

Hanzi Freinacht (2017). *The Listening Society. A Metamodern Guide to Politics. Book One. Metamoderna ApS*

Reviewed by Elke Fein¹

A Personal Introduction

I met “Hanzi” for the first time in 2011, right before the founding meeting of the European Consortium for Research in Adult Development (ESRAD) in Lund where the main “Hanzi” author was studying at the time. He had contacted me over Facebook in response to some entry on integral politics and adult development, a passion that we both share. And so we decided to meet a few days before the ESRAD conference, to exchange ideas and visions about how to transform politics into an integral direction.

Already then, the young Swedish sociologist (he asked me to remain with the pseudonym) was close friends with his future “Hanzi” co-author and sparring partner, an equally young Danish historian and philosopher, who later founded “Fri Tanke” publishing. At the time, the two of them, together with a couple of other friends, had put together a manifesto of integral politics, hoping to develop the foundations of a new political movement or party around these ideas in Sweden and the Nordic countries. As I had been actively involved in the first integral party, founded in Switzerland in 2008, we had plenty to talk about.

While I met Hanzi 2 and the rest of their gang only briefly, Hanzi 1 had kindly offered to be my host at the ESRAD event, which he also attended himself. So over about a week of co-working and living, multiple impressions added up to a picture, in particular that of a bright and ambitious young thinker, thrilled by integral and developmental models and the prospect of infusing these into societal reality. At the same time, he also shared a couple of deep personal issues and challenges which made clear that – by necessity – he was working as hard on the level of psycho-emotional processing and personal transformation as he was in the area of theory building. And he had strong claims and solid views in both areas.

One of the topics that was present in our conversations already then was the strong green-social-liberal political mainstream in the Nordic countries, in particular Sweden. Yet, while probably being culturally ahead of things in many other western countries, the question was if, or to what degree it was actually ready to embrace “integral” ideas, for instance those of vertical growth and

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development in individuals and societies. For the “Hanzi” team, consisting of critical social scientists, one of the main challenges was therefore how to find an appropriate language and approach for bringing “integral” into the discussion without triggering the typical reflexes of the “green meme”. The Listening Society is (part of) the answer that the authors came up with: a contentious, provocative, sometimes even offensive invitation to dance, debate – or fight – towards what they imagine to be a typical “green meme” intellectual reader. Their recipe is to mix deep sincerity and thorough analysis with playfulness and irony.

Part of the reason why they decided to publish their book under a pseudonym supposedly was, first, to somehow go beyond a common reflex of mainstream publishing and academia, namely to claim praise for individual work. Instead, the author(s) suggest that transcending certain natural impulses of the ego is an important feature of the to-come meta-modern phase and stage of societal development. Also, “Hanzi” seems to make it easier for them to ride their attack against the green meme mainstream, a confrontation that purposefully transgresses the usual moral boundaries of academic politeness and respect time and again.

At the same time, “Hanzi” also shares quite a lot of detail about his own (in this case, Hanzi 1’s) life trajectory and experience (“Who is Hanzi Freinacht?”, p. 5ff.), including his daily schedule and routine when writing the book over a year or so in a chalet in the Swiss alps. This personal background does indeed reveal some of the deeper motivations behind certain aspects of the model laid out later in the book, in particular the comparatively strong focus on subjective states and depth (“My friend, I write this from a subtle longing of my heart”, p. 6). So, what is this longing about that a listening society is the answer to?

The Listening Society – Resources, Vision and Main Contents

The term “listening society” refers to the idea of a societal culture of awareness that listens – and responds to the needs of its citizens in a deeper and more holistic way than the current materialistic one, including the deeper longings of body, mind & soul. The book spells out elements of a vision revolving around how we could “create and reproduce a society in which the average human life experience is more emotionally satisfying and spiritually productive” (p. 95), assuming that more happiness, in turn, will cause people to give something back to society and thus lead to better communities, more sustainable economies and a healthier planet. The basis for this is a world view and epistemology which Hanzi chose to call “metamodern,” drawing on theorizing in the fields of art, aesthetics, philosophy and culture theory. Even though the book’s major resources and inspiration come from Ken Wilber’s integral model (as one of the authors acknowledged in his presentation of metamodernism at the IFIS Online Colloquium in April, 2019), this choice of terminology is presumably also motivated by the consideration to reach a wider audience in the academic mainstream this way.

The term “metamodern” is borrowed from the Dutch art scholars Timotheus Vermelen and Robin van der Akker who noted a new trend of “pragmatic idealism” in arts already two decades ago. They also describe it as both a product of and a reaction to postmodernism, embracing “doubt, as well as hope and melancholy, sincerity and irony, affect and apathy, the personal and the political, and technology and techne.” (Levin, 2012). “Hanzi” now sets out to add more specific

meaning to the term, in particular that of a developmental stage and related philosophy, thereby aiming at making the concept travel to the social sciences and political practice.

So what is the essence of this socio-political metamodernism and how is similar to or different from “integral”? To what degree are its contents borrowed from integral or actually go beyond the latter in substantial ways? Even though these questions are not explicitly addressed in the book, they were at least ever present in my reading.

Hanzi himself proposes three different definitions of metamodernism (a cultural phase, a developmental stage, and a philosophical paradigm, p. 362f.). Readers interested in terminological fine-tuning will have to go into Hanzi’s appendix where he offers a condensed version of his conception of the metamodern paradigm (p. 363 ff.). My own reading is that metamodernism as outlined in “*The Listening Society*” is one possible interpretation, expression and/or application of integral thinking – even though the author(s) might not subscribe to this reading.

Given the Hanzi authors’ background in the social sciences, what they do offer beyond the integral model per se are elements and foundations of a vision for a more integral society and some political choices and changes of perspective that could help to bring it about. On the level of modeling strictly speaking, there are some interesting terms and categories that one has not seen or that are used differently in Wilberian models. However, I don’t see these pointing at completely new dimensions that integral philosophy would not have been aware of before. Hanzi’s metamodernism rather comes across as a “reframing” of integral for a post-modern (academic) audience, which it explicitly speaks to in both tone and style, and in view of addressing more specifically socio-political challenges. That, of course, is of value in its own right, given that much of the academic mainstream is currently struggling with late forms of modernism (for part of the sciences) and post-modernism (for the humanities and much of the social sciences), as well as with their paradigmatic contradictions and limitations preventing more efficient action on pressing global issues.

So let’s spend a few words on Hanzi’s language and style first. In line with the identification of sincerity and irony as a core characteristic of metamodernism, *The Listening Society* displays a mixture of these two qualities itself. More precisely, it takes the reader on a roller-coaster ride between sincere high-level theory and epistemology on the one hand, and a way of addressing the (presumed) reader in a personal dialog that is sometimes witty and playful, but as often also straight and provocative (“the less intellectually gifted readers are by now conjuring up ways to get out of the stranglehold”, p. 11; “in case you still don’t get it...” p. 351), partly de-constructive (“bullshit,” p. 60; “science is a whore dressed up as queen, a jester posing as king,” p. 20; “wisdom [...] is a crap variable,” p. 300) and sometimes purposefully insulting (“my theories deeply insult the prevailing moral intuitions. I spit straight in the face of their political identities [...]”; “it is the solemn duty of the philosopher to piss on all that you hold dear and sacred, to show you that your gods are false”, p. 9; “frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn about your feelings; if [you are mad at me for insulting you] you should probably put down the book, go take a long, hard look at the mirror, get over yourself, and re-read the last section,” p. 19). Of course, this style is an integral part of Hanzi’s message and strategy. He wants – or (thinks he) needs – to be provocative in order to make himself heard and get the message across: That mainstream postmodernism is in a dangerous dead end and should start noticing the new paradigm that is knocking at the door. It should start acknowledging that metamodernism is much more effective in addressing the pressing needs of

our times and therefore deserves exceptional intellectual-emotional efforts, even if this might appear painful to the holders of certain current belief systems.

One can discuss whether the book has always chosen the right means to this end. Yet, it does essentially walk its talk when it comes to the symphony of a rather colloquial (personal, dialogical) style, theoretical depth, playfulness and sincerity, or as Hanzi puts it, “sincere irony” (p. 27, 107). The fact that it is generally very well edited, with almost no language and spelling errors or typos, also demonstrates and emphasizes the sincerity part of its message.

Giving a complete summary of the book’s rich content would go beyond the limits of this review. I will nevertheless try to give some insights into Hanzi’s core ideas and some of the inspirations I have gained from the reading.

The Listening Society is conceived as the first book of an envisioned series of several more to come. In the book itself, two more volumes were announced, a developmental perspective on history, including core principles of metamodern politics (n° 2), and a volume on “the Nordic ideology” (n° 3 – this has actually just been published in May 2019 as number two), featuring developments in the Scandinavian countries. According to the author, the latter have come particularly close to a metamodern political culture, and are thus particularly well prepared for implementing it. Meanwhile, however, the main Hanzi author has also been talking about a series of up to six books that seem to be taking shape in Hanzi’s mind. Well, let’s see what comes next.

The series’ overall focus is on politics and transforming society based on an integral, or, in Hanzi’s terms, metamodern paradigm. This includes an analytical perspective on historical and present socio-economic developments and a multidimensional vision of how (a metamodern) society could take responsibility for the development of its citizens. As Robert Kegan has coined the vision of a “Deliberatively Developmental Organization,” *The Listening Society* spells out the first steps towards the vision of a deliberatively developmental society.

In this context, considerable space is dedicated to the idea of personal happiness in a broad sense of the term (p. 73ff.), which is conceived as a worthwhile socio-political goal. This is because happy people whose immediate and deeper needs are met, are more likely to take responsibility for others and the society as a whole. “Happy people are more productive in profound and complex ways” (p. 78). Moreover, the term *listening society* refers to a new, more complex notion of welfare – one that by supporting peoples’ development not only facilitates better choices and healthier, happier lives of its members, but thereby also helps to actually saves costs which would otherwise be generated for various kinds of treatments and by a considerable number of collateral damages (p. 84). In Hanzi’s words: By “deliberately and carefully cultivat(ing) a deeper kind of welfare system that includes the psychological, social and emotional aspects of human beings (...) the average person (...) becomes much more secure, authentic and happy (in a deep, meaningful sense of the word); (...) such people can then recreate society in a myriad of ways, solving many of the complex, wicked problems that we are facing today” (p. 72).

While the book does give some examples as to how this could happen, drawing on happiness research and an impressive list of references from meditation research documenting meditation’s multiple benefits (pp. 96-103), it seems to be primarily concerned with laying the groundwork and seeding the broader, overall vision than with defining concrete strategies and steps. The vision itself

is extended to a larger systemic level, with societies competing for being the most listening one, as a “competitive edge in the global economy”, so to speak (p. 93). With “human development driv(ing) economic growth, (this) deeper welfare system is necessary” in order not to “be outcompeted by other, *more* listening societies where citizens truly do thrive” (ibid.).

The Metamodern Model

In a nutshell, the metamodern model is essentially introduced as a combination of four dimensions that Hanzi presents as independent of each other: cognitive complexity, cultural code, subjective state and depth. The first two dimensions: personal (individual) cognitive development and socio-cultural development (or “code”) come across as elements from the Wilberian integral model. Cognitive complexity is essentially presented based on Michael Commons’ Model of Hierarchical Complexity (MHC); cultural code appears to be a modified version of Spiral Dynamics. The two other dimensions, state and depth (p. 158), differ from the Wilberian integral model to some degree, even if probably less substantially than with regard to their relevance and positioning in the Hanzi model. (Unfortunately, Hanzi’s model is not visualized anywhere in the book, so that the reader has to mentally build it up from the text on her own). Let’s look at each of the dimensions successively, with the two developmental ones going first.

Cognitive Complexity: The fact that Michael Commons’ MHC is given a particularly prominent place as “the by far most scientifically viable and consistent [model], and the one that indisputably has the strongest empirical evidence” (p. 171) is less surprising, given that the Hanzi author has spent several months working with Commons in the US after completing his dissertation. Since the MHC is well known to IR readers, I will not bother summarizing its merits and contents, but rather report some of the dissonances I stumbled over during my reading. While there is no doubt about Hanzi’s assertion about the solidity and mathematical basis of the MHC, I had to read twice when it comes to some of Hanzi’s other claims. For example that “Commons is the only one that has discovered one [i.e. cognitive complexity, E.F.] of the [Hanzi’s] *four* fundamental dimensions of development” (p. 173) – what about the Piagetian foundations of cognitive developmental research in the 1930s?

Equally irritating is Hanzi’s treatment of essentially “all of the (other) holistic adult development theories” as “fail(ing) to grasp quite what it [development] is” (p. 172). Without any mention of the specific goals and approaches of the respective theories, Hanzi somewhat seems to criticize everything that is not MHC, precisely for not being MHC. For instance, he claims that renowned researchers of ego development such as Robert Kegan, Jane Loevinger and Susanne Cook-Greuter “mix things up” or “blend in issues of personality into the different stages and spice it up with a bit of psychiatric diagnostics (where the lower stages are described as psychopaths, more or less),” p. 173. – Excuse me?! Several similarly bold claims about other authors are based on similarly fluffy grounds that often raise more questions than they answer.

There is no discussion of the distinction between hard and soft stage models and related debates on measurement (see Stein & Heikkinen, 2009), nor of their respective merits and limitations. Just plain judgement. What’s worse, Hanzi claims that “the main problem of many of the adult development theorists, from Jane Loevinger and Susanne Cook-Greuter to Robert Kegan, stems from the fact that their authors are at this [the MHC systematic] cognitive stage” (p. 201) (sic!).

Neither does he elaborate what “problem” he is referring to, nor does he provide any evidence for his claim about the developmental stage of the mentioned researchers. In a private communication with the main Hanzi author, he explains that the above claim is based on their “putting development into one scale which is one-dimensional, and driven by one central logic (one system, rather than several systems with differing properties).” Hanzi sees this “tendency to view everything as “ONE system” (as) a hallmark of systematic stage thinkers” (private communication).

While lacking empirical evidence is a reoccurring theme in the book, Hanzi remains relaxed: “I don’t have the data to prove it, but as far as I can tell...” (p. 337); or: “parts of the book are based on arguments and generalizations that you must weigh and consider with your own rational and emotional faculties, much like the arguments of other social theorists. (...) Social theory is where science and common sense meet” (p. 20).

Another irritation arises when Hanzi complains that “many of the neo-Piagetians (...) tend to be relatively narrow researchers who don’t fully take stock of the social implications of their own theoretical work” and therefore “fail to understand the vast consequences of their theory for understanding society, and the world at large” (p. 385, footnote 80). While it is true that most adult development researchers “are lousy political sociologists,” why accuse them of their choice of topic and academic focus if they have never claimed to deliver a sociological analysis? True, “that is another reason we need Hanzi” (ibid. 385, fn. 80). At the same time, Hanzi would not have been possible without the work of all these previous researchers in the first place. So, while claiming that all the “solid science” is on his (and Commons’) side, Hanzi fails to apply a basic principle of scientific integrity when it comes to paying due credit to the achievements of other research traditions. We will come back to this and the problem of empirical back-up.

The second developmental dimension in the Hanzi model of metamodernism is sociocultural development or, as he puts it, cultural code, evolving through a range of symbol stages from A (archaic) to G (metamodern). Here again, the author draws heavily on work by preceding researchers, namely Jean Gebser, Clare Graves and Don Beck/Chris Cowan’s *Spiral Dynamics*. Even though he slightly modifies some of Beck/Cowan’s stage names (“Faustian” for “Red” or “Imperial” and “Post-Faustian” for “Blue” or “Mythic/Traditional” and calls the overall stage category of the cultural code dimension “meta-memes,” there is no substantially novel quality claimed for these stages description-wise. Given that the Hanzi model is not based on evidence of its own, this is not surprising.

At the same time, Hanzi uses and introduce several terms, namely value memes, symbol stages, “meta memes” and, later in the book, “effective value memes,” the definition – and distinction of which remains somewhat unclear. While the contents of the seven memes/stages appear to be what we know from the SD/Wilberian models, the almost synonymous use of some of these terms adds some conceptual confusion. For clarification, Hanzi, as often in the book, refers to further forthcoming volumes with a promise of more detail. (In this case, *The 6 Hidden patterns of World History* is announced to discuss “the historical development of meta-memes, i.e. the overall patterns that set the logic for what memes can be expected to show up at a certain stage of societal development,” p. 213). Later on, we learn that the concept of “effective value meme” is in fact a new, way more complex variable, first mentioned, but only vaguely explained on p. 174 as an “overall pattern” generated by the relationship between Hanzi’s four dimensions *complexity*, *code*, *state* and *depth*. Here again, the aim is high, namely to provide “a more stringent version of the

Spiral Dynamics model, solving its main problems and clearing some of the confusions around it...”, while its clarification and operationalization is postponed (“each of which [the four categories] will get simplified but workable definitions...,” p. 174).

Before we move over to the two other dimension of the model, what I do find helpful in view of the first two is the analogy of using the terms “hardware” and “software” for cognitive development and cultural code respectively (216ff.). Hanzi argues that it needs a certain cognitive stage (as the necessary “hardware”) to be able to function properly at the respective level, while the cultural code of a social context can be adopted through socialization, like “downloading” a software content, provided the corresponding hardware/cognitive level has sufficient “hard drive space”. This illustrates that with a given kind of hardware (or, more precisely, operating system), only equal or lower level software can be run successfully, whereas higher level (more complex) software can possibly be downloaded, but might not function properly based on the existing hardware (operating system, *my term, EF*).

This analogy is a nice illustration of the differences and interrelations between individual and collective/cultural development. An individual that is born and socialized into a certain culture, and hence is exposed to that culture (has the *software* available and downloaded), but will interpret and run it according to their own currently operating hardware/operating system. Stephen Chilton (1988), in his Neo-Piagetian account of political development, has formulated this relationship in view of what has become a frequent challenge in the area of democratization politics: transferring democratic institutions to non-democratic environments. Chilton states: “Unless the institution’s structure is preserved by people at the appropriate stage, the institution will regress to less developed forms” (Chilton 1988, p. 88).

In this sense, Hanzi’s chapters on the development of “cultural code” (also called “symbol stages”) and on “language travelling through history, picking up new symbols and meanings as larger societies and more complex interactions between greater numbers of humans over greater distances emerge” (p. 223), are a nice reframing and adaptation of developmental theory to social science discourse. This is of value in itself, given that the latter appears to be one of the main target audiences of the book.

So let’s now turn to the two other dimensions that are introduced as core elements of the metamodern model besides cognitive complexity and cultural code: subjective state and (psychological) depth. To readers familiar with integral modelling, it comes as a surprise that Hanzi presents these as the “inner dimensions”, as opposed the two former ones. According to the author, the developmental dimensions describe “a kind of ‘exterior’ reality, meaning that they can both be intersubjectively recognized and, in some sense, ‘objectively’ studied” (p. 249). While he sees the two developmental dimensions as referring to “the organism’s behavior”, he refers to state and depth as “the organism’s own inner experience”. This, then, is suggested as a cure to a claimed “inner dimensions blindness – the failure to recognize and understand the primary importance that peoples’ inner lives have in society” (*ibid.*).

Note that Hanzi does not make reference to Wilber’s zones and the integral methodological pluralism derived from them, and that he only mentions phenomenology very briefly. Therefore, one has to assume that all of the latter seem to not suffice him to cover what he is after – up to

experts in phenomenology to judge whether his own modelling (see below) adds substantially new insights and better ways of conceptualizing things here.

By “subjective state,” Hanzi refers to “higher” and “lower” inner states of being. They are claimed to be different from emotions, but rather something “more fundamental” that includes “some kind of sum or totality of how we feel” in each moment (p. 254). As an ordering principle for subjective states, he then comes up with a scale from 1-13, reaching from lower states (“hell,” “horrific,” “tortured,” “tormented”) to medium states (“very uneasy” to “joyous, full of light”), up until the high states (“vast/grand/open,” “blissful/saintly,” “enlightened,” p. 260).

Reading chapter 12 on subjective states, one starts to sense that this (and the following) dimension are of particular importance to the author for personal reasons, and that these insights are the product of his own inner growth process. In fact, he does share some biographical and family background in this regard: “During most of my adult life, I have been followed by a sense of tragedy, a subtle but pervasive sadness... (...) the aching heart became the main engine of my life’s work” (p. 6). So while he has a whole backpack of deep difficult experiences here to draw on, that have apparently not been adequately addressed by other/integral models, Hanzi also concedes that “these fields have yet to produce a systematic theory of development equaling the MHC” (which, as mentioned above, he considers as the most scientifically reliable model, p. 249).

Different from the stage descriptions in the first two developmental dimensions of the model, there is no comparable description of the 13 states, either from personal experience, literary accounts or other sources. Moreover, Hanzi suggests that one can only really understand states that one has experienced oneself (p. 272). This, of course, not only makes it difficult to come up with “objective” scaling and modeling strategies regarding the different states. The author limits himself to the assertion that “even if my scale isn’t proven, it is certainly testable: you would need to devise a way of measuring physiological correlates and perhaps peoples’ self-described experiences” (p. 395, fn. 129). In any case, the question remains open, on which grounds the 13 state model has been built by the author. Has “Hanzi” himself – or people he draws on – actually experienced the full spectrum that he so clearly (yet vaguely) lays out in his book? Or, since at some point, he admits that he hasn’t, do they come from “common sense,” single intuitive examples, or solid scientific research? Based on his own premises and standards at least, it becomes close to impossible to verify Hanzi’s model of 13 subjective states empirically.

But anyway, let’s assume they were meaningful categories. Because we need them to understand the fourth fundamental dimension of Hanzi’s model, the idea of a spectrum of states that a person has experiential access to, which he refers to as “depth.” Even though Hanzi claims that the four dimensions are independent of each other, depth obviously has an immediate relation to subjective states. He conceives depth as a product of the range (and thus number) of subjective states that one has experienced out of the above described spectrum. The more states an individual has experienced, the greater their psychological depth. Depending on whether one’s experience includes more of the lower or more of the higher states, Hanzi speaks of “dark” versus “light” depth. Just like for states, he stresses that “we are generally only capable of recognizing the forms of depth that we have developed ourselves” (p. 298). At the same time, the empirical basis of the emergence of this dimension of the model remains unclear.

Again, one senses that not only is conveying this dimension particularly dear to the author, but also that the depth chapter is likely written on the basis of some deeply transformative personal experiences, including ones of existential suffering of his own and people he knows. For instance, he points out that “a lot of the less-than-fully-functional people in society tend to out-depth most of us (...). Broken and crazy people, for all their limitations, often live in greater worlds; they have walked to hell and back. A lot of them just stumbled on their way back” (p. 288). This theme is touched at various occasions. Examples include experiences from the main Hanzi author’s family and the observation (apparently also based on personal experience) that a therapist should possess at least the same depth as their client in order to be able to help them (p. 288).

Considering the passion with which Hanzi explores this dimension (“depth as beauty, mystery and tragedy;” “only a sense of tragedy can drive us to work for the wretched of the earth: loving until it hurts (...), only broken hearts can save the world” (p. 293), it is safe to say that adding this dimension to next-stage modelling is one of the core foci and concerns of the book.

The importance of depth is additionally stressed by the fact, that Hanzi equates depth with wisdom (“wisdom is great depth, plain and simple,” p. 302). At the same time, a whole chapter is dedicated to a discussion of the idea of wisdom – if not the whole body of wisdom research. As far as the latter is concerned, Hanzi’s positions resemble those of his discussion of the “holistic” developmental models: The research in the field uses different approaches or doesn’t consider his own dimensions, hence it’s worth nothing: “The wisdom people haven’t done their homework (...), they haven’t figured out exactly what they are talking about;” wisdom is “a crap variable” (p. 300). And unfortunately, Hanzi again combines his critique with broad and cloudy judgements about a number of other writers, for instance Eckhart Tolle (“kind and wise, but poorly educated and not very clever,” p. 302, 278), to mention only one example. Unfortunately, the author does not explain how he arrives at his evaluations of specific people’s developmental stage, level of depth etc., but seems to call upon the reader’s trust in (his, Hanzi’s) common sense: “Social theory is where science and common sense meet” (p. 20).

Despite these weaknesses – and notwithstanding the difficulty of measurement – the depth category can be considered as the most original idea in the Hanzi model. Moreover, in this regard, the author’s particular interest seems to be to redefine the interrelations between the four dimensions, more precisely, to have state and depth acknowledged as equally – or even more – important than structural cognitive and cultural development. While development is a goal in all four dimensions in order for individuals to mature Hanzi’s own preference is on what he calls the inner dimensions, i.e. state and depth (“if I had to choose, I’d go with state,” p. 348).

He gives multiple examples of people with high depth despite low complexity, as if to point out that what is commonly appreciated as an indicator of personal development in integral circles, namely cognitive and/or ego development, is only part of the story. On the one hand, this preference seems to imply that people whose personality profiles show high depth (i.e. wisdom, life experience etc. or spiritual development) are of particular “value” for society and thus, should be given more appreciation, regardless of their cognitive complexity. On the other hand, Hanzi rightly points out that development generally requires a benevolent environment and, ideally, a minimum quality of state (high states “have lasting impact on our overall psychological development,” p. 275). So the fact that relatively high/positive/happy states can be brought about quite easily through some sort of support or “nudging,” opens up a worthwhile field of activity for Hanzi’s metamodern politics

and society: “Just imagine how differently society would function if many more of us were in higher states a larger portion of the time” (p. 270).

Altogether, Hanzi suggests a model that combines the four dimensions – and even allows high depth to “outweigh” low complexity in a person’s overall developmental profile: “If we are roughly correct, all of these four dimensions should correlate strongly with people's value memes; in fact, they should together make up the value meme, more or less” (personal communication). In the book, Hanzi therefore introduces the new concept of “effective value meme (evm)” which he defines as “a kind of average between your complexity, code, state and depth” (p. 310). In other words, the higher one scores in each dimension, the higher one’s evm.

Obviously, the term “development” takes on a different meaning when we turn from structuralist stages to inner states, and Hanzi himself does concede the difficulty of measuring the latter. What he does not spell out at all though is how the four dimensions can actually be translated into one overall indicator or category. While the idea that an individual can have low complexity and high depth is very plausible, it is not made very clear, how “these four dimensions work together to generate overall patterns” (the evms). The book leaves open, what those patterns might look like in practice, and how they could be meaningfully modelled on a higher, more complex level, beyond just summarizing and adding up someone’s scores in each individual dimension (p. 174).

In view of the relation between states and stages, Hanzi himself just states that they are related, but don’t predict each other (p. 270), and that “states are more volatile and easier to affect than stages of cognitive complexity (p. 271). So far, these things are well-known, not least from Wilber’s work in this area – with which Hanzi does not seem to agree with though: “Wilber’s model comes closest to understanding these issues. He speaks of two kinds of development: one of spiritual states and one of cognitive stages. But his model (called the Wilber-Combs lattice) is still spaghetti” (p. 173). Eh...?!

General Comments

This, together with a couple of sometimes very harsh critiques of other authors and their models lead us to some final, overall comments on *The Listening Society*.

The book is definitely inspiring reading to anyone interested in integrally informed politics and probably a long overdue wake-up call for postmodernists, with its convincingly laid out claim that “there is no safe political position” (p. 151) and that it’s time for postmodernism to face its own inner contradictions. It also contains convincing pieces of analysis when it comes to reinterpreting the evolution of political governance and socio-economic conflicts over the past 2-3 centuries (finally an integrally informed sociologist!), as well as numerous worthwhile ideas helping to conceive ways for transcending the left-right divide and other challenges of metamodern/integral politics (p. 45). Part of the more concrete sections is Hanzi’s description of the Danish political party Alternativet (The Alternative) which is trying to put elements of these new approach to politics into practice since 2013 (chapter 5).

At the same time, what some have considered a “refreshing” strength (namely “that the ideas of the books are robust but not so carefully fine-tuned as to amputate capacity for impact,” see Hilary

Bradbury's recent review on the Metamodern mailing list) also appears to come with some noteworthy weaknesses. I will point out three of them below.

First, the choice to depart from more a conventional tone and style in favor of what Hanzi calls "sincere irony" can be understood and justified by the declared purpose of the book. However, in my reading, the text does not always walk its talk when it comes to displaying a "listening" attitude towards other contributions to the broad field of metamodern, developmental, integral and other streams of research. When talking about other authors (i.e. developmentalists and wisdom researchers), Hanzi often takes a rather judgmental position, instead of paying credit where credit is due. In this sense, I didn't particularly experience Hanzi's book as a "listening" exercise; his universe does not demonstrate the proposed "youniverse" that sees and appreciates everyone else's efforts. Despite repeated self-ironic confessions à la "we are probably, after all, mistaken" and his explicit "ironic smile at our own self-importance," Hanzi's overall tone comes across as just a bit overconfident. It sometimes also recalls discourses around making one's own tribe "great again" – by bashing other communities, in this case, the integral one, for example. Notwithstanding its ironic stance and its legitimately provocative call for action, the book could display a somewhat healthier degree of sincere scientific humility which, IMHO, can also be seen as an indicator of personal and spiritual development.

For instance, while Hanzi is very explicit about his own model (and the metamodern perspective) being the best and "most powerful theory" currently available for explaining the world ("only the Metamodern value meme can see the world with a sufficient sobriety," p. 332) and about his favorite MHC as being the most scientific and consistent possible methodological approach for this endeavor, he dedicates much less space to other systems than the MHC. Quote: "We don't really have to bother with going through the other theories of adult development; I should only briefly point out that they don't really work..." (p. 346). At the same time, he tends to remain rather vague about the "weak spots" of other theories, often failing to back up broad claims.

Sometimes, this raises questions as to the author's understanding of the respective models. Take for instance Hanzi's claims about Robert Kegan's and Susanne Cook-Greuter's personal cognitive stage and depth based on the design of their theories. He claims that they are functioning at the (MHC) systematic level, because "they both insist upon putting development into one scale which is one-dimensional, and driven by one central logic (one system, rather than several systems with differing properties)." While it may be true that the "tendency to view everything as 'ONE system' is a hallmark of systematic stage thinkers", there is no distinction between the person and their model, let alone a proper analysis of personal stage. While I myself only intuitively doubt Hanzi's evaluation, a colleague who has personally worked with both Kegan and Cook-Greuter more intensively, gave the following comment: "I don't think either of them is inherently at the systematic level, they both display too much subtlety, nuance, compassion, humor and so on to just see things that way. At the same time, what a person who only reads their text sees is their 'performance' in relation to the text they read. Given that most of what they might read is aiming to describe and outline a theoretical model, it could appear at this level. So in such a case, it appears the author is conflating performance in a specific context with the person, and this is dangerous" (personal communication).

Hanzi then goes on to claim that "both do, however, have greater depth and state than most of us" and that "people who are higher in depth and state than in their complexity and code" – what

does this mean, actually? ... “are often tempted towards a ‘holistic’ view because you feel that there is more to the world than your mind can explain (...), and this tends to pressure the mind to accept magical beliefs” (personal communication). He then gives one (disputable) example each for what he thinks is a magical belief, and ends on the assertion that what he has diagnosed as an imbalance of depth and stage (connected with magical beliefs) “is the most common imbalance in integralists.” He further states, that the (non)belief “in magic is a major difference between integralists and metamodernists.” And according to Hanzi, of course, it’s *the* “integralists” who believe in magic while *the* metamodernists don’t, because they “find such beliefs pathological as they can and will curtail any healthy expression of higher stages unfolding in society at large.” Aha.

Second, as to the empirical grounds of Hanzi’s own model, what we find is quite far away from the MHC’s high and clean measurement standards, when it comes to those dimensions that he brings in on top of existing integral models. This is partly due to the fact that inner dimensions such as state and depth are considerably difficult to explore, let alone to measure in any intersubjectively verifiable way. The author is well aware of this weakness (“I don’t have the data to prove it,” p. 337). And while he does mention possible methodological avenues to get a hold of these dimensions (such as in-depth interviews or brain analysis), there is no sign in the book that he has actually engaged in any of the proposed methods, even with regard to a limited number of cases, to test if any of them are helpful in the context of the model. All we get is the confession that “parts of the book are based on arguments and generalizations that you must weigh and consider with your own rational and emotional faculties, much like the arguments of other social theorists”

Finally, connected to the first critique, it often remains less clear than it would be desirable, how the proposed new model or meta-system relates to previous, existing ones – and what, therefore, is actually the new aspect or insight (except combining 4 dimensions two of which remain theoretical). For the developmental stages, Hanzi draws heavily on Michael Commons’ MHC (for cognitive stage) and on Spiral Dynamics for what he calls “cultural code.” For the latter, he uses a few new stage names, but does not propose any essentially new contents, let alone empirical data that would suggest modifications to either of these models. When it comes to his understanding of “inner dimensions” and the relations between states and stages, which appears to be a crucial issue to him, there is no discussion of Wilber’s zones, and the Wilber-Combs lattice is, as it were, ridiculed as “spaghetti” (whatever this means). Furthermore, the fact that Hanzi does not provide any graphic illustration of his model (beyond some tables on individual sub-dimensions), but keeps it exclusively textual and thus, linear (-ironic!), does not make it easier for the reader to buy into his specific overall construct of effective value memes.

So, coming back to my initial question about the essence of metamodernism as presented in *The Listening Society*, and about how it is similar to or different from “integral,” the answer has not become clearer. I by all means appreciate the momentum that the book has generated among a broader circle of interested readers in the direction of transformative perspectives for politics and society. (For the moment, the discussion about it seems to be led mainly by male intellectuals though). At the same time, I would still describe it as one *interpretation* – or (the beginning of an) application of integral ideas to these domains (more of that comes in volume 2), maybe also a translation of “integral” for wider postmodern audiences, which is of value of course. I see few substantially new ideas or concepts though, that have not somehow been present in the writings of other integral authors before. Yet, I do see a powerful vision, a strong sense of urgency to “get

these things out into the public,” and I see a growing community of engaged readers, followers and co-creators who seem to have the willpower – or, in Hanzi’s words: “the balls” – to go forward behind the flag of metamodernism and implement a next generation of political leadership and citizenry. This by itself, cannot be overestimated.

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