psychological effects of the structure of the nuclear family; the effects of poverty, unemployment, racism, and poor social services; and the effects of a history of colonisation.

The second section in each issue is entitled "How the government helps now". This section documents government spending on the provision of social services and public education related to each area. This 'documentation' is similar in form to the section on 'the facts': short statements presented as simple information. We note that this section exclusively concerns government spending, once again evoking an economic rationalist discourse in as much as 'help' is constructed as a commodity to be 'bought' by the government on behalf of taxpayers. Reference to the government as a legislative body is

infrequent and terse. We also note the positioning of the government as 'helping' to address the issue. Our reading of this positioning is that as a 'helper' the government has a duty only to 'assist': the implication is that 'direct' responsibility for the issues lies elsewhere. This section does not suggest where 'direct' responsibility is located, but it immediately precedes a section entitled "Expectation" and it is this section which makes a clear statement about who *is* responsible.

For each issue the 'expectation' section is positioned at the top of the right hand page of the document. It consists of the title and not more than three sentences presented in bold type which is larger than some of the section titles. We read this privileging of position and size as indicating that this is the critical point in relation to each issue. The statements in these sections explicitly specify those who are to be held responsible for addressing the issue. In eight of the eleven issues responsibility is apportioned to parents. In each case the relationship between parents and children constructed in the expectation is a relationship between individuals: between parents and their particular children. There is no suggestion that parents might be constituted as a community of care for children, or as a social group with a particular interest in children's well-being. In two of the remaining issues responsibility is apportioned to 'people'.

Again it is clear from the construction of the 'object' of responsibility that 'people' is a term used to refer to 'individuals'. For example, in the issue entitled 'training and learning for employment', individuals are constituted as responsible for their *own* employment readiness. No community, whether employers, employees, investors, taxpayers or legislators is attributed any responsibility for workforce competence. For the issue entitled 'Work obligations and income support' it is individuals receiving income support who are apportioned responsibility for finding work. Again, there is no reference to any community or social group as having employment responsibilities. Despite the claim of the document to be concerned with 'social and family' responsibility it is apparent from all the 'expectation' sections that responsibility is constructed solely as a matter of individual obligation. This is again indicative of an economic rationalist discourse which construes the 'social body' as an aggregate of individual subjects.

The section which follows the 'Expectation' for each issue is entitled "why it's important". Accounts of the importance of the expectation vary, though they frequently refer to minimizing the 'cost' of the problem or fulfilling the potential of personal and economic resources. In each case it is possible to read the account as consistent with an economic rationalist conceptualization of the issue.

The final two sections on each issue are entitled "Current law" and "Questions for discussion". The 'Current law' section positions the government as a legislative body with the power to constrain and penalize individual subjects. This positioning was rarely evoked in the earlier section on 'how the government helps'. It serves to remind readers that the government could legislate the expectations of responsibility proposed for discussion. The possibility of

punitive legislation as a means of both legitimating and enforcing individual responsibility for social issues is elaborated in several of the 'questions for discussion'. For example, on the issue of 'Keeping children healthy' one of the discussion questions asks if immunisation should be "required for entry into early childhood education services and schools?" (p. 11). Some of the discussion questions less explicitly evoke the possibility of legislation. For example, on the issue of 'Sharing parenthood' one discussion question asks: "What else should the government do to reinforce the responsibility of parents not living with their children to support them financially". By framing the questions so as to explicitly or implicitly suggest legislative solutions, the document performs a rhetorical constraint on the construction of 'solutions' through a rhetoric of participation and 'choice' of response.

Issue 11 - Individual responsibility for health

The privileging of the individual, and constraint of choice within a rhetoric of choice, are further demonstrated within the following detailed analysis of one issue. Space has precluded a complete analysis of all issues. Issue 11, the issue of 'health', both physical and mental, was chosen because of its particular relevance for psychologists.

The title given to this issue, "Keeping ourselves healthy", relies on assuming that health is a natural state which needs to be maintained ('kept') in the face of various threats. This construction of health evokes a notion of responsibility founded on a moral obligation to be individually responsible for the 'care' of our health.

While health is never actually defined, it is consistently talked about in terms of the absence of illness and susceptibility to damage. This is particularly notable in the organisation of the 'facts' section of the issue. The facts link lifestyle decisions regarding cigarette smoking, alcohol, diet and exercise with a series of pathological conditions such as heart disease, cancer, liver damage and strokes. In short, health is seen as the absence of pathology.

Three discourses are used to constitute this notion of health: a physiological discourse, a discourse of preservation, and a psychological discourse. The physiological discourse is organised around the signs and symptoms of physical illness. In the case of the first four facts, aspects of lifestyle choice (diet, alcohol consumption, exercise and cigarette smoking) are the major themes and are directly linked to physiological diseases. Functionally, health is constructed in terms of the absence or presence of disease, and lifestyle choice is linked to individual responsibility for the prevention of pathologies. The use of this discourse inhibits the possibility of understanding 'personal lifestyle choices' as signifying social or emotional problems. For example, within a more 'holistic' understanding of health and health care, excess alcohol consumption might indicate interpersonal or social issues as 'risks factors' for a variety of health problems, including interpersonal problems such as dysfunctional family relationships, and social problems such as unemployment, inadequate housing and poverty.

The preservation discourse speaks to the practice of individual responsibility for maintaining health. The first and second facts identify those things we ought not to do in order to maintain our health (smoking and drinking excessively). The third and fourth facts stipulate those things we 'should' do. The third fact stipulates that 30 minutes of daily exercise will maintain cardio-vascular health. Fact four specifies a varied diet and particular 'healthy' foods. This discourse pivots on the assumption of 'health' as vulnerable to personal lifestyle practices related to pathologies. It provides a direct link between the causes of pathologies established through the physiological discourse, and the notion of individual responsibility for controlling 'risk factors'. The use of this discourse inhibits the possibility of understanding community and environmental issues as 'risk factors' for health problems. For example, by focussing on individual practices, practices producing industrial pollution, pesticide and herbicide use, or genetic modification of food cannot be subjected to 'rules' for maintaining 'health'.

The psychological discourse is organised around the signs and symptoms of mental illness. In fact five, an increasing youth suicide rate is linked with substance abuse and depression. Here the psychological discourse functions to 'individualise' risk factors. As in the case of the physiological discourse, a more holistic view of health might construe youth suicide in terms of particular circumstances including peer relations, educational achievements, social expectations, family dynamics, fiscal solvency and gender relations. Similarly, substance abuse and depression among young people may be understood as effects of social, interpersonal, community and environmental factors.

By framing the facts within these discourses the notion of ill-health is constructed as a matter of individual responsibility. Following the rules maintains good health whereas breaking the rules results in physical and mental illness, death and disability. Drugs and alcohol are unproblematically linked with physiological disease and mental ill health. Our shared understandings of health as a more 'holistic' phenomenon which includes interpersonal, social, community and environmental factors as well as (and in relation to) personal lifestyle choices, has enabled us to identify the limitations of the discourses at use in this section, and to find alternative ways of understanding 'risk factors'. This alternative understanding has implications for a construction of responsibility which includes the ethical and moral as well as the financial, and involves political, cultural, social and community perspectives.

The discourses at work in the section on 'the facts' are also evident in the following sections. 'How the government helps now' includes information on government spending for education programmes, sport and fitness programmes and specialist services. The combination of a focus on 'health' as an effect of individual lifestyle choices, and 'help' as a matter of 'spending', is an example of the way in which economic rationalist discourse can be brought into play with other discourses to construct a particular version of government intervention: one which excludes the possibility of direct government responsibility for health

(through, for example, legislative control of environmental health hazards).

The exclusion of any direct government responsibility for health is implicitly reiterated in the 'Expectation' section. This section consists of the statement that "People will do all they can to keep themselves physically and mentally healthy". This notion of 'people' draws on the economic rationalist conception of a collective of individuals. Here the individual is clearly constituted as responsible for his/her own 'health'. Any phenomenon linked to health and beyond the control of the individual as an agent, is implicitly excluded as a 'health concern'.

The section of 'Why it is important' includes two statements on the 'cost' of poor health: one concerning the individual 'cost' and the other concerning social 'cost'. Both these statements explicitly evoke the economic rationalist discourse to explain the importance of 'health'. The final sections on 'Current law' and 'Questions for discussion' emphasise the government's position as legislative body and draw heavily on the construction of health as an individual physiological and psychological phenomenon. They construe 'legislative solutions' in terms of the partial prohibition of smoking and alcohol, and suggest the possibility of government intervention into areas of personal 'lifestyle choice'. They exclude the possibility of government responsibility for health problems outside the control of the individual.

Conclusion

Our analytical reading of the draft code identifies discourses which are consistent with an economic rationalist worldview. In particular, we note that the construction of the notion of responsibility excludes the government, emphasises financial over moral or ethical responsibilities, and implicates the individual as the 'owner' of responsibility for social 'issues'. This analysis suggests that the document emphasises the 'individual' at the expense of the 'social', and despite purporting to deal with social and family responsibility, relies on individualised conceptions of both social problems and their solutions. The tensions between the social and the individual, which have been at the heart of social psychology since its inception, are masked by the reduction of the social to the 'sum of individuals'. Our analysis has highlighted the way in which constructions and positions serve to enable economic rationalist conceptions.

We recognise that economic rationalist discourse has been active in constituting government policy since the mid 1980's (Kelsey, 1997). The draft code legitimates economic rationalist constructions of problems, solutions and people by claims to their factuality. The wide circulation of the code enables economic rationalist discourse to become more readily accessible as a resource for the interpretation of social problems. As social psychologists we are particularly concerned that the availability of economic rationalist constructions of the 'social' serves to legitimate and maintain the construction of the individual as decontextualised, asocial, and ahistorical.

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Address for correspondence:

Keith Tuffin
School of Psychology
Massey University
Private Bag, Palmerston North
New Zealand

E-mail: K.Tuffin@massey.ac.nz