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Annemie Ploeger
Emerging Perspectives of Metatheory and Theory:  
A Special Issue of Integral Review

Steven Wallis

A New Focus

Welcome to this special issue of Integral Review. Here, we have encouraged contributions from a diverse group of serious thinkers. Their peer-reviewed contributions provide a broad range of insights into the emerging field of metatheory. Metatheory is an important field of study because each person’s metatheoretical perspective shapes the way she or he understands theory. And, the way we understand theory influences how we create, validate, test, select, and apply theory to improving ourselves, developing goals, and working to optimize the human (and post-human) condition. Without consciously understanding metatheory, we lack a “second loop” of learning – a second level of awareness.

Generally, our experiences give rise to concepts, which we combine, into theories. Theories are like lenses we use to view and engage the world (and ourselves). Having better theories means we are better able to engage the world around and within us. Despite the obvious importance of theory, few have taken the time to understand what it is all about. Engaging theory as a topic of study instigates an important recursion in human thought. Such recursions open the door to revolutions in understanding. For example, what if you changed your nation’s policy on how it makes policy, or changed your ethic for changing your ethics?

Here, we investigate our theories about what constitutes a good theory. This approach is conceptually similar to second-loop learning – or learning how to learn. Clearly, if one learns how to learn more effectively, one can learn more quickly and more deeply. This can save a great deal of time (and tuition) and allow one to apply the learned knowledge sooner. This too, is a potential usefulness of metatheory. By using our lenses to look at our lenses, we can create better lenses. Continuing, we may accelerate the process of lens-improvement. With metatheory, we can accelerate the process of theory-improvement. And, thereby, we can accelerate our understanding, self-improvement and conscious co-evolution. Finally, these changes are desperately needed in an era where such understandings are desperately needed and hotly contested.

In this special issue, some authors adopt an approach to metatheory where they essentially combine and integrate multiple theories. Other authors adopt an approach where they use one theory as a lens through which to view (and gain insights into) other theories. A third general theme includes conversations around how we can best engage this thing called metatheory. All of our authors take on this difficult and complex task of understanding theory, integrating theory, and advancing the field of metatheory. My hat is off to each of them, for they are bold explorers in a new field of study.
We begin with a paper by Zachary "Zak" Stein who suggests a philosophical metatheory by investigating the history of metatheory. Exploring a rather interesting idea about metatheory and metatheoricians he asserts that we are concerned with nothing less than the “trajectory of knowledge production processes.” And, with our metatheoretical perspectives and metatheories, we serve a normative function – guiding and enhancing academic discourse. Importantly, his reflections help us to understanding metatheoreticians – helping to define the field and helping us to learn who we are.

In the process of investigating a theory, one must adopt some conceptual stance. Stratos Ramoglou presents an investigation using two such stances to evaluate one theory within the field of organizational studies. One approach is founded on a constructivist view while the other is pragmatic. He shows that it is possible that these metatheoretical approaches can find themselves in conflict, thus raising difficulties for the analyst. To resolve this conflict, Ramoglou presents a third metatheory, an emancipatory perspective, which serves as a “tie breaker” and possibly suggests an evaluative perspective that is more effective than the other two. In plain language, it may be that we do not have (and may never have) all the answers to the uncertainty of the world. Yet, we must engage it. There may be no way to avoid the use of some metatheoretical model. And, emancipatory values allow for the emergence and engagement of new ideas. This, in some sense, cuts through a difficult dilemma. Instead of asking, “Is this true or not?” his approach suggests that we may benefit most by accepting the idea based on the benefits that such a belief may provide.

In another example of an emancipatory perspective, Carter Haynes adopts a high-level approach to identify the limitations of positivist research in the analysis of complex, subtle, social systems. Specifically, and appropriately, his exemplar here is fundamentalist religions. He draws an interesting parallel between religious fundamentalism, and positivism – where positivism may be understood as a sort of an academic fundamentalism. Haynes goes on to describe a variety of qualitative methodologies and, importantly, suggests that epistemological flexibility and metamethodology are useful supports for critical analysis and the building of more effective metatheory.

Instead of looking at a metatheory as a combination of perspectives that describe an overarching perspective, Alan Singer looks at a metatheory as a set of under-girding commonalities – something that connects and integrates core ideas of multiple perspectives from multiple perspectives. His paper is more complex than most in this special issue and his many insights are well worth reading. Here, Singer is focused on business strategy as a form of metatheory. He demonstrates by careful example how metatheorizing might be used to combine strategy, ethics, and more. He also suggests the importance of metatheory as part of a formal educational process to help students understand and integrate ideas across disciplines.

The importance or usefulness of metatheory depends on how effectively the field of study is developed. In the next paper, Steve Wallis provides an outline of metatheory’s standing as a science; and, what we might do to advance the study of metatheory. He includes modern, postmodern, and integral approaches to science and so opens the door for greater synthesis and extensions of this emerging field. Usefully, he reviews a wide range of metatheoretical
methodologies from critical and appreciative perspectives, while highlighting those that appear to the most effective in developing more rigorous theory and metatheory.

It is interesting to note a German-English connection in the growing field of metatheory. Authors from previous issues of the *Integral Review*, such as Markus Molz and Wendelin Küpers, are joined in the present issue by Karim Fathi. Fathi’s paper, in German, investigates two approaches to conflict resolution. Importantly, he consciously applies a specific model to investigate the integration of those approaches. That model, an Integral Approach based on Wilber’s AQAL model, clarifies important aspects of the conflict management approaches. He finds that this approach is useful for integrating multiple theories. Specifically, he finds that AQAL (in its present form) lacks categories that appear necessary to understand the process of conflict resolution. Thus, Fathi opens the door to advancing both conflict resolution theory, and integral theory. And, like Singer’s work in this special issue, suggests that researchers should be familiar with a variety of epistemological, metatheoretical, and practical approaches. For those who do not read German, Karim has thoughtfully provided an extended abstract in English.

**Special Section – Combining the Combinations**

An important part of metatheory is the process and product of combining and integrating multiple theories. In this special section, we begin with three papers – looking at three metatheories where the authors have used their understanding of metatheoretical methodologies to integrate theories within disciplines. The fourth paper takes the additional step of integrating the three across disciplines. Both process, and results, provide valuable insights to those interested in metatheory, transdisciplinary studies, and (of course) each of the specific fields of study addressed directly in the papers.

In the first paper, Annemie Ploeger begins with evolutionary psychology, which has already been advanced as a metatheory. In this, she asks a question that is often asked by theorists and metatheorists, alike: Why has this metatheory not been widely adopted? Importantly, she draws useful conclusions as to how a theory works (or does not work) within a discipline and opens the door for interesting conversations and explorations into the effectiveness of metatheory within the social sciences.

In the second paper, Mark Antley investigates the field of human development. He uses complexity theory as a lens to interpret, and find linkages between, multiple theories (as developed by Bandura, Sameroff, and Erickson). Mark finds this approach useful for identifying contradictions and inconsistencies between theories; which, itself, points to a useful tool for metatheoretical studies. That understanding, importantly, represents a purposeful and metatheoretical approach to identifying opportunities for advancing theories and disciplines.

Latha Poonamallee begins the third paper of this special section with the recognition that paradox and contradiction between competing theories creates a challenge to the creation of metatheory. She proposes a resolution to this issue that involves the adoption and implementation of a metatheoretical stance based on advaita (non-dualism). Through her investigation of the epistemology, ontology, and praxis of advaita, she develops an intriguing
line of inquiry balancing spirituality and metatheory. Practical implications are also suggested that may be applied to individuals, communities, and combinations of approaches to research.

In the final paper of this special issue, Annemie Ploeger provides an essay with a bold and intriguing goal – she seeks to integrate the three metatheories of this special section. Her effort points to some of the exciting possibilities, as well as some of the inherent difficulties, of this kind of process. From her effort, it seems that it is easier to integrate theories that share a common intellectual heritage (evolution and systems, in this case). It is more difficult, though not impossible, to integrate those metatheories with advaitic approach. Another difficulty may be in linking different "forms" of conceptual constructs. In this case, evolutionary theory and systems theory are fairly well advanced as "theories." In contrast, the advaitic approach is more of a philosophy (including elements of ontology, epistemology, and more).

**Toward the Horizon**

These authors do not engage in an easy task. Metatheory is an emerging field and our scholars are explorers. Explorers who purposefully eschew the daily commute in exchange for a challenging voyage on uncharted seas. In this, they are not merely mapping uncharted territory; they are also exploring what it means to have a map.

This kind of exploration does not occur with great frequency. Indeed, for the social sciences, this may be the challenge of the millennium. To help us meet that challenge more effectively, we need new ways to identify the topology of our “conceptual constructs.” If our experienced world oscillates between relativism and determinism, is it possible to point to something and unarguably identify it as a philosophy, paradigm, theory, ontology, or fact? And, what if those things may be recognized as facts from a relativist perspective, but theories from a deterministic one? Those designations may become “moving targets” that may change depending on the context in which they are observed or used.

On one level, such questions may appear to generate quite simple answers. One might simply say, “I know it when I see it – and there it is.” On another level, the interrelationships between these conceptual constructs makes that process as difficult, and as important as defining one’s relationship with the universe. To merely think about such relationships, tends to change them.

To conclude, it is important to note that each of the articles in this special issue is developing, presenting, or using a methodology for the combination and/or analysis of theory. These exercises advance our understanding of metatheory and theory, thus advancing the field of metatheory and improve our ability to understand and develop theory to optimize the human condition in concert with our planet.

My profound thanks to the authors, reviewers, editors, and publishers of Integral Review for their encouragement and support in the creation of this special issue. It is rare to find this blend of brilliance, dedication, and empathy. And, I feel that we are all better for their efforts. It is my hope that the examples and insights presented in these articles and essays will enable and encourage you, the reader, to become a conscious and active participant in the nascent field of metatheory.
On the Normative Function of Metatheoretical Endeavors

Zachary Stein

Abstract: I reconstruct an historical understanding of metatheory that emphasizes its normative function. The pioneering work of James Mark Baldwin inspires an account of how metatheoretical constructs emerge developmentally and come to serve a discourse-regulative function—overseeing, organizing, and regulating whole fields of discourse. Then I look to Charles S. Peirce as an exemplary normatively oriented metatheorist and explain how both continue a philosophical tradition concerned with the normative function of humanity more broadly. Thus, while I think it is valuable to pursue a variety of metatheoretical endeavors, including descriptive and empirical ones—mapping the terrain of various discourses, or summarizing their contributions—I argue for a specific vision of metatheory as a normative endeavor with rich intellectual and historical precedence. Unpacking some of the implications involved with this way of viewing and doing metatheory lead to considerations about the differences between two general types of metatheory (scholastic-reductionist and cosmopolitan-comprehensivist), the role of philosophical interlocutors in the public-sphere, and the trajectory of human evolution in the coming decades.

Key words: Charles S. Peirce, Integral Theory, James Mark Baldwin, metatheory, normativity, 19th Century thought.

Introduction: We metatheorists?

[With] self-consciousness comes the possibility of transforming ourselves by adopting new vocabularies, redescribing, and so reconstructing our selves and discursive institutions. While all of us are in some sense consumers of such new vocabularies, it is the special calling of some to produce them. And among those producers some take the construction of unique, potentially transformative vocabularies as the project by commitment to which they understand and define themselves. Among that group, some seek to produce those new vocabularies precisely by trying to understated the phenomena of sapience, normativity, conceptuality, reason, freedom, expression, self-consciousness, self-constitution, and historical transformation by subversive, empowering vocabularies. Those are the philosophers. They are charged neither with simply understanding human nature

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(human history), nor with simply changing it, but with changing it by understanding it.
(Robert B. Brandom, 2009, p. 150)

In general, we humans are a self-interpreting species for whom the practice of recollecting and redescribing ourselves is a crucial necessity. For us the reconstruction of identity is a continuous process wherein the past is selectively crafted into a history. It is a creative and self-constitutive exercise. We come to know each other and ourselves not by exchanging resumes (mere inventories of events), but by telling our stories. And our stories change as we do; they reflect what actually happened and what we think is worth remembering, they reflect who we were, who we are, and who we would like to become. Neglecting this retrospective task results in identity confusion, leaving us fragmented, meandering, directionless. Some argue that the species as a whole faces an impending identity crisis as the unchecked proliferation of informational and biological technologies create abrupt discontinuities in the intergenerational fabric of the lifeworld, catapulting us out of history and into forms of life that are incongruent and incomprehensible (Habermas, 2003; Fukuyama, 2002). These concerns about possible futures appear realistic when they are seen in the context of the obvious identity confusions that already characterize large swaths of the academy, especially in the humanities and social sciences (Kagan, 2009; Menand, 2010). The disciplines traditionally responsible for the self-interpretation of the species do not have a coherent self-interpretation themselves.

This paper is a preliminary articulation of how I think we metatheorists should understand our endeavors. I articulate this self-understanding by pointing to certain specific historical figures and their ideas, which I think exemplify the character and trajectory of our field. This proposed self-understanding addresses both aforementioned loci of identity confusion. Remembering (recollecting and redescribing) who we are as metatheorists should go a long way toward bringing order to the disorder and fragmentation of the academy. It should also allow for the emergence of profoundly substantive and coherent voices in a public sphere that is increasingly irrational, inarticulate, and superficial.

What follows is a certain type of scholarly intervention. It involves an historical reconstruction of core intellectual themes that have shaped a given field, addressing this reconstruction to participants in that field, and thus affecting how they understand their efforts. Both Brandom (2002; 2009) and Habermas (1971) have executed projects of this type—in philosophy and critical theory respectively—and both have discussed the unique methodological issues involved. Historical reconstructions of this kind are not uncontroversial. As mentioned above, and unpacked in the methodological clarifications of both Habermas and Brandom, the past must be crafted into a history. The reconstruction of a cumulative trajectory or tradition is both a discovery and a creation. It is also both descriptive and prescriptive. We remember what we think is worth remembering, which depends in part on who we want to become, yet who we want to become is a reflection of who we think we have been all along. This kind of complex hermeneutic exercise is indispensable for assuring the continuity of intellectual traditions. Retrospective reconstructive work sets the necessary staging for concerted constructive efforts.

Importantly, these kinds of reconstructions are always partial. The story I tell here is but one story (and a regrettable brief and unelaborated one at that). There are other stories worth telling. And I encourage the reconstruction of different stories. In one sense this paper can be read as
having a merely *expressive* intent, as opposed to its being read as if it were crafted to persuade or convince. Taking it this way amounts to seeing it as akin to the declaration: “This is how I understand what I am doing. Who is with me?” This does not mean what follows is arbitrary or irrelevant, or that it cannot be persuasive. The long tradition of expressive philosophical projects—from Schelling, Nietzsche, and Emerson through Derrida, Rorty, West, and Brandom—would suggest quite the opposite. Many have been *influential* while yet only claiming to express themselves, especially regarding issues too deep to really argue about. So while I am adopting a somewhat unconventional argumentative strategy, it is not an unreasonable one.

I have adopted this argumentative strategy mainly in response to the state of the discourse surrounding the term *metatheory*, which has been so variously characterized (e.g., Edwards, 2008; Fiske & Shweder, 1986; Overton, 2007; Ritzer, 1991; 1992). At first pass the term can simply be understood as referring to a type of super-theory built from overarching constructs that organize and subsume more local, discipline-specific theories and concepts. Roughly: whereas a theory within a discipline typically takes the world as data, metatheory typically takes other theories as data. Beyond this first pass, however, the discourse about metatheory gets very complex very fast (see Ritzer, 1992). A highly abstract, ornate, and self-referential academic niche has emerged. And as a result there has been a flowering of interesting intellectual work concerning metatheory. This is not a situation unique to the discourse about metatheory. Nor do I write this intending a criticism of the field. This is how things stand in most fields, even those with seemingly straightforward subjects, such as *human memory* (see: Hacking, 1995).

But things get even more complex and contested if *philosophy* is not partitioned off from metatheory (a move I have never seen justified) and if the whole discourse about *interdisciplinarity* and *transdisciplinarity* is also thrown into the mix (e.g., Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott, & Trow, 1994; Klein, 2005, Stein, 2007). When the net is cast broadly what comes into view is an expansive and unprecedented proliferation of reflective activity about knowledge production processes in post-industrial socio-cultural contexts. The task of cataloging the various genus and species that populate this intellectual landscape is a daunting one. And the idea of offering some new theoretical creature that might survive seems misguided, as the diversity on the current scene suggests probable redundancy. So my strategy has been to look back to a time before the Cambrian Explosion, as it were—a time before the contemporary cacophony—to find the key progenitors in hopes that this approach might allow for clarity about the core properties that characterize metatheoretical endeavors.

What results, I think, is a compelling account wherein metatheory is understood as a unique extension of more traditional modes of philosophy. First emerging in America in the later half of the 19th Century, metatheory grew up as a response to advances in psychology that would transform epistemology, and to socio-economic transformations affecting the institutionalization of knowledge production—the birth of the complex departmentalized research university. It emerged to serve a normative function as a result of cognitive, disciplinary, and discursive necessities, ultimately positioning itself as a locus of responsibility for setting the trajectory of high-level discourses and reflective cultural practices. Of course, today metatheorists claim to be doing all kinds of things, such as serving descriptive, deconstructive, or even decorative functions. I am aware of the various ways we metatheorists might understand ourselves, but I
choose to offer a vision that emphasizes the distinctly normative core of metatheoretical endeavoring. Others are welcome to tell stories that construe metatheory differently, perhaps as a more recent and poly-focal form of academic activity. I personally prefer to see metatheory as the continuation by new means of classic philosophical efforts, where highly reflective individuals take responsibility for discursively constructing conceptual innovations aimed at bringing coherence to the state of knowledge for the sake of shaping human history.²

Below I profile James Mark Baldwin and Charles S. Peirce, characterizing them as key progenitors of contemporary metatheory. They both self-consciously appropriated and transformed the philosophical traditions they inherited in order to address the rapidly changing contexts of knowledge production they faced. The results are best understood as metatheoretical endeavors that are explicitly related to a specific philosophical tradition concerned with the function, role, and purpose of humanity in an evolving universe. So Peirce and Baldwin are two of the missing links (though there are others) that relate contemporary metatheory to the full richness of its philosophical inheritance. I will offer more on that philosophical tradition in the penultimate section below. First I will briefly explain Baldwin's metatheoretical ambitions, including a look at his model of human development, which was, in part, an account of the genesis of metatheoretical constructs. Then I will discuss Peirce's philosophical work as a way of demonstrating Baldwin's ideas about the normative function of metatheoretical constructs that are understood as high-level emergent properties of cognitive developmental processes. Peirce's work exemplifies the kind of normatively oriented metatheory that was (and still is) struggling to emerge and to meet the needs of our self-interpretating species, which must create the metatheoretical languages it would use to re-create itself.

Baldwin's Dictionary and His Views of the Higher Stages

We see experience establishing, of itself, a synthetic mode of apprehension. To our mind, the course of the history of thought makes it plain that the quest for such a mode of experience presents the only hope of a lessened strife among points of view; for in such a mode of process evidence would be present to show that the entire system of experience is expressive of reality, and that only in the organization of the whole are the respective roles of this and that function to be made out. [Thus] the need of carrying out to their legitimate outcome all the hints that consciousness gives as to its unreduced and undivided epistemological calling. [This calling] does not deny the epistemological value of any of the mental functions, or the force of any of the theories which are based respectively upon one or other of the functions; on the contrary, its aim is to discover the synthetic adjustment of their claims with the larger whole. (James Mark Baldwin, 1915, p. 226)

² It may be that I am merely reconstructing part of the lineage of a certain type of metatheory. Perhaps the type of metatheory I am reconstructing here is better understood as a species of philosophical metatheory, which can be set apart from scientific metatheory (Ritzer, 1991). Or perhaps it should be called, integral metatheory (Edwards, 2007; Esbjörn-Hargens & Zimmerman, 2009; Hamilton, 2008; Laszlo, 2004; McIntosh, 2007; Mascolo & Fischer, in press; Wilber, 1995; 1999). I have no objections to the idea that what follows is merely a reconstruction of a certain type of metatheory. It may be that what I have in mind is not even metatheory, but a kind of philosophy. Call it what you will in the long run, I call it metatheory here for rhetorical purposes. I return to this issue in the conclusion.
James Mark Baldwin was a massive figure on the intellectual scene of his day. During the height of his influence he was mentioned in the same breath as William James, John Dewey and Pierre Janet, on both sides of the Atlantic. He was arguably the most significant American psychologist of the 19th Century—while James gave psychology a face, publishing the indelible *Principles of Psychology*; Baldwin gave it legs, institutionalized it, building labs and starting journals. His writings were widely cited, translated into many languages, and several of his books were considered as standards in the field. And though his theories have had a lasting impact on a variety of areas—from developmental psychology (Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1932) and psychoanalysis (Lacan, 1977) to evolutionary biology (Weber & Depew, 2003), evolutionary epistemology (Campbell, 1987), and integral theory (Wilber, 1999)—he is not the household name he once was.

Given his former stature and the continuing relevance of his ideas, many have speculated about the reasons for his present obscurity (Broughton & Freeman-Moir, 1982). A scandal did leave him blacklisted in American academia, and his departure did clear the way for behaviorism, as John B. Watson assumed control of Baldwin’s prestigious faculty position and numerous journal editorships (see: Wozniak, 2001). However, Baldwin did continue to write prolifically while exiled in France, was eventually elected a foreign correspondent to the French Academy (the highest honor that can be given to a non-citizen), and then bestowed the Legion of Honor for his charity and relief work in France during World War I. The standard story is that institutional rearrangements and broad changes in the academic *Zeitgeist* secured his fate as a footnote in the history of psychology. There is certainly a moment of truth in that account, but there is a deeper reason for Baldwin’s neglect, I believe. It has to do with the fact—and the parallels with here Peirce are remarkable, as I will show below—that he was doing metatheory when it was unacceptable to do so.

His later works are nearly universally considered to be obscure, speculative, and worthless to contemporary psychology (Boring, 1922; Richards, 1987; Weber & Depew, 2003; although see: Broughton & Freeman-Moir, 1982). This is, I believe, because these works (Baldwin, 1911, vol. 1-3; 1913, vol. 1-2; 1915) unlike his earlier works (1895; 1897) are not offered in the spirit of experimental psychology. Baldwin’s later works are offered as metatheoretical interventions, aimed at organizing the existing state of discourse in the human sciences, biology, and the humanities into a common framework, a *comprehensive developmental theory of reality*.

Baldwin’s moves beyond psychology toward metatheory were undoubtedly catalyzed by his work as editor of the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (Baldwin, 1905). The *Dictionary* stands as one of the most impressive trans-national scholarly efforts ever. Explicitly comprehensive in its ambitions, its four massive volumes cover the majority of academic knowledge that existed at the turn of the last Century. It contains contributions from hundreds of academics on well over a thousand topics, serving as a veritable *who’s who* and *what’s what* for the 19th Century academy. The *Dictionary* remains unrivaled as a scholarly achievement in certain respects—getting a remarkable amount of knowledge under one roof, with attention to

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3 For an account of Baldwin’s life and work see: Boring, 1922; Richards, 1987; Wozniak, 2001.

4 Yet even Broughton only really pays attention to the first volume of Baldwin’s three-volume *magnum opus*.

5 For an account of how profoundly the project affect Baldwin’s thought see: Wozniak, 2001.
codifying common terminology and efforts at clarifying the structure of the epistemological relations between the disciplinary perspectives in play. And Baldwin oversaw the entire project, making emendations or substantial contributions to almost every entry.

Importantly, the ambitious encyclopedic effort coincided with Baldwin’s appointment to John’s Hopkins University, the first modern research university in America. This was a dynamic time in the history of academic institutions (Cremin, 1988; Kerr, 1963; Menand, 2010). The sciences began to gain hegemony and the disciplines were subdividing and multiplying at a dizzying rate. No student of 19th Century thought can ignore the profound and pervasive impacts resulting from the professionalization and concomitant departmentalization of knowledge production in the years immediately preceding the publication of Baldwin’s *Dictionary*. It was in these years that the academy began to assume the shape it has today, with a vast array of siloed, specialized disciplinary areas. It is hard to see Baldwin’s *Dictionary* as anything but a response to what was becoming an increasingly fragmented and sprawling intellectual landscape, an unprecedented academic landscape he found himself in the middle of at Johns Hopkins.

But while he was in the middle of it institutionally, he was also in the middle of it theoretically, as his interests turned at this time toward articulating a metatheoretical developmental epistemology. He moved beyond the focused experimental orientations that characterized his earlier psychological works. Baldwin began to construct an overarching model that could account for the wide variety of knowledge he was compiling for the *Dictionary*, the various types of validity-claims, and the related methods of investigation. Moreover, it was a model that would ultimately account for his ability to organize this knowledge, providing an account of the genesis of metatheoretical constructs as high-level emergent products of cognitive developmental processes. From where I sit it is critical to see—although it is often overlooked—that the publication of the *Dictionary* immediately preceded Baldwin’s work on *Thought and Things* (1911, Vol. 1-3).

In *Thought and Things*, his magnum opus, he offers a convergent view of human epistemological development, putting forward a model in which the higher-stages are mainly integrative and reconciliatory—functioning to transcend the dualisms and differentiations carefully and necessarily built up as the child develops in relation to culture and nature. Baldwin suggests that psychological growth is best thought of in terms of different lines or domains of development, which he refers to as developmental modes. Each mode is a relatively distinct skill or capacity, exercised in relation to different aspects of reality. Modes cluster together because they have similar external controls, thus forming distinct object domains. Different disciplines, methods, and their related validity-claims can be organized in terms of differential mode-recruitment profiles. And at a more abstract level this same strategy provides Baldwin with a way to build a system of epistemological categories. At its highest reaches the model contains a central division between logical and practical modes—a distinction that retrofits Kant’s differentiation of theoretical and practical reason. This is the difference between science and morals, between objectivity and inter-subjectivity; I-It set apart from I-Thou-We. For Baldwin (and others, e.g., Habermas and Wilber), the two most basic modes of development are those that cluster around objects (I-IT; objectivity) and those that cluster around people (I-Thou-We; intersubjectivity/subjectivity).
In any case, late in the life course, according to Baldwin's model, these different lines reach a point of complexity and divergence such that they call for the creation of a specific type of new concept, built to transcend but include the differences between the logical and the practical—to reconcile science with the perspectives of the lifeworld. New constructs emerge and begin serving a discourse-regulative function—overseeing, organizing, and regulating whole fields of discourse. With a nod to Kant, Baldwin characterizes this emergent developmental capacity as the *aesthetic imagination*. In Baldwin's words:

The outcome of our investigation, broadly stated, is that in the aesthetic imagination . . . *the processes of experience [can] come together after having fallen apart*. Each of the cognitive modes [i.e., lines] . . . sets up, as is its nature to, a reference in which *the real for it, its real, is found*. But in each case *its real, not the real*, is postulated or presupposed, since the control that is discovered is the outcome of this or that special mode and stage of psychic function. The protest of the aesthetic imagination is against just this partialness of each of the modes of "real" meaning. Its own ideal, on the contrary, is one of completeness, of reunion, of *reconciliation*; it gives us the "real" which is absolute in the sense that its object is not relative to, and does not fulfill, one type of interest only to the exclusion of others. (Baldwin, 1911, Vol. 3, p. 13)

In Baldwin's model the aesthetic imagination emerges during the course of late-stage cognitive and socio-moral development. It leads to the construction of a variety of *trans-logical* and *trans-practical* constructs. These constructs function across multiple domains and disciplines to oversee, integrate, and regulate important reconciliatory syntheses. For example, Baldwin states that at this stage the individual begins to yearn for views that overcome the distinctions between mind and body, theory and practice, and the ideal and the actual.

Most relevant to this discussion is what Baldwin called *theoretical intuition*, a name he gives to what results when the aesthetic imagination is exercised in the domain of theoretical or logical pursuits, such as science. As Baldwin describes, "By theoretical intuition is meant the immediate apprehension or perception of rational principles as such, these principles being looked upon as constitutive or regulative of knowledge" (Baldwin, 1911, Vol. 3, p. 234). Thus, according to Baldwin's developmental model, whole theories, methods, and discourses come to be regulated by the products of late-stage psychological growth. A capability comes online that allows for the creation of metatheoretical constructs that serve a normative function.

This way of understanding the higher reaches of human epistemological development would buoy Baldwin’s continued metatheoretical endeavors, most notably his ambitious attempt at building a *comprehensive developmental theory of reality* (Baldwin, 1915). According to this vision, human experience, as elaborated through cultural evolution, is the apex of cosmic evolutionary development, giving a unique significance to our moral, epistemological, and for Baldwin most importantly, our aesthetic strivings. For Baldwin, with homage to Kant’s third *Critique* and the Romantics it inspired, it is in the reconciliatory immediacy and world-disclosing power of aesthetic experience that the fullness of reality is revealed, transcending but including all the partial modes of experience built up over the course of biological, cultural, and individual evolution. Thus do the aforementioned *aesthetic imagination* and its *theoretical intuitions* function to guide the trajectory of cultural evolution. And so the function of humanity in the
natural world is a normative one—to redeem, reconcile, and resuscitate the full reality and meaning of the universe. But this is getting ahead of our story.

For now it should be noted that Baldwin’s theorizing ate its own tail. He offered a theoretical account of the very cognitive processes that he recruited in his metatheoretical endeavoring. He argued that metatheoretical constructs, which organize and regulate whole discourses and theories, were a necessary outgrowth of epistemological development. I pointed out that he began his forays into metatheory after executing a massive project that got him intimately acquainted with the full range of knowledge production processes then extant. So Baldwin’s story teaches that the emergence of metatheory involves an ability to reflect on a range of knowledge production processes and recognize that they need regulating, organizing, and direction setting. This ability was inimitably exemplified by Charles S. Peirce, who faced the same unprecedented academic environment as Baldwin, and who also took the metatheoretical high road.

**Peirce’s Metatheoretical Modus Operandi**

The word *normative* was invented by the school of Schleiermacher. . . . But we must trace its introduction into common speech, to Wundt. It is taken from the Latin verb *normo*, to square. . . . The majority of writers who make use of it tell us that there are three normative sciences, logic, aesthetics, and ethics. The doctrines of the true, the beautiful, and the good, a triad of ideals which has been recognized since antiquity. . . . Logic is the theory of *right* reasoning, of what reasoning ought to be, not of what it is. On that account, it used to be called a *directive* science, but of late years the adjective *normative* has been generally substituted. (Charles S. Peirce, 1931, p. 5)

Peirce was a towering but controversial figure on the intellectual scene of his day. He was by any measure a prodigious polymath, with a working mastery of well over a dozen sciences, a mathematician, logician, metaphysician, and an epistemologist. He was one of the few American academics on the world stage during the middle of the 19th century, and was the first American to be elected as a member of an international scientific organization. But he was never able to gain the institutional support and positioning in the American academy that many thought he deserved. Both his personality and the substance of his intellectual contributions made it difficult for him to secure a position. As would be the case for Baldwin two decades later, a scandal forced Peirce to leave John Hopkins University.6 And like Baldwin, Peirce was a metatheorist during a time when it was unacceptable to be one. During the last decade of his life he faded into obscurity, eventually dying in poverty in rural Pennsylvania. He was known as the greatest genius of his generation to a few (including William James and Theodore Roosevelt), but completely unknown to most.7

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6 A footnote is warranted about the fact that both Peirce and Baldwin were dismissed from the academy due to sexual scandals. (Baldwin was caught in a club that also served as a brothel; Peirce got a divorce and married a (very) young French woman). But a full discussion of the shadows of these men, the mores of Victorian America, and the complex and personal nature of the academic politics involved would take us too far afield (See: Brent, 1998; Richards, 1987).

7 For an account of Peirce’s life, which had the plot line of a Greek tragedy see: Brent, 1998.
Yet Peirce toiled away at his work, even as he was starving to death in the Delaware River Valley. He ultimately built what is one of the most profound philosophical systems ever constructed. As Peirce explained it,

[I intend] to make a philosophy like that of Aristotle, that is to say, to outline a theory so comprehensive that, for a long time to come, the entire work of human reason, in philosophy of every school and kind, in mathematics, in psychology, in physical science, in history, in sociology, and in whatever other department there may be, shall appear as the filling up of its details. (Peirce, 2000, p. 168)

This system has exerted a wide ranging influence, from philosophers like Popper (1966) to linguists like Chomsky (1979), both of whom see Peirce as one of the most significant philosophers to have ever lived. His continued relevance for a wide range of fields outside philosophy, including semiotics (a field which he founded), cognitive science, and computer science, is evidenced by what amounts to an academic cottage industry, where scholarship is burgeoning (see Misak, 2004).

For the purposes of the story I am telling here, it is important to see that Peirce’s work was, in part, like Baldwin’s, a response to the unprecedented transformations affecting academic knowledge production processes in the later half of the 19th Century (Ketner & Kloesel, 1986). On one reading, Peirce's philosophical system can be understood as a general semiotics, analytically equipped for overseeing, explicating, and evaluating different kinds of beliefs at multiple levels—from propositions, to arguments, to discourses. Peirce executes this ambitious project by utilizing a variety of philosophical methods—methods Baldwin would claim exemplify the exercise of aesthetic imagination, or theoretical intuition.

Peirce surveyed a broad expanse of sciences and inductively explicated an evolutionary hierarchy akin to a biological taxonomy (Kent, 1987; Peirce, 1931). He built a system of existential-graphs wherein the relations between propositions are explicated via logically uniform concept maps (Peirce, 1933; Shin, 2002). He also clarified the intersubjective conditions for the possibility of reliable knowledge production, arguing that inquiry-oriented communication communities must have an open and inclusive structure predicated on trust, honesty, and reciprocity (Apel, 1995; Peirce, 1984). And of course, as a final example, it is well known that underlying his whole system was a set of three primordial concepts—in Kant's sense of being transcendentally basic—that he characterized as syncategorematic categories, and once correlated with the three basic pronouns, I, Thou, and IT (Habermas, 1992; Peirce, 1982). In all of these instances Peirce was out to build metatheoretical constructs that could play a role in adjudicative processes concerning the value of our cognitive wares.

Moreover, Peirce, like Baldwin, positioned his discourse-regulative project atop a broader evolutionary vision of the universe where the strivings of humanity are continuous with the evolution of the cosmos (Peirce, 2000; 1934; Esposito, 1980; Hausman, 1993). Peirce articulated a sophisticated and empirically grounded evolutionary ontology where all events are semiotic processes that co-evolve toward increasing complexity, autonomy, self-awareness, and possible harmony. Peirce’s pansemiotic evolutionary theory was a unique (post-metaphysical) view in so far as it was explicitly offered as a hypothesis amenable to correction in light of forthcoming
empirical data. It greatly influenced Whitehead (1978) and continues to intrigue and inspire scholars in the physical and biological sciences (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984) and philosophy (Apel, 1994).

This understanding of evolution allowed Peirce, like Baldwin, to bring his overarching normative concerns about the trajectory of academic discourses in line with a venerable philosophical tradition that articulated the radical significance of humanity’s cultural endeavors in terms of a cosmic evolutionary unfolding. Ultimately, Peirce, with a look in Kant’s direction, envisioned humanity as capable of multitudinous self-correcting intellectual and ethical endeavors, which ought to result in an ideal communication community coterminous with the cosmos. In this post-metaphysical eschatology, the ideals of harmonious love between all beings and unconditional knowledge about all things stand as goals to be approached asymptotically. With this thought Peirce rearticulates a philosophical motif that can be traced back through Emerson, Schelling, and Kant to the obscure cipher of Bohme’s mystical Protestant religiosity and its ancient Hebraic and Neo-Platonic roots.

What Does it Mean to Serve a Normative Function: Humanity's Task

We are symbols, and inhabit symbols. . . . Our expressions, or namings, [or theories,] are not art, but a second nature, grown out of the first, as a leaf out of a tree. What we call nature, is a certain self-regulated motion, or change; and nature does not leave another to baptize her, but baptizes herself; and thus through the metamorphosis again. (from The Poet by Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1895, p. 86)

Emerson was not the first to speculate about the function of humanity in nature; but he was one of the most articulate. Beyond merely positioning humanity in the natural world, Emerson offered a vision in which humans have a role to play, a task ordained—a function—in nature. The continuity of human history with natural evolution would become a theme in American philosophy (Schnieder, 1963). Following the influential examples of Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte, a set of speculative Americanized ‘cosmic histories’ were articulated by the likes of John Fiske (1874) and Francis Ellingwood Abbot (1885). Lester Frank Ward (1883), the St Louis Hegelians (Leidecker, 2007), John Dewey (1898) and others (Mead, 1936), would all argue that cultural evolution should be understood as being in important ways continuous with cosmic evolution. These early voices, like those of Peirce and Baldwin, toiled in Emerson's shadow. Of course, Emerson toiled in the shadow of Kant, who first tentatively and cryptically suggested that the laws humanity gives itself are best read as an autonomous extension of the self-regulative processes of the natural world. According to this view, humanity's autonomy—literally, its self-legislating capability—represents nature's crowning innovation, wherein are found startling advances toward novelty and complexity. Importantly, a capacity for autonomy entails the acceptance of responsibility. This is the root of the notion that humanity is somehow accountable for the trajectory of evolution.

According to the tradition I am reconstructing here—from Kant through Emerson to Baldwin, Peirce, and Wilber—the function of humanity in nature is a normative one. It is a function contingent upon the autonomy of humanity in an evolving world and humanity's reflective
knowledge of this situation. This tradition suggests that we are responsible for directing the trajectory of evolution, and we know it (our ought to). Peirce wrote about it in terms of our having a responsibility to lay down new cosmic habits; Emerson offered his evocative and ennobling calls for self-determination with this broad context in mind; Kant argued that humanity ought to facilitate the transformation of the kingdom of nature into the kingdom of ends by proceeding such that the norms of our actions might be fit to serve as universal laws (akin to natural laws). These views highlight the directive, regulative, trajectory setting—that is, the normative—function of humanity in nature.

As I have suggested above, this philosophical tradition focusing on the normative function of humanity is the context from which the first metatheoretical endeavors emerged. Metatheories emerge, as Baldwin suggests and Peirce's work exemplifies, in order to regulate and oversee whole sets of discourses—serving a normative function vis-à-vis more local, discipline-specific theories and concepts. Metatheories set the trajectory for broad segments of culture and knowledge production. This saddles the metatheorist with unique responsibilities.

Along these lines, many of Kant's arguments were set in the context of specific views about the responsibilities of philosophers in the public sphere and beyond. In the final sections of the Critique of Pure Reason, Kant (1998, B867) lays out a distinction between two general types of philosophers: scholastic-reductionist and cosmopolitan-comprehensivist. The former perpetuates the fragmentation of knowledge by exercising the power of philosophy in isolated contexts and for partial purposes. The latter embodies a post-metaphysical vision of philosophy wherein the philosopher serves a normative function in the public sphere, explicating the teleologia rationis humanae, being a legislator of reason's future, and an immanent catalyst of the corpus mysticum.

Kant (1983) articulated one of the earliest and most influential normative global meta-narratives in a series of publications about the history of human civilization and the necessary future emergence of a global governance system. In its wake Habermas and Apel have both articulated normative global metatheories concerned with the trajectory of cultural evolution—both trace a lineage to Kant via Marx, Weber, the American Pragmatists, and other 19th century European thought-leaders. It seems Wilber can trace a lineage to Kant via Baldwin, Peirce, and Emerson, all cosmopolitan agents building metatheories to fit normative functions. With this backward glance we are positioned to consider the shape of metatheories to come.

**Conclusion: The Shape of Metatheories to Come**

[Post-modern capitalistic social structures] have evidently found some functional equivalent for ideology formation. In place of the positive task of meeting certain needs for self-interpretation by ideological means, we have the negative task of preventing holistic self-interpretations from coming into existence... . . . Everyday consciousness is robbed of its power to synthesize; it becomes fragmented. . . . The attempts at an Aufhebung of

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8 For the full scope of Kant’s ideas concerning socio-cultural evolution see: Fenves, 1991. For Kant’s life and the political complexities and editorial compromises surrounding his radical views see: Cassirer, 1981. And for the contemporary relevance of Kant’s cosmopolitan political vision: see Habermas, 2006. Finally, for Kant’s views on normativity, a concept central to his whole philosophy, see: Brandom, 2009; Korsgaard, 1996)
philosophy and art were rebellions against structures that subordinated everyday consciousness to the standards of exclusive expert cultures developing according to their own logics. . . Everyday consciousness sees itself thrown back on traditions whose claims to validity have already been suspended; where it does escape the spell of traditionalism, it is hopelessly splintered. In place of “false consciousness” we today have a “fragmented consciousness” that blocks enlightenment. (Jürgen Habermas, 1987, p.355)

At the outset I raised the possibility of a species-wide identity crisis that would render humanity incomprehensible to itself. This is one way of recasting the idea—handed down from Dewey, through Habermas, to Wilber—that non-synchronic patterns in socio-cultural development have resulted in a situation where our techno-scientific capabilities far outstrip our ethico-political visions and organizations. Just as unprecedented scientific advances expand the reach and efficacy of our communication and biomedical technologies, the fields tasked with expressing an understanding of what humanity is have been rendered speechless by their own confusions. The proliferation of self-descriptions provided by contemporary biologically oriented human sciences offer a fragmented and reductionistic picture, while the humanities and social sciences, underfunded and undervalued, pursue opportunistic and conservative research agendas (Kagan, 2009). In the same historical moment we find ourselves with the knowledge and power to reliably and strategically affect the central nervous system as a means for canalizing behavioral conformity, our normative discourses are in disarray—the normative sciences, as Peirce would call them—these are the discourses that address how things ought to be with society and its discursive institutions. In the coming decades, as the global information explosion continues and networks of communicational connectivity encircle the earth, we will be using them to debate the meaning of our humanity—striving to articulate a set of global values that might allow us to understand ourselves as the inhabitants of a globalized techno-economic and communications infrastructure. The academy—the so-called ‘multiversity’—is not built to provide humanity with a coherent picture of itself. The desperate trumpeting of interdisciplinary approaches in colleges and research labs is a testament to this (Menand, 2010).

In a set of publications I have addressed issues of quality control at the level of interdisciplinary knowledge production and education, and suggested that metatheoretical constructs play a necessary role in epistemologically responsible approaches to interdisciplinarity (Stein, 2007; Stein, Connell, & Gardner, 2008). Specifically, I suggested that metatheoretical constructs, such as the four quadrants (Wilber, 1995), the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1998), and the classic syncategorematic categories (Peirce, 1984), play an important function in both disciplinary and interdisciplinary discourse. This function can be characterized variously, as the setting of quality control parameters, or the clarification of our epistemic and ethical responsibilities. Metatheoretical constructs can be built to oversee, regulate, and direct disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge production. Metatheory, as I see it, serves an important normative function on the contemporary academic scene.

But the contemporary relevance of transforming knowledge production processes goes beyond the academy. Problem-focused interdisciplinary think tanks are beginning to play an increasingly important role in an emerging global network of change-oriented institutions. While some—such as the Club of Rome and branches of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—have been around since the 1970s, the past decade has seen a
proliferation of action-oriented institutes that span traditional disciplinary boundaries for the sake of producing usable-knowledge about pressing global problems. The State of the World Forum, Integral Institute/Research Center, and the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford, are three examples out of literally dozens. The United States Federal Government and the United Nations continually create specific problem-focused interdisciplinary initiatives, and readily draw from those already producing usable-knowledge in the public sphere. Above I have expressed what I think the role of metatheory is in this constellation of conditions, in the academy and beyond. It is to weave a coherent overarching set of normative constructs, organizing and regulating the specialized discourses in view, with an eye to comprehensiveness, and a voice resonant with the lifeworld.

As mentioned in the first footnote, this view of metatheory is controversial. But the idea here is not to displace or replace the self-understanding of metatheorists who take themselves as scientists pursuing descriptive projects with objective methods. Rather, the intention is to remind big-picture thinkers that this kind of scientific self-understanding is not the only option. Putting arguments about the crypto-normativism of ostensibly descriptive projects aside (Habermas, 1987), I claim only that we metatheorists might want to think differently about what we do. I sketched the contours of a tradition that wedds the normative function of metatheory to ideas about the autonomy and self-directedness of human cultural evolution. I suggested that metatheorists are those concerned about the trajectory of knowledge production processes and reflective cultural practices. According to this view metatheorists build specific kinds of high-level constructs that have a normative thrust. Their interventions aim at affecting the proprieties of our discursive practices.

Hand wringing about the liabilities accompanying these kinds of explicitly normative projects is to be expected. While performative contradictions plague arguments against normative endeavors—prescribing the wholesale rejection of prescriptions—there are legitimate worries worth attending to. Worries about the institutionalization of centralized discursive authorities are warranted, as are concerns about the nefarious political affordances of evolutionary ideologies (Farber, 1998). Yet these are not necessary accoutrements to the vision of metatheory outlined above.

The key players in my account, including Kant, Peirce, and Habermas, are stanch, articulate, and influential proponents of the free and open discursive practices that characterize the best scientific communities and democratic public spheres. Against the backdrop these thinkers provide, the criticism that normative metatheoretical endeavors would be coercive enterprises, aimed at stifling discourse, innovation, and free inquiry is misguided. The idea that metatheorists oversee and regulate various discursive practices does not entail that metatheorists are overseers. Rather they are just the most reflective and visionary participants in knowledge production processes, arguing about preferable or regrettable trajectories for sets of disciplines, suggesting syntheses, but wielding nothing other than the unforced force of the better argument. I support the institutionalization of metatheoretically guided knowledge production because the exercise of normative authority in these contexts is not merely a matter of power-broking. Sweeping arguments to the contrary betray a lack of nuance about what normative authority looks like and reflect the sorry state of our normative discourses more generally.
As the quote beginning this concluding section suggests, we inhabitants of the post-industrial West share a lifeworld characterized by the devaluation of overarching and totalizing ideologies (see also Bell, 2000). And we still associate the very idea of normative authority with the dark legacy of politically operationalized all-encompassing worldviews. The story told above about the fractioning (and factioning) of the modern research university is but one sub-plot in a larger narrative about recent transformations in the self-understanding of the species. No doubt, the specter of an evolutionary ideology has loomed at least since Darwin first articulated an objective mechanism governing evolutionary processes. But the slow and persistent emergence of an evolutionary worldview has not counteracted broader tendencies toward a radically polycentric and conflict-ridden cultural environment. Even putting aside its rejection by traditionalists preferring non-scientific accounts, evolution is an ambiguous and contested concept, especially with regards to its broader ethico-political implications (Wilber, 1995; Wilson, 1975). The suggestions I offered here assume that heterogeneity and pluralism will continue to characterize cultural evolution. Exercising the normative function of metatheory does not entail the homogenization of cultural practices and discursive institutions in the name of evolutionary progress. Placing metatheory in an evolutionary context does not entail taking on the worst baggage from a Century’s worth of attempts at resuscitating ideology in evolutionary garb (Farber, 1998).

Shadow boxing aside, the goal of this paper has been to remember and express—to reconstruct a thread in the history of metatheory with the hope of affecting the shape of metatheories to come. More work remains to be done filling out the rest of this history, and more importantly, building metatheories that fit the specifications thus reconstructed. I have already begun this constructive metatheoretical work in a series of publications that address the use of metrics in contexts where human lives are under scrutiny, from the diagnostic categories that structure the delivery of psychopharmacological interventions to the standardized testing infrastructures that frame educational opportunity (Stein, Dawson, & Fischer, in press; Stein, della Chiesa, Hinton, & Fischer, in press; Stein & Hiekkinen, 2009). Overseeing complex multi-disciplinary areas of concern, these interventions involve the construction of metatheoretical constructs that serve as normative parameters. I argue the merits of setting a new trajectory for the various discursive practices involved with the institutionalized measurement of human functioning, suggesting directions more comprehensive, responsible, and responsive to the singularity and vulnerability of individuals. Moreover, as others have shown (Jaques, 1976; Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), the possibilities of cultural evolution and justice in the coming decades hinge on the kinds of metrics we choose to build and use when assessing the properties of human lives that bear on political and economic decision making. Our systems of measurement determine who we think we are and what we do to each other. Consider how SAT scores and GDP reports affect the self-perceptions of individuals and nations respectively, how partial they are as indices, and how drastically they alter the distribution of resources. But these considerations bring us full circle, back to the idea that we are responsible for the creation of the metatheoretical languages we would use to re-describe and re-create ourselves.
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Metatheories and Organizational Theory: A Pragmatic Response to Metatheoretical Uncertainty

Stratos E. Ramoglou

Abstract: Metatheoretical dilemmas about the nature of the social world often animate organizational theorists who purport to dissolve pertinent controversies along truth-laden lines of philosophical argumentation. The present paper acknowledges the inescapable uncertainty at this level of discourse to nonetheless resist taking the usual step according to which metatheoretical discourse should be abandoned as unhelpful, if not misleading, metaphysics. However, it also parts from traditional modes of metatheoretical defense to instead try to identify whether metatheoretical frameworks, beyond considerations of any possible cognitive merit in deciphering the nature of the world, may be of any use in making a desirable difference in the world. In developing a pragmatist defense of realist metatheories, we may explicitly value metatheoretical discourse from a novel standpoint and further delineate subtle conceptual relations between metatheory, theory, phenomenological acceptance, action and epistemic ethics.

Keywords: belief/epistemic ethics, metatheory, organizational theory, post-analytic philosophy, organizational unconscious, social epistemology.

What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.

L. Wittgenstein

A great deal of bad philosophy comes from people thinking that they can somehow whistle what they cannot [speak about].

A. J. Ayer

For Wittgenstein, it was absolutely vital to realize that Freud had not given us a set of scientific explanations for, e.g., dreams and neuroses. His achievement was much greater than that, for what Freud had given us, according to Wittgenstein, was a new mythology, a new way of looking at ourselves and the people around us.

R. Monk

Introduction

Metatheoretical issues traditionally provoke significant controversies among social theorists. Among the disputes of a metatheoretical nature, the soundness of realist systems of thought

1 Stratos Ramoglou is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cambridge. His principal research interests fall in three broad categories: (the theory of) entrepreneurial action, philosophical logic, and issues in social epistemology and ontology. Although his doctoral dissertation is occupied principally by the first topic, the present article is part of a project consisting of papers that investigate issues regarding knowledge claims on various levels of discourse in light of ethical and ontological considerations.

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undoubtedly occupies a prominent position. For while there is an increasing interest in the ontological questions that have been traditionally tabooed by (empiricist) philosophers of science, anti-metaphysical skepticism has by no means vanished. A salient factor responsible for this state of affairs should be reasonably attributed to the prominence of constructionist metatheoretical (anti-realist hereafter) approaches, since it seems that they have at their disposal powerful conceptual tools for undermining the soundness of claims that promise to provide access to or presuppose knowledge of essential truths about the nature of the world.² ³

Among social theorists engaged in ontologically-informed metatheoretical disputes, organizational theorists, and especially scholars in the Critical Management Studies (CMS) subdomain of organizational theory, are remarkably active (see for example Contu and Willmott, 2005; Fairclough 2005; Fleetwood 2005; Grey and Willmott, 2005; Reed 2005). Positioning himself radically in pertinent debates, almost a decade ago, Tsoukas reminded organizational scholars that thinkers such as Wittgenstein have taught us “not only what questions to ask but, more crucially, what questions we should not ask” to suggest that the question “whether one should take a realist or a constructionist approach to explaining organizational phenomena . . . is an unhelpful question” (Tsoukas, 2000, p. 531). On this (meta)metatheoretical positioning, he advises that we transcend the false metaphysical dilemmas underpinning pertinent metatheoretical disputes and head toward pragmatism.

To unpack the mode of skepticism imbuing Tsoukas’ position, when one argues for a realist or constructionist metatheory, one tries to speak what one “must pass over in silence” (Wittgenstein, 1961/1922, §7), since one vainly struggles to answer unanswerable questions. These are metaphysical questions which are, by their very nature, unsusceptible to objective settlement by logico-empirical means. Along this line, it follows that, if we succumb to the temptation to answer them, we are doomed to produce idling discourse, but not answers. Or, as Ayer (echoing Frank P. Ramsey) would put it, realists and constructionists try to whistle what cannot be (meaningfully) spoken, and in doing so produce “bad philosophy” (Ayer, 1956, p. 75).

Notably, the type of anti-metaphysical skepticism displayed by Tsoukas applies at the level of metatheory and as such should be acknowledged as skepticism of a higher order than that applied

² Note that it would verge on the boundaries of a naive simplification to presume the presence of major intellectual consensus between realist or anti-realist strands of thought. Moreover, one should keep in mind that these concepts have undergone extensive conceptual stretching by being used in a multitude of contexts and for a variety of purposes (see also Hacking, 1999). However, if it would be prudent to avoid identifying the common attributes of strands of thought fashioned as “realist” or “anti-realist,” we may at least try to identify what is most typically the locus of divergence. To this end, there does not seem to be a safer way of distinguishing between realist and anti-realist metatheories with respect to the divergent stances that they tend to take pertaining to the question of whether conceptions that transcend experience should be treated as having extra-discursive reference or not. For while the realist is inclined to respond favourably to relevant metaphysical questions, the anti-realist tends to treat pertinent conceptions as having no extra-linguistic or mind-independent counterpart but as the mere outcome of the ways that we (communally or not) structure/construct experience.

³ Of course, anti-realist positions are not as ontologically neutral as they pretend to be (see Searle, 1995, pp. 149-197). However, although negative metaphysical assertions are inevitably ontologically-charged, it certainly helps to differentiate them from realist metatheories by identifying the latter with approaches that take a positive stance on existential questions.
at the level of theories, namely, the level of discourse typically favored by anti-metaphysical skeptics. Consider, most obviously, God-centred discourse: just as one cannot affirm the existence of God, it goes, neither may one claim that “God does not exist” (Ayer, 2001, p. 121). It should thus merit noting that, if theories of this sort are from this analytical viewpoint condemned as unanswerable metaphysical questions, Tsoukas should be plausibly understood to be framing metatheories as unanswerable metaphysical metaquestions. Or, as (the later) Wittgenstein could put it (utilizing early Wittgenstein’s semantic vocabulary) they are higher-order nonsense.

The present paper does not dispute the above thesis and on methodological grounds concedes to this type of skepticism. This is to say that the espousal of this mode of skepticism does not stem from the expression of a genuine cognitive stance, that is, the belief that respective metatheoretical positions have equal cognitive merit. Instead, the motivation for doing so is that this maneuver may allow us to surpass the conventional epistemic criteria for assessing pertinent disputes and examine whether we may settle them along non-traditional lines of thought. In other words, having espoused the ontological agnosticism propounded by Tsoukas, what is presently put under critical scrutiny is whether the advice of (metatheoretical) silence follows of necessity or whether there may be reasonable non-epistemic grounds for maintaining/advancing (metatheoretical) discourse.

To put it simply, the motivation of the present paper is to examine whether metatheoretical frameworks may be helpful in some way, even if we accepted that they serve no epistemic purpose. To respond to the aforementioned aphorisms, I inquire whether metatheories may be useful as “working whistles,” for whistling what cannot be confidently uttered, once we embrace metaphysical uncertainty. To position myself with respect to Tsoukas’ anti-metaphysical pragmatism, I purport to examine whether embracing his anti-metaphysical stance in favor of a pragmatist orientation is consistent with metatheoretical discourse. I argue that it is, and will venture to defend this thesis by advancing a positive evaluation of realist metatheories beyond standards of epistemic validity and along criteria of pragmatic legitimacy.

The challenge of securing an extra-epistemic defense of metatheories may be feasibly undertaken once we appreciate their deeply practical function. This concerns the fact that in their implicit promise that they provide “true windows” onto the world, realist metatheories can be utilized as validating frameworks for claims that could have otherwise been highly epistemologically vulnerable. For one basic function of (realist) metatheories is to shield scholarly claims from the (so common) “How do you know?” epistemological question. Again, consider the concept of “God.” While the claim that “God exists” is unquestionably untrue along a constructionist framework, it is not so untrue along a realist one. For instance, it is not trivial that Archer, Collier, and Porpora (2004) foundationally ground their defense of the scholarly merit of God-centred discourse in the soundness of a realist metatheory.

Notably, if in this case realist metatheory is tantamount to a “whistle,” it is the concept of God that is the theory being whistled. Along this conceptual geography, it seems that the success of the goal of achieving a pragmatic defense of the desirability of realist metatheories

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4 Essentially by questioning the cherished view that “certainty” is a necessary component for the proper understanding of “knowledge.”
fundamentally relies on the convincing defense of the presence of a theory that merits whistling. Thus, while Archer and colleagues appear to defend the utility of God-centred discourse, having previously accepted the truth of a metatheoretical standpoint, this paper would fulfill its motivation by going the other way around. More specifically, by examining whether we ought to commit to the realist metatheory having previously examined the desirability of discourse on God.

Evidently, one way of fulfilling this paper’s task would be through the pragmatic defense of the concept of God. In my failure to present a convincing case regarding the pragmatic legitimacy of the notion of God, however, I examine the pragmatic legitimacy of another concept whose ontological status is also questionable, viz., the Freudian unconscious, in the light of the emancipatory axiology, which, after all, is supposed to foundationally inform the CMS project.

The backbone of the rationale is rather uncomplicated: Having first opined positively on the desirability of (the effects likely to be produced by) the belief in the unconscious, we may subsequently discern the pragmatic usefulness of metatheories in sustaining (conceptions of) its cognitive merit. Finally, it merits noting from the outset that, in the effort to bestow a pragmatist orientation on this enterprise, I utilize basic intellectual blocks of Steve Fuller’s (1987; 2002) social epistemology.

The paper is structured in three sections. The first section closely assesses the inadequacy of a realist vis-à-vis a constructionist metatheory to answer the question of the unconscious in an epistemologically conclusive way. The second section, develops a heuristic exercise aiming to examine the desirability of the effects for organizational life if belief in the existence of the unconscious were adopted or rejected and underscores the pragmatic centrality of realist metatheories. In the final discussion section, I anticipate criticisms that the developed line of argumentation inevitably raises.

Embracing Metaphysical Uncertainty

Does the Unconscious Exist?

According to the Freudian worldview, the unconscious lies at the very centre of psychoanalysis” (Gabriel, 1999, p. 5), and the whole psychoanalytical discourse thereby is significantly predicated on the existence of the unconscious. The unconscious is like the warehouse of our psyche, where threatening desires and ideas are stored yet not erased. Those repressed elements are like another self who covertly occupies an agentic space of our psychic being. This hidden agency is, as Gabriel puts it, akin to “a stranger within ourselves . . . [who] has unpredictable, destructive and self-destructive appetites” (Gabriel, 1999, p. 311).

In spite of appealing to unobservable “stuff,” for Freud, the unconscious was not only real but additionally “subject to normal scientific scrutiny” (Gabriel, 1999, p. 6). However, although Freud argued for its scientific status, it does not seem that he succeeded in convincing fellow scientists. Thus, we find Freud complaining that, “The concept of the unconscious has long been knocking at the gates of psychology and asking to be let in. Philosophy and literature have often toyed with it, but science could find no use for it” (1940, p. 286).
The idea of the unconscious has indeed been received with heightened levels of skepticism by the scientific community. This stance is largely explicable if we consider the temper of the era, which was significantly influenced by the epistemology of the empiricist philosophers of science; an epistemology significantly underpinned by hostility towards evidentially unconfirmable propositions. The most famous attack against the scientific validity of psychoanalysis has arguably been carried out by Karl Popper (1963). In a word, from the Popperian point of view, the ideas put forward by Freud are unfalsifiable, and thus pseudoscientific, and should therefore be excluded from the corpus of beliefs that we value as knowledge. Notably, whereas Freud adopts a realist attitude, the Popperian is skeptical. However, it is not epistemologists of science that most strongly reject the validity of Freud’s propositions. Far from that, it is the constructionist doctrine that more foundationally threatens the validity of psychoanalytical ideas.

This point merits closer attention. Popper did not dogmatically preclude the possibility of some metaphysical assertions being useful, true or falsifiable by upcoming hypothesis-testing technologies or observational possibilities. It may thus be said that Popper was not an ontological antirealist, but rather a methodological antirealist. Empiricist epistemologists, more generally, were concerned with the justificatory (and/or semantic) status of propositions and did not reject the possibility that Freud may have indeed discovered something uniquely real. They merely underscored that certain discursive practices are not science and ought to be demarcated from scientific discourse.

On the contrary, constructionists tend to deny the very possibility of Freudian introspection or superior insight as a plausible source of knowledge. Significantly, the constructionist sociologists of knowledge, Berger and Luckmann, have prompted social scientists to face psychoanalytical theories “as legitimations of a very peculiar and probably highly significant construction of reality in modern society” (1966, p. 210); while, Kuhn, the constructionist philosopher of scientific knowledge has argued that psychoanalysis is no more than a craft, likening it to astrology (Kuhn, 1970, p. 8). From a constructionist standpoint, the totality of being is thereby reducible to social constructions, and theories that draw their credentials from suppositions of human nature should be treated as misguided and/or misleading fictions.

Thus, if empiricist theorists of knowledge confront metaphysics by denying its epistemological plausibility, constructionists deny the very ontological possibility of extradiscursive reality. Constructionist epistemology should thus be acknowledged as radically different from empiricist epistemology. To recap, concerning the ontological status of the unconscious, Freud claims to know that it exists, the (consistent) constructionist that (s/he knows that) it does not exist, and the empiricist epistemologist remains silent.

Who Knows?

Consider that although a constructionist rejects the psychoanalytical worldview as metaphysics, the constructionist worldview is no less metaphysical. Constructionism may appear prima facie as an epistemological thesis, but it is at its core a particularly ontologically bold metatheory, since constructionists (tacitly) hold fairly strong presuppositions pertaining to the nature of the world. Likewise, whereas realism prima facie presents itself as an ontological
thesis, it is also an epistemologically bold metatheory, since the existential plausibility, for instance, of the unconscious presupposes Freud’s advanced epistemic capacities regarding the discernment of a possible existence.

This paper acknowledges the merits of the view advanced by Tsoukas, namely, that such questions cannot be addressed objectively, by accepting that the question of the appropriateness of any metatheoretical standpoint cannot itself be settled on certain foundations. Differently put, both frameworks provide epistemic justification to statements that postulate knowledge status, although they are themselves epistemologically fragile. We may thus acknowledge that employing a realist or a constructionist metatheory is to some extent an inevitably arbitrary choice. It follows that, if no such choice can take place on a metatheoretically impartial basis, we may accept that we are in a state of metatheoretical agnoia.

However, even if “the metaphysical bedrock upon which the [realism/constructionism] dichotomy rests . . . leads nowhere and is philosophically flawed” (Tsoukas, 2000, pp. 532-534), it seems that we still have to take a stance about the existential standing of the notion of the unconscious that is so central to psychoanalytical discourse. For the least of reasons, an agnostic stance would not be very different in practice from the banishment of the unconscious from discourse that we academically acknowledge/treat as reliable.

A plausible path for moving ahead may be discernable if we search for an extra-epistemic standpoint in order to respond to a metaphysical question that may not be resolvable on metatheoretical grounds. And in the case of CMS such a point of reference need not be arbitrarily imposed. That is because, as we are going to see, such a vantage point may be easily identified in the emancipatory axiology informing the very essence of the CMS project.

**Toward a Pragmatist Solution**

Having espoused an ontologically agnostic stance on the level of metatheory, I presently draw from Fullerian epistemology aiming to find a pragmatic way out. In particular, I will venture to develop a heuristic exercise that explores the desirability of the effects that certain phenomenological attitudes pertaining to the reality of the unconscious are likely to beget in the workplace. On those grounds, we may then have some pragmatic basis for justifying the legitimacy of competing stances pertaining to the metaphysical dilemma of the unconscious, to then turn back to the metadilemma of metatheories and approach it with a pragmatically solidly-justified position.

**From the Quest for True Knowledge to the Question of Belief Ethics**

The employment of basic conceptual tools of Fuller’s social epistemology offers a way of reaching a pragmatic response. In Fuller’s words, “the answers to these questions are to be found by deciding what we want, a political issue centering on the definition of ‘we’ and evaluating the consequences of those practices accordingly” (2002, p. xvi). It follows that if we want to answer the question of the unconscious in line with the Fullerian social epistemology, we have to examine the degree of convergence of the effects of the relevant existential claim (i.e., the unconscious is real), inferred causal accounts (e.g., if desires are repressed, then neurotic...
behaviors arise), and explanatory inferences (e.g., employees are underachieving \textit{because} their psychostructural needs are neglected) with proclaimed interests.

Transcending concerns of epistemic validity, we now ought to first think about “who we are” and “what we want,” and then examine whether we may thus answer the otherwise unanswerable question of the existence of the unconscious. Notably, not all organizational scholars share identical scholarly interests. For example, some are concerned with enhancing the levels of organizational performance, while others are motivated by humanist ideals. If there can hardly be consensus on the interests by all pertinent agents, the answer to this question should be contingent upon the interests of certain disciplines as realized by their underlying values. In this spirit, we examine the relevance of the effects ensuing from dis/believing in the unconscious for emancipatory interests. After all, as we may see, they are already presupposed in the context of Critical Management Studies, which is also the scholarly context in which metatheoretical disputes on the nature of organizational phenomena typically unfold.

\textbf{Who Are “We”?}

On closer consideration, the domain of CMS provides fairly unambiguous responses to ethics-related concerns. Alvesson and Willmott describe the CMS manifesto, noting that it is an extension of Critical Theory that:

should contribute to the liberation of people from unnecessarily restrictive traditions, ideologies, assumptions, power relations, identity formations and so forth, that inhibit or distort opportunities for autonomy, clarification of genuine needs and wants, and thus greater and lasting satisfaction. (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992, p. 435)

Manifestly, the CMS project is normatively informed by emancipatory ideals. Thus, it provides a relatively clear-cut answer to the question of how the desirability of respective concepts whose ontological status is under scrutiny ought to be evaluated: with respect to the “emancipatory effects” that respective knowledge claims are anticipated to beget.

Given our interest in emancipation, the desirability of the unconscious may now be evaluated by examining whether there may be good reasons to believe that its acceptance may serve in the fulfillment of emancipatory ideals. In this vein, in the following subsections I deploy a phenomenological type of analysis, in order to reflect what it would mean \textit{practically} to accept or reject the concept of the unconscious.

\textbf{Accepting the Unconscious}

If the unconscious is “a part of our mind that is beyond our direct knowledge and control” (Gabriel, 1999, p. 311), then, I suggest that, the phenomenological acceptance of the unconscious on behalf of a manager would mean that one has to accept the futility of trying to gain total control over the organization. For the acceptance of the reality of something entails accepting that it cannot just be “wished away.” At the same time, being unknowable entails that one should not expect that someday we may understand how we may “tame” it. It may thus be plausibly argued that if managers believe in the existence of the unconscious, doubting their ability to
control organizational behavior effectively is likely to water down the epistemic hubris of being able to control the workings of organizational life masterfully. It could be said that committing ontologically to the existence of the Freudian unconscious is tantamount to accepting that I cannot afford to avoid the presence of an annoying housemate.

From this standpoint, it may be plausibly argued that trust in the functional efficiency of rationalizing practices is likely to be undermined and the workforce to be emancipated from the tightening of control. From this viewpoint, espousing the “reality”/reality of the unconscious, managers are less likely to act in anti-emancipatory ways that the belief in their ability at managing the unmanageable buttresses (Gabriel, 1995).

The unconscious may be thus seen as a “working narrative” for appreciating the chaotic aspects of an otherwise highly-orderly, experienced organizational reality. Differently put, the idea of the unconscious appears as a working means for lending phenomenological substance to our encounters with the organization as a “chaosmos” (Tsoukas, 2003, p. 618), and this complex worldview could help us produce desirable emancipatory effects by helping managers experience idiosyncratic behaviors as ineliminable, in effect, making the managers less likely to stigmatize these idiosyncrasies as unnatural, an attitude that the belief that they could counterfactually be tamed would plausibly encourage.

**Denying the Unconscious**

In contrast, the denial of the existence of an “unearthly” agency capable of “naturalizing” the erratic behavior of employees, by framing it as inevitable, would mean the espousal of an alternative explanatory schema that would frame pertinent behaviour as controllable. This is the understanding that emerges along a constructionist worldview that confronts reality as the constellation of contingent events. For the ensuing attitude is that experiences do not conform to some fundamental necessity, but are presumably non-inevitable. (see Hacking, 1999, p. 6)

Imagine that I have just experienced an unfriendly attitude by the waitress who served me. If I am equipped with a “constructionist worldview,” I am less likely to excuse her, since my background presuppositions provide validating credentials for the inference that she could have behaved in a more “civilized” manner. Locked in a constructionist mindset, I feel convinced that she simply failed in being a well-mannered employee, and consequently I feel annoyed by her behavior. Moreover, I dare to guess that if I were occupying an administrative position in the cafeteria, I would seriously consider the actions that should be taken for this relevant misconduct to be “remedied.”

What could the implications of such an imagery of organizations be when espoused by the actual controllers of organizations? If managers see organizations through these sensemaking lenses, they are likely to try to eliminate the “irrational” aspects of the organization that are perceived as threatening for the smooth functioning operation of an organization. Gabriel has argued that “Being in charge is a core belief of managers, no matter how much unpredictable reality frustrates them” (1999, p. 283). The absence of doubt regarding one’s unfailing ability to intervene in the workings of the organization that the rejection of the unconscious could reasonably encourage is likely to heighten the levels of managerial epistemic hubris. Whereas I
previously believed that the waitress could have controlled her reactions, the manager is equally likely to believe that s/he can control erratic aspects of organizational life that need not have been such.

The Pragmatic Centrality of Realist Metatheories

Beyond the fact that the background absence of a realist framework would have a priori framed as implausible psychoanalytical (organizational) discourse, we may briefly elaborate a further function of realist metatheories. Up to now, it was argued that though we do not know if in fact the unconscious exists, we need not know this truth in order to whistle it as true. Nonetheless, how credible may an “academic whistling” sound? From an epistemology of testimony standpoint, testifying that the unconscious is probably true or that it is legitimate to be believed as true would be skeptically received. And if we further desire to have a practical impact on organizational life, appeal to realist metatheories should plausibly help in acquiring the required epistemic weight. In our case, they could offer good philosophical grounds for postulating the soundness of organizational theory that presupposes the existence of the unconscious.

Moreover, let me draw your attention to the suitability of the critical realist metatheory for legitimating the “truth”/truth of entities of low evidential status. Although the evidential standing of the unconscious when juxtaposed with that of tables makes the former an “easy prey” for the epistemologist, critical realism could shield the valuable idea of the unconscious from epistemological scepticism. The elaboration even of the elementary lines of this metatheoretical project is not possible in the present paper (see Bhaskar, 2010 for an informative statement). However, let me only highlight that by appealing to notions such as the multilayered stratification of social reality or the structure of the human agent, organizational scholars can certainly protect pragmatically legitimate notions that a disinterested quest for certainty cannot allow.

Of course, this is not to here naively assume that realist metatheories are never employed in order to satisfy practical ends. For example, Thompson’s defense of critical realism betrays a pragmatist motivation, when he stresses critical realism’s suitability for resuscitating “the possibility of making truth claims” (2004, p. 60), which he argues that postmodern approaches do not permit. However, even if this is so, it is not clear when metatheories are used in this fashion, or when they actually prospectively determine the claims to be made.

Figures 1 and 2 sum up the rationale through a diagrammatic depiction. The whitened circle denotes that when equipped with a constructionist metatheory, a scholar is likely to deny the existence of the unconscious. Contrarily, a scholar committed to a realist metatheory is more likely to accept the truth of the unconscious (blackened circle). Having espoused the vanity of relying a priori on metatheories for solving similar questions, the lower cases of the diagram show how a pragmatist way of dealing with the puzzle of the unconscious may work. In a bit more detail, in the first scenario, I (an organizational theorist) believe that discourse that refutes

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5 Assuming rather plausibly that utterances in a whistled language do not “sound” equally credible to pronouncements that are moulded in well-argued metatheoretical underpinnings.
the reality of the unconscious is likely to nourish attitudes that I trust are going to give rise to disciplinary actions and thus contribute towards the generation of undesirable effects in the organizational context. By contrast, I believe that discourse that maintains a different take on the unconscious is likely to contribute to enhancing the emancipatory potential in organizational life. I do not know what is truly happening or is going to happen, but I reckon myself pragmatically justified to accept and utter in my scholarly writings and teachings the unconscious as true and utilize realist frameworks in order to defend my (uncertain) claims from devastating skepticism.

Figure 1. Dealing with the Unconscious - Conventionally

Figure 2. Dealing with the Unconscious - Pragmatist treatment
Discussion

The robustness of the suggestions put forward significantly relies on the assumption that scholars of organization studies are not only students and educators but additionally able creators of organizational realities. A reasonable objection to this assumption concerns the ability component. This assumption may be further broken down into three reasonable objections: first, that organizational scholars can create aspects of the world; second, that even if they can, they are ethically licensed to do so; and third, that even if both the first and second objections are supported, scholars can know the effects that their actions will bring.

In response to the first objection, saying that scholars are capable creators of aspects of the organizational world is not tantamount to assuming that they can willingly fulfill their voluntarist fantasies. If, however, we accept basic sociological thinking on how the assumptions of reality tend to become self-fulfilled, we are justified in believing that the discourse that we produce and accept as reliable influences the constitution of aspects of reality when assimilated in social cognition. A complete denial of this sociological process is invited, but an alternative account capable of explaining how definitions of institutions of epistemic authority tend to be self-fulfilled is required.

With respect to the second objection, it may be argued that substituting epistemic for social values is “unethical.” If we understand the compulsive trust in truth to be a guarantee of the march of progress, sacrificing epistemic values for the sake of social values is certainly unethical. Having, however, refused the possibility of attaining the truth with regard to metaphysical questions, our stance is significantly ethical, because at least we do not hide under pretences of truth. From this point of view, unethical scholarship is instead the generation of propositions that is apathetic concerning their effects.

On the last point, the response is that the assumption that we can affect the route of organizational becoming does not imply that we can know what is going to happen. Nevertheless, the beliefs we hold pertaining to the effects that certain propositions we sanction may beget range along a continuum of plausibility. And even if the very idea of rationality may be deceptive, one need not adopt a nihilistic view and relinquish the endeavour to be more thoughtful regarding the versatile nature of the world and its complicated workings. This is so, because, to the extent that we are able cognitive agents, denying the possibility of our judgmental faculties is a self-deceiving, if not self-defeating, attitude. Expressed in another way, to be in the dark is not to be blind.

Again, this is by no means to assert that through exercises such as the one developed here one can predict what will occur. Nonetheless, what is minimally suggested is that being more reflective on the social effects immanent in the epistemic warrant bequeathed to propounded worldviews can provide the basis for (at least) more morally responsible scholarship. We may not know what is so, but we can transcend the often responsibility-absorbing alibi of truth, to reflect more honestly on the desirability or potential danger of respective ideas.

Finally, note that not all organizational theorizing is laden with emancipatory values, and similar pragmatist exercises may be plausible, if the end-value is substituted. Nevertheless,
ethical reflexivity is hardly ever irrelevant when dealing with organizational conduct. A point of import defended in this paper is that religious devotion to metatheories may not only delude us, but more importantly impede the scholar’s critical capacities to engage responsibly with the world and its possible workings (see Fuller, 1993).

Conclusion

Following Tsoukas’ framing of the realist vis-à-vis constructionist “epistemological rivalry . . . [as] philosophically flawed” (2000, p. 534), we purported to examine the dilemma facing respective metatheories against a pragmatist background. In order to explicate the futility of settling metaphysical questions on metatheoretical foundations, I employed the example of the Freudian unconscious to assert that there is not any epistemologically objective vantage point for knowing whether Freud had a revelatory experience or if he was simply deluding himself. Espousing an agnostic stance, I was subsequently guided by Fuller’s epistemic ethics to explore the possibility of advancing the “ontic truth” of the unconscious on the justificatory basis of its alleged ability to contribute toward the fulfillment of emancipatory values.

In the developed exercise, it was argued that even if the unconscious is untrue, and this truth could provide an accurate representation of the world, it would be undesirable, because the effects of the ensuing phenomenological attitudes would be undesirable. From a complementary viewpoint, the absence of desirable effects that could have been the case had a possibly untrue unconscious been accepted as true would itself be undesirable. In short, it seems preferable to commit to the reality of the unconscious even if constructionists are right and Freud wrong.

Having argued for the desirability of the existence of the unconscious, I then returned to the question of metatheories to highlight how realist metatheories may enable scholars of organizations to whistle the theories that they desire, (more) effectively. And even if metatheories may not palliate the (objective) uncertainty of the world, they seem pragmatically indispensable given that social scientists have to “apologize” to the epistemologist and “survive” the scientistic mood of the era, still haunted by the ghost of the positivist methodologist. As such, realist metatheories need not be seen as an end in themselves, but may be also valued a means for the transition into a postanalytic epoch for the social sciences.

To conclude, responding to Wittgenstein’s and Ayer’s admonitions on the limits of meaningful discourse, it may be the philosopher’s duty to do good philosophy, yet an organizational scholar may do good to the organizational landscape by whistling what the philosopher must pass over in silence.

References


A Case for Flexible Epistemology and Metamethodology in Religious Fundamentalism Research

Carter J. Haynes

Abstract: After reviewing a representative sample of current and historical research in religious fundamentalism, the author addresses the epistemological presuppositions supporting both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and argues for epistemological flexibility and metamethodology, both of which support and are supported by metatheoretical thinking. Habermas’ concept of the scientific self-understanding of the sciences is used to point up the limitations of positivist epistemology, especially in the context of fundamentalism research. A metamethodological approach, supported by epistemological flexibility, makes dialogical engagement between researchers and those they research possible, and an example of how this would look in an actual research design is provided. The article concludes with a theoretical statement and graphic representation of a model for dialogical engagement between Western scholars and non-Western religious fundamentalists. Such engagement, the author argues, is necessary before any real progress on the “problem” of radicalized fundamentalism can be made.

Keywords: Epistemology, fundamentalism, Habermas, metamethodology, metatheory, positivism.

The purposes of this article are to review a representative sample of religious fundamentalism research, comment on the various epistemological positions it represents, make an argument for an inclusive approach to epistemology and methodology, and relate these first three purposes to the larger project of metatheory. Given the changes that have taken place in Western consciousness since 9/11, it seems important to summarize and reassess the direction and impact of the research that is meant to help us understand fundamentalist movements. Because most of the studies in this area are conducted by Western researchers and published for a Western audience, questions about how academics come to “know” things about non-Western fundamentalists are relevant. In the case of Islamic fundamentalist movements, a vast cultural gap separates the individuals being studied from those researching them. How do well meaning...
but culturally and intellectually disconnected investigators find useful epistemological approaches to studying these phenomena? Is fundamentalism research more epistemologically attuned to the object of its study or to the positivistic bias characteristic of Western intellectual discourse? Does the epistemological hegemony attendant to the scientific method contribute to other kinds of hegemony, including those that some believe are the root causes of fundamentalist movements? How can metatheoretical thinking help us to assess, organize and synthesize religious fundamentalism research in new and helpful ways? This is the sort of question that is at the heart of this article.

I will explore religious fundamentalism using a metamethodological perspective that calls for epistemological flexibility. I am defining “epistemology” classically: one’s theory of knowledge, of how it is possible to know something. The term “metamethodological” refers to a sensibility that derives richness from the cumulative consideration of a wide variety of methodological approaches. Metamethodology is similar in intention to metatheory. Both activities are aimed at finding commonality, building bridges, identifying overarching concepts, and utilizing any synergies that result. I will stress the need for epistemological flexibility both because it is necessary to support metamethodology, and because it is a prerequisite for dialogical engagement between parties whose native epistemologies are not compatible (i.e., between Western academics and fundamentalist believers). There are also parallels between epistemological flexibility and metatheory. During the development of metatheoretical constructs, walls between previously unassociated concepts, theories, and schools of thought must be broken down so that new, integrated knowledge can be developed. Though it is not often stated in these terms, some measure of epistemological flexibility is necessary for metatheoretical knowledge production.

Before beginning my formal survey of religious fundamentalism research (and some of the epistemological, methodological, and theoretical issues arising from it), I will offer some definitions of religious fundamentalism. A word about the role of positivism, and a brief discussion of the question of causation, will round out the introductory portion of the essay. Next, the survey of the literature will be presented, and the article will conclude with discussion and practical application.

**Religious Fundamentalism Defined**

Sociologist of religion Martin Riesebrodt Riesebrodt (2000) notes that:

the term fundamentalism emerged in early twentieth century American Protestantism to designate a religious movement which, among other things, opposed biblical criticism, the teaching of evolutionism, and the philosophy of Nietzsche while advocating biblical literalism, strict patriarchal moralism and authority, prohibition, control of social vices and self-control. (p. 269)

He defines fundamentalism as being associated “with religious orthodoxy, often literalism, and rigid moralism, especially with regard to sexual morals and gender relations, as well as intolerance, anti-pluralism, and anti-modernism” (Riesebrodt, 2000, p. 271).
Since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the term “fundamentalist” has come more into common usage as meaning any religiously extreme individual or movement, especially those that sometimes resort to violence to accomplish their goals. Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003, p. 116) define fundamentalism as “a set of militant, mobilized, antisecularization movements arising in the course of the twentieth century.” A more detailed and religiously-focused definition has been suggested by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992). They see fundamentalism as:

the belief that there is one set of religious teachings that clearly contains the fundamental, basic, intrinsic, essential, inerrant truth about humanity and deity; that this essential truth is fundamentally opposed by forces of evil which must be vigorously fought; that this truth must be followed today according to the fundamental, unchangeable practices of the past; and that those who believe and follow these fundamental teachings have a special relationship with the deity. (p. 118)

**The Role of Positivism in Fundamentalism Research**

Too often, the epistemological foundation necessary to engage in scholarly work is assumed or not considered carefully enough. Analyzing and addressing the epistemological foundations for research questions and methodologies can shed fresh light on past work, identify unstudied areas that may be fruitful topics for future research, and strengthen the critical analysis of a body of literature. Traditionally, modern scientific inquiry has been both based on and consonant with the philosophy of positivism, which holds that truth is derived from empirically validated and objectively measured data. Positivism was born in an atmosphere of confidence about scientific discovery. The industrial revolution and subsequent meteooric rise of technological advancement created the perception that universal laws formed a dependable, unquestioned and self-evident intellectual structure (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 21). The emphasis on logic, structured design, and cognitively generated solutions were translated, first among intellectuals and later by the general public, into the view that rational thought undergirds all truth. Like many widely accepted philosophical positions, the popular version of positivism eventually took on an almost religious fervor, which allowed adherents to remain in denial about the gnawing problems that science could not solve: those ancient tendencies among the human race toward avarice, greed, cruelty, hatred, isolationism, and racism that were brought back in to clear relief in the aftermath of the Holocaust (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Habermas, 1971).

Because they focus on numbers and objective measurement, the research methodologies arising out of the positivist worldview are often termed “quantitative.” In light of the difficulties encountered by using traditional quantitative methods to study the nuances of fundamentalism, Almond, et al. (2003, p. 117) opt for a more open and flexible theoretical structure that takes into account the heterogeneity of social reality. “In trying to generalize about causation from a relatively small number of very complex cases... [one finds that] there are not enough cases to establish statistical significance with confidence.” Almond’s attempt to address this problem is evidenced by “increasing rigor and systemization in case study research, comparative historical analysis, and the adaptation of statistical analysis to small numbers.” More on this “qualitative” approach to fundamentalism research will be presented later in this article.
Droogers (2005) makes the observation that positivists and religious fundamentalists are similar in some ways:

positivists hold that the term ‘reality’ refers to a singular entity . . . so too do fundamentalists hold that there is but one form of the sacred reality. . . . Accordingly, there is only one ‘grand’ story to be told about this reality. In the case of both fundamentalist believers and positivist scholars, the reality that they focus on is driven by laws and rules. . . . Fundamentalists and positivists seek to impose a rather monopolistic, centripetal, law-based and strict view of the world. (p. 469)

Notwithstanding this analogical comparison between the approaches taken by religious fundamentalists and positivist scholars, it is important to remember that positivism is a philosophical position resulting in a particular epistemological set while fundamentalism is a religious conviction resulting in a particular way of life. Even so, there does seem to be a parallel between the tendency of positivism to reject all “truth” that cannot be observed using empirical methods and the tendency of fundamentalist believers to reject claims that are not in line with accepted doctrine. Being completely sure of our own position can blind us to solutions our native epistemology does not allow us to perceive, and this can be equally true whether the “proof” that backs up our favored position is “scientific” or “theological.”

The Question of Causation

One debate among social scientists who study religious fundamentalism involves the question of causation. One way of stating the question is:

Are individuals and communities truly motivated by their religious convictions to take personal, social and political action, or is the religious context only a palatable justification for the actions those individuals or communities would have taken anyway for personal, social, or political reasons? (Bruce, 2000, pp. 102-103)

In searching for an answer, positivist epistemology would most likely lead to empirical analysis of fundamentalism using quantitative methods, but positivist epistemology cannot account for phenomena outside the measurement capacity of scientific observation and analysis. For example, even though religiously motivated actions or behaviors can be quantified, purely spiritual aspects of religious experience do not lend themselves to the kinds of questions that science asks. In other words, because spiritual (i.e., non-empirical) phenomena cannot be observed (except through the actions or behaviors they may produce), they are more appropriately the terrain of researchers who are not bound by the strictures of the scientific method and a positivist epistemology. Hence, the answer to the question of causation depends, in part, upon the epistemological lens through which the question is examined. A positivist approach would likely produce a mechanistic interpretation of human behavior (religious or otherwise) that bypasses the issue of spiritual agency (because that agency cannot be measured). By way of contrast, a relativist epistemology would likely allow for the attribution of religious motivation to spiritual agency. This is because a relativist epistemology would not require that the methodologies employed to examine the question of causation hold to standards set by the scientific method.
One of the epistemological questions confronting the study of religious fundamentalism has to do with the effect of epistemological set on perception. Stated as a question, we might ask, “Is it possible for a positivist scholar and a fundamentalist believer to observe the same phenomenon and perceive different ‘truths’ because of their divergent epistemologies?” Take prayer as an example. The scholar could measure the physiological responses of the adherent, or make observations about post-prayer changes in behavior. The believer could have a profound or even life changing experience during that same prayer, but because the believer and the scholar are attending to different aspects of the phenomenon (i.e., are perceiving the prayer through different epistemological lenses), they have no common reference points at which they can connect and dialogue. From metatheoretical perspective, one supported by epistemological flexibility and informed by metamethodology, I am choosing to answer “yes” to this question (i.e., that divergent epistemologies do cause divergent perceptions and estimations of truth). I am also making the judgment that dialogical engagement is of utmost importance in the study of religious fundamentalism, and am therefore led to the conclusion that a strictly positivist epistemology is incompatible with productive fundamentalism research. Epistemological flexibility, it will be argued, is key to the development of a metamethodological approach, which, in turn, is key in the development of dialogical engagement.

This is not to say that positivist epistemology and the quantitative methodologies associated with it are not helpful in the study of religion. As will be seen in the following review of the research literature, salient and interesting facts about religious behavior have come from using quantitative techniques. But in order to enter a dialogical environment, at least two things are required. First is what I am calling metamethodology: an integrative, flexible and inclusive approach to research methodology that places equal value on quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Second is the epistemological flexibility that is demanded by a metamethodological approach. Since distinct methodologies flow from distinct philosophical theories of knowledge, metamethodology implies the ability to bridge the epistemological divide that has separated positivists from those ascribing to other positions.

A Survey of Religious Fundamentalism Research

Quantitative Approaches

One area of study that has been mined using quantitative methodologies is the relationship between religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism. For example, Miller and Wattenberg (1984) used national survey data to assess the effect of evangelical religious identification on voting habits. They categorized respondents according to the strength of emotional attachment to fundamentalist interests and religious beliefs and then analyzed the associations between fundamentalist attachment, policy preferences and voting. The authors used descriptive statistics to arrive at demographic characteristics of fundamentalist voters and then applied correlational and factor analyses to determine the magnitude of individuals’ affective connections to fundamentalist thinking.

In a related study, Jelen and Wilcox (1991) used survey data to develop an index of religious dogmatism as measured by doctrinal orthodoxy and public religious activity. Predictive statistics indicated that the dogmatism construct accounts for a significant portion of the variance...
associated with respondents’ attitudes about personal freedom. In another study, these authors (Jelen & Wilcox, 1992) surveyed financial contributors to Republican presidential candidates to explore the relationship between religious self-identification and attitudes toward the Christian Right in the U.S. Respondents self-identifying as fundamentalists evidenced the highest level of support for Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority.

Quantitative social research also focuses on the relationship between fundamentalism and sexism. One project analyzed both individual and group fundamentalisms with respect to attitudes about women. Researchers designated participants who said they believed in the Bible as literally true “individual fundamentalists” and used denominational affiliation to identify “group fundamentalists.” Respondents’ affect (positive or negative) toward public leaders of the Christian Right was the dependent variable. Independent variables included the self-identification of participants as fundamentalist, evangelical or charismatic. A two-stage process of bivariate analysis (Christian Right affect and religious self-identification) preceded a multivariate procedure that attempted to uncover unique effects of religious self-identification while controlling for other independent variables such as attitudes toward the ACLU, feminists, and liberals. The authors found that sexist attitudes were connected with both individual and group-level fundamentalisms. For women, sexist attitudes were a function of individual as opposed to group-level fundamentalism, but for men the opposite was true (Peek, Lowe, & Williams, 1991).

Another study investigated the relationship between the number of fundamentalists living in various states in the U.S. and the overall level of conservatism among whites in those states. Larger fundamentalist populations were correlated with more conservatism in the general Caucasian population. This relationship was strong even after experimentally controlling for the religious affiliation, beliefs, and practices of individuals (Moore & Vanneman, 2003).

The hypothesis that southerners would evidence more prejudice than those from other regions because fundamentalism is more common in the southeastern U.S. led another group of researchers to study the relationship between fundamentalism and prejudice by region of the country. An analysis of data from the 1988 general social survey did not fully support the supposition, but the authors did find significant regional differences in fundamentalists’ tolerance of communists, atheists, gays and lesbians (Ellison & Musick, 1993).

Psychometric research shows the Religious Fundamentalism Scale to be psychometrically sound and has helped researchers measure several kinds of prejudice and authoritarian aggression. This instrument was standardized on college students (and their parents) from mostly Christian backgrounds. Post hoc item analysis yielded solid intercorrelations between the Religious Fundamentalism Scale and other scales used to measure prejudice (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992).

In a critique of the Religious Fundamentalism Scale, Watson, et al. (2003) highlight what they see as ideological bias. Through psychometric isolation of anti-religious sentiment in the wording of items, they determined that the scale “describe[s] ‘fundamentalism’ relative to unsympathetic normative assumptions” (p. 317). By translating the original items of the scale to remove such bias and then administering both the original and translated versions to the same
subjects, these investigators made both a quantitative and a theoretical critique of what they saw as the ideological preconceptions held by the scale’s authors.

Another set of researchers used multiple regression analysis to demonstrate that authoritarianism can statistically predict prejudiced attitudes against people of color and gays and lesbians. Controlling for authoritarianism, however, produced a positive correlation between fundamentalism and homophobia but a negative relationship between fundamentalist attitudes and racial prejudice. Based on these findings, the authors theorized that Christian fundamentalism “consists of a second major component other than authoritarianism—related to Christian belief content—that is inversely related to some forms of prejudice but not others (Laythe, Finkel, & Kirkpatrick, 2001, p. 1).

**Summary: Quantitative Approaches**

As can be seen from this sampling of quantitative research studies on religious fundamentalism, important knowledge has been produced using these methodologies. The observant reader will have noticed that all the studies cited thus far have investigated North American fundamentalist movements. Quantitative studies of non-Western fundamentalist groups were sought but not found. To the extent that religious constructs can be quantified, the relationships between phenomena such as authoritarianism, political affiliation, policy preference, dogmatism, social and gender issues, prejudice, and aggression can be analyzed as a source of descriptive and comparative data. One of the strengths of quantitative methods is that otherwise amorphous concepts and confusing relationships can be presented logically and, often, with clarity. The value of being able to compare fundamentalism directly with other known behavioral phenomena is immense, and the empirical sensibility that originally grew out of positivist epistemology brought us this “common language” of quantified constructs.

There is also something missing in a purely quantitative approach to fundamentalism. We see nothing of the quality of individual lifeworlds, or of the rich, human texture of religious fervor, spiritual devotion, and doctrinal certainty. Qualitative methodologies were, in part, created to access aspects of research “data” that are not adequately understood or described by quantitative methods.

**Qualitative Approaches**

Qualitative methodologies are more flexible than quantitative study in terms of both associated epistemology and the range of techniques available to researchers. Several qualitative techniques, as they have been applied to fundamentalism research, are discussed here.

**Typology and Grounded Theory**

The largest and most comprehensive research endeavor undertaken to date regarding religious fundamentalism is the *Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, a “decade-long interdisciplinary public policy study of antimodernist, antisecularist militant religious movements on five continents and within several world religious traditions” (Almond, et al., 2003, p. 6). This study was primarily concerned with three questions: (a) “What are the
local, regional, and global contexts for, and triggers of, the emergence of fiercely antimodernist, antisecular movements from within virtually every major world religion in the twentieth century?”, (b) “What characteristics do these movements share across religious, cultural, and political borders?”, and (c) “Are fundamentalist movements, whatever their places of origin and everyday activity, capable of extending their influence transnationally” (p. 6)?

One of the books arising from this massive study is *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around The World* (Almond, et al., 2003). This volume describes a process of data collection and analysis that eventually led to the formulation of a grounded theory of fundamentalist movements. The authors developed an extensive typology through methodical coding and categorizing of group characteristics along several different continua. For example, the following ideological characteristics of fundamentalist groups transcend national, religious, cultural and ethnic differences in the cases analyzed: reactivity to the marginalization of religion, selectivity (of texts or doctrines), moral dualism (right or wrong, good or evil), absolutism or inerrancy, and the idea that history has a miraculous culmination. All the cases studied were assigned a rating for each of these measures based on the extent to which that particular case demonstrated the characteristic. Matrices were then developed to graphically represent gradations of various characteristics within and between groups.

The theoretical model presented in *Strong Religion* asserts that all fundamentalists share a “family resemblance” regardless of religious or other contextual demarcations. Specifically, all fundamentalists are united in their identification of three distinct antagonists to their cause: the corrupt or compromised religious establishment, the secular government, and the secularization of modern society. This framework is further delineated using the concepts of structure (long-term contextual conditions), chance (contingent random factors) and choice (the element of human leadership). Each domain (structure, chance, choice) is divided into sub-domains and coding systems are used to categorize cases based on both domain and sub-domain ratings. For example, the sub-domains for structure are education, communication, civil society, social structure, mobility, ethnic-regional factors, economic development, political characteristics, and international environment (Almond, et al., 2003, pp. 116-132).

Max Weber’s (1922/2008) typology of religious attitudes has also been applied to the analysis of fundamentalism. His system offers two continua on which to place religious phenomena: approval/rejection and control/adaptation/withdrawal. Fundamentalist attitudes on the one hand reject secular society and, on the other, might evidence a desire for world control or withdrawal from society depending on the organizational form of the particular group. Withdrawal can be symbolic, as in the formation of a subculture, or geographical, resulting in a commune. Control may take the form of a religious movement, social protest, secret society or political party (Riesebrodt, 2000).

**Hermeneutics**

Modern fundamentalist doctrine is based on text, whether the Bible, Quran, or other sacred document. This fact situates the discussion of fundamentalist movements within the realm of hermeneutics. Originating in the context of scriptural interpretation, hermeneutical inquiry was later applied to secular texts, and then to non-textual phenomena.
Bloom (1992) contrasted divergent interpretations of sacred texts in his commentary on protestant fundamentalism. He compared the scholarly practice of biblical interpretation, based on the original language, meaning, and context of biblical literature, with what he saw as the idiosyncratic and often agenda-based interpretive strategies used by some fundamentalist pastors. These two hermeneutic methods produce different meanings from the same texts, and those differences can be used to further explore what protestant fundamentalists find important to emphasize.

Pizzuto (2007), focusing on Islamic fundamentalism, appealed for objective criteria that can be used to distinguish valid interpretations of sacred texts from invalid ones. He maintained that people of faith have only the narratives and symbols of their religion to defend themselves against the lure of power, meaning, and significance promised by violent extremism. When scripture is interpreted to support violence, effective gestures toward peace must be theological, must start with the presumption of faith, and must challenge religious traditions from within. Pizzuto suggested that we distinguish between valid and invalid interpretations and use valid interpretations to help transform fundamentalist religion from the inside. Uncritical use of scripture to advance a fundamentalist agenda can result in the conviction that God condones violence against the “other” (i.e., non-believer) in the name of moral righteousness or religious purity.

Bartkowski (1996) has pointed out that, among Christians, evangelicals view the Bible as inspired and authoritative but are also able to allow for metaphorical interpretation. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, insist that the Bible is infallible and literally true. Many take a concrete, anti-interpretive, anti-metaphorical stance toward scripture. Understanding the various camps of Christian interpretation quickly becomes complicated when hermeneuticists move beyond the inspired versus inerrant debate. Inerrantists can be further divided into subcategories based on their particular hermeneutic sensibilities and tolerances. According to Barnhart (1993), these subgroups include:

(1) those who subscribe to extended inerrancy, and thereby insist that ‘when Scriptures affirm something as true, it is true exactly and precisely as stated’, (2) those committed to limited infallibility, in which minor conflicts in textual reports of a specific event (e.g., the Resurrection) are believed not to imply that the event never happened; and lastly (3) those who argue for appropriate inerrancy, thereby attempting to distinguish the ‘essential truths’ of the Gospel (which are believed to be without error) from the Bible’s non-essential qualities (e.g., pseudonymous writings, scientific inaccuracies, cultural accommodations). (Barnhart, 1993, p. 260)

Ethnography

Ethnography is particularly adapted to the witnessing, experiencing and exploration of otherness. Arising from within Cultural Anthropology, ethnography has more recently been embraced by sociologists, historians and others investigating the differences between people, cultures, societies and organizations. Some social phenomena cannot be perceived or appreciated except through immersion of the researcher into the culture being studied, and this immersion,
coupled with specific analytical procedures, is what makes ethnography unique from other qualitative methodologies (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

A well-known example of ethnographic enquiry is Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Part of his thesis was that modern cultures do not develop in isolation. There are reciprocal economic, social and power differentials that characterize the divergent historical experiences of Eurocentric and Eastern individuals. Therefore, the development of the Occidental identity required the subsequent and complementary social construction of the “Oriental” identity. Because the Oriental identity was formulated by Western academics and intellectuals without the knowledge or involvement of those it purports to describe, Said labeled these Western thinkers “Orientalists.”

In bridging the cultural and epistemological divide between East and West, both in terms of his personal immersion and his scholarly writings, Said was one of the first to point out that individual cultures hold “the naïve belief in the certain positivity and unchanging historicity of a culture, a self, a national identity” (Said, 1995, p. 2). Many Westerners see Western ideology and culture as superior to Eastern ideas and practices. Said would contend that Orientalism has led to an intellectual and popular environment in which Asian, Indian and Middle Eastern cultures appear less human, weaker, and less sophisticated than cultures of European decent. In addition to pointing out that the West’s Orientalist portrayal of the East was volitional and subjugating, Said railed against “the creating of entities essentialising a region or a people, whether it be East or West. His endeavour [was] precisely to demolish the conceptual constructions that divide the world into confrontational cultures or hierarchical civilisations” (Ferial, 2004, p. 124).

Zaidi (2007, p. 424), in a recent assessment of “the Orientalist essentialization of Islam,” pointed out that most Western scholars critique the ideological content of Islam rather than embracing a dialogical hermeneutic.

Such a critical approach to Islam and Muslims has only grown stronger since the 1970s, when western academic interest shifted from the relatively humanistic interest in the religion of Islam to social-scientific explanations of Islamic fundamentalism. What has gone largely unremarked in this shift from a perspective informed by the humanities to one informed more by the social sciences is the slippage that occurs by shifting from a focus on the fundamentals of Islam to Islamic fundamentalism…. Since then, the analysis of Muslim societies has been replete with such critical accounts, which, while they break with the classical Orientalist scholarship that regards the religion of Islam as the sole defining element of Muslim backwardness, continue to treat the self-knowledge of Muslims as impure, as mere ideology. (p. 414)

### Comparative-Historical Inquiry

The concept of the “enclave culture” was developed using both ethnography and comparative-historical inquiry. The enclave construct is a way of formulating and describing the group psychology, worldview and sensibilities common inside fundamentalist movements. The study that led to this construct compares religious and cultural movements that eventually resulted in fundamentalism with those that did not (Almond, et al., 2003, Chapter 1). Using *exile* as a
metaphor, the marginalization of religious activity and thought in developing countries was taken as a common existential aspect of fundamentalist groups. The idea that members are fighting for survival and moral purity against the seemingly intractable movement of modernization (away from righteous living and religious viability) figures prominently in the social psychology of fundamentalist groups. The enclave culture has a unique cosmology of physical time and space. Although a religious movement at its core, the enclave is also contextualized within the wider historical and cultural environment. In the enclave, historical time:

tends to be somewhat shrunken, collapsed, and condensed. The past is reduced to a few key eras, closely related to the enclave’s notions as to what accounts for the glory and decline of the tradition; it is, hence, intensely relevant for the present. The future perspective is likewise rather short; the more radical the enclave, the shorter it is. Its overall bent is pessimistic if not doom-laden. (Almond, et al., 2003, pp. 56-57)

**Metatheoretical Research and Critical Social Theory**

Metatheoretical inquiry and social theory are discussed together because the overlap between them is substantial. Metatheoretical research refers here to a method of gathering together existing theories relating to a particular topic, assessing strengths and weaknesses, and reviewing criticisms. The metatheoretical researcher then looks for patterns, themes, discontinuities and possible overarching theoretical content in preparation for constructing a unique extension of theoretical knowledge. The unique foci of critical social theory are the relationship between research and the surrounding social justice context, the betterment of society, and the amelioration of human suffering and oppression. Critical social theory has been used to critique social policies and institutions as they contribute to racism, oppression of the poor, the subjugation of women, and other misuses of power. One method of applying social theory is to compare the stated purpose of powerful individuals, institutions or governments with the social results produced by their actions. When inconsistencies are identified, especially when they point to the oppression of marginalized groups, researchers can attempt to exert pressure for change on those in power (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998).

Coreno (2002) used metatheoretical inquiry to combine two traditional sociological paradigms, the class model and the culture model, in an effort to better understand religious expression. The class model, in the tradition of Karl Marx (Marx & Engels, 1967) and Max Weber (1922/2008), explores the link between class location and religious belief and behavior. The culture model, by contrast, “emphasizes religion’s power to create shared commitments across class boundaries” (Coreno, 2002, p. 340) and is associated with Durkheim (1976). By synthesizing these two paradigms into the “class culture model,” Coreno attempted to demonstrate that religious beliefs and practices often “define the symbolic boundaries of distinct class cultures” (Coreno, 2002, p. 343). To test this model, he employed quantitative analysis of survey data. Using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, he showed that class and culture together provide a more robust model for understanding religious phenomena than either class or culture alone.

Schmalzbauer (1993, p. 331) has drawn attention to the existence of a “new class” in North American societies in which there is a strong relationship between professional/managerial
employment and political and moral liberalness. Study of these “knowledge class” workers can help to clarify the roles of both class and subculture in defining ideology. Christian evangelical new class workers are members of both a religious subculture that embraces conservative social values and a work force that is characterized by liberal attitudes. Schmalzbauer found that evangelical members of the knowledge class strongly resist any relaxation of their moral position regarding sexuality, but that significant liberalization takes place regarding abortion, civil liberties and gender roles. Conservative Christians continue to resist the liberalizing effects of higher education even after becoming consumers of it.

Critical social theory can provide a context for discussion of the root causes of fundamentalism. For example, in an attempt to set the stage for a critique of the power structures and geo-political alliances that were in place on 9/11, Wallace (2003) noted several grievances held against the U.S. as a result of its Middle East policy.

The issue is not one of indirectly supporting regimes through buying oil from them. . . . Rather, the USA arms almost everyone in the region. Not only does it not encourage democratic reform, it actively suppresses it. Consider American support for the three-decades-long Israeli occupation of West Bank and Gaza. Consider CIA support in 1953 for the Shah as he crushed a fragile emerging constitutional democracy in Iran. Consider also that our [USA] government is the principal backer of the massively corrupt regime in Saudi Arabia, which, when not exporting oil, exports Wahabism around the world, an especially intolerant species of militant Islamic doctrine to which Osama Bin Laden and many of his top lieutenants apparently belong. Valid criticisms, grievances, real offenses, open wounds: in short, a history of social injustice lies at the heart of Muslim opposition to the United States. (pp. 493-494)

Wallace (2003) went on to suggest a Habermasian foundation for a critical theory relating to the ongoing ideological, cultural and political conflict between militant Islamic fundamentalists and the West. Habermas sees modernization as a historical process in which societies are progressively rationalized over time. This evolution is marked by intermittent backsliding, stasis, and struggle. Habermas posited a number of developmental stages through which societies pass, and holds that societies progress from “tribal,” to “traditional,” to “modern” over time. “In tribal societies, religious-based kinship structures govern virtually all social interaction, determining conduct in accord with the sacred and transcendent” (Wallace, 2003, pp. 503-504). Societies in which (non-Western) fundamentalists live are mainly “tribal” or “traditional” and Western countries are “modern.” This disparity may help to explain the difficulties inherent in building a dialogical bridge to span the distance between fundamentalists and the Western researchers who study them.

The progressive modernization and secularization of society are at issue for many fundamentalist groups, especially those outside North America. The tension between Islam in the Persian Gulf region and the forces of modernization helps to explain “the events of 11 September as an episode in the ongoing historical drama of modernity itself” (Wallace, 2003, p. 510). Although modernization has been somewhat spontaneous in the West, Islamic countries see it as an import grown elsewhere. Wallace has hypothesized that there is a clear connection between the introduction of modernity in the Middle East and an “especially virulent religious backlash”
(p. 510). When modernization is imposed from the outside, even though it may be promulgated by governmental representatives within Islamic society, it is perceived as being both a Western commodity and a tool used by the local elite to consolidate power and wealth (Wallace, 2003).

Langman (2005) offered insight into the role modernization and globalization have played in the development of religious fundamentalism. In addition to creating rapid social change and dislocation related to rural-urban migration and class mobility, globalization has disseminated “rational, secular worldviews and mass mediated forms of privatized hedonism from consumerism to eroticism that are an affront to the values and identities of many traditional people – especially those already disadvantaged by the global economy” (p. 258). Globalization is interpreted by many fundamentalist leaders as eroding the authority of elders, challenging values and morals, and disrupting social structures and gender relations. Thus, the ascent of religious fundamentalism can be seen as a response to globalization. Langman’s critical theory holds that capitalist modernity, in addition to the benefits often touted, brings new forms of domination and “a cold, sterile, lonely dehumanized world of conformist ‘cheerful robots’ seeking consumerisms… in an ever more frantic attempt to secure a meaningful identity in a meaningless world” (p. 270).

In a recent example of social criticism related to Islamist terrorism, Cigdem (2006) warned against denouncements of terrorist acts that do not also criticize terrorism’s foundations. He was careful to point out that fundamentalism can present a healthy challenge to the religious institutions that have collaborated with repressive political regimes, but also made clear that terrorism cannot be justified under any circumstance. Islamic fundamentalism and Islamic terrorism are two separate phenomena. Terrorist acts of self-proclaimed Islamic militants are not the result of the “religious orientation of postmodern Islamic expansionism,” but “one of the consequences of American hegemony and of the European Union’s reluctance to confront global inequalities and political inconsistencies” (p. 162).

**Summary: Qualitative Approaches**

The knowledge we can glean from qualitative investigation of religious fundamentalism is often broader but less specific than quantitatively derived results. There is a clear trade off here. We are trading away empirically based observation and measurement of the behaviors and constructs associated with fundamentalism, but we are gaining a more descriptive and sweeping landscape of (less specific and measurable) information. As mentioned, the epistemological position historically associated with the scientific method and its quantitative methodologies is positivism. The epistemologies that have helped pave the way for qualitative techniques are quite diverse. For example, in addition to being a methodology, hermeneutics is also a distinct epistemological perspective (see Gadamer, 1976; Ricoeur, 1981). The qualitative methodologies that do not have connections to specific epistemological positions evidence an epistemological flexibility not characteristic of the scientific method. An ethnographer or social theorist, for example, is generally free to draw from a range of epistemological positions, as long as she can make a convincing argument for how her theory of knowledge supports her truth claims as they relate to her methodologies.
This flexibility has pros and cons. The epistemological position of positivism is limiting in
that it restricts the researcher to only what can be perceived and measured empirically, but
quantitative methodologies do have the advantage (generally speaking) of producing the kind of
data that can be compared meaningfully with data produced in similar quantitative studies. This
can usually not be said of investigations that employ qualitative methods.

One comparative advantage of qualitative methods, and the epistemological flexibility
associated with them, is their ability to cast a wide net in exploring religious phenomena. Because qualitative inquiry is more flexible than quantitative inquiry, it is more adaptable to the
particular phenomena being studied. In the case of religious fundamentalism, this is important
because much of what interests scholars does not lend itself to the precise demands of the
scientific method.

The typological analysis described by Almond, et al., (2003) for example, provides a way of
categorizing a wide array of fundamentalist movements. But typology requires some level of
subjective judgment about which category an item should be placed into. Similarly, the grounded
theory of “family resemblance” would not have been possible without the authors’ willingness to
take certain intuitive leaps that cannot be justified scientifically.

Hermeneutic study provides a rich source of information about how fundamentalist groups
interpret and interact with their sacred texts. Because scriptures play a central role in many
religions, the tools of hermeneutic inquiry have become an important part of fundamentalism
research. But hermeneutic findings are of a different nature, and are supported by different
epistemologies than, say, survey findings subjected to statistical analysis. In the same way,
critical social theory is a valuable source of conceptual data regarding the root causes of
fundamentalist expression, especially outside North America. Through it we have been able to
understand that there is likely a relationship between militant Islam and Western hegemonic
domination. Though this theoretical structure could not have been arrived at without the use of
different rules and methodological standards than those supported by positivist epistemology, I
personally find it one of the most convincing and inspiring scholarly arguments related to
religious fundamentalism.

Having laid out examples of both quantitative and qualitative research into religious
fundamentalism and argued for the indispensability of both, I will now proceed to a discussion of
the significance and problematic nature of the epistemological divide that tends to separate
scholars with positivist leanings from those who embrace the epistemological flexibility
demanded by qualitative methodologies. This divide is, in my view, akin to the divide between
fundamentalist believers and non-fundamentalists. I am taking a more practical or applied turn at
this point in the article as I move from examination of scholarship and its epistemological
foundations to how scholarship, epistemology and metatheororizing might mirror and contribute
to the real world problems of fundamentalist isolation, radicalization and militancy.
Discussion

Scientistic Self-Understanding as a Limitation of Positivism

The differences between quantitative and qualitative methodologies (and between varying qualitative techniques) point up the diverse theories of knowledge that support methodologies by providing the philosophical foundation on which to lay truth claims. Thus far, I have made, somewhat indirectly, a number of points that I would like to now bring to the foreground. First, although quantitative methodological approaches to fundamentalism research produce important knowledge, the primary epistemology informing quantitative methods is positivism. As Habermas ably pointed out in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971), positivism as an epistemological position has led to the scientistic self-understanding of the sciences, which means that, through circular reasoning, science lost the ability to critique itself philosophically.

Positivism certainly still expresses a philosophical position with regard to science, for the scientistic self-understanding of the sciences that it articulates does not coincide with science itself. But by making a dogma of the sciences’ belief in themselves, positivism assumes the prohibitive function of protecting scientific inquiry from epistemological self-reflection. Positivism is philosophical only insofar as is necessary for the immunization of the sciences against philosophy. (Habermas, 1971, p. 67)

Habermas’ point here is that science understands itself in a way that precludes accurate self-reflection because positivism categorically excludes science from the need for epistemological self-questioning. This exemption is accomplished by the positivist definition of “truth” as objective, measurable, etc. In short, positivism defines truth as scientific truth, and this puts science in the role of examining everything except itself.

There exists an epistemological divide between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and between fundamentalists and the scholars who study them. Not that these two fissures are identical, but they have parallels, and my task now is to argue for a dialogical and tolerant approach to both areas of division. Habermas’ solution to the epistemological roadblock thrown up by scientistic self-understanding was to construct his own empirical epistemology to support “empirical-analytic” inquiry, which remained open to philosophical critique and dialogue. Though Habermas’ new epistemology has not come close to overtaking positivism, he was able to lay philosophical groundwork in *Knowledge and Human Interests* to support what would later become known as “qualitative” research. My interest in this early project of Habermas lies in his identification of the rigid insularity of positivism and the effects this philosophical isolationism has had on scientific inquiry.

The application of the association between scientistic self-understanding and positivism to our current topic rests on the association already made between positivist epistemology and quantitative methodology. Fundamentalism researchers who are wedded exclusively to the positivist project at the level of epistemology will be limited in their ability to study fundamentalism at the level of methodology. Scientistic self-understanding is insular, self-assured, and dependent on pre-conceived notions about the reliability and validity of the scientific method. Fundamentalist believers are insular, self-assured, and dependent on pre-
conceived notions about reliability and validity of their faith and doctrine. Dialogical engagement between researcher and researched requires a break with positivism so that the epistemological distance between scientific “fundamentalism” and religious fundamentalism may be bridged.

**Metamethodology as an Antidote for Scientific Insularity**

The second point I have tried to make, and will elaborate on here, is that a metamethodological approach to religious fundamentalism is more helpful and informative than focusing on one technique or category to the exclusion of others. This is partly because of the multi-faceted nature of religious fundamentalism research. Fundamentalist believers do produce actions that can be measured, attitudes than can be quantified, and political activity that can be observed, but religious fundamentalism also evidences aspects that are not amenable to empirical study.

Metamethodological approaches must, by definition, be supported by a flexible epistemological sensibility, one that can appreciate the scientific worldview, but also other epistemological positions. As has been mentioned, metamethodology and flexible epistemology both evidence important convergences with metatheory. In fact, it can be said that metamethodology is the methodological equivalent of metatheory. This direct comparison has clear limitations, mostly owing to the categorical separation between theory as a formulation of knowledge and method as a form of data collection. But the comparison is still, I think, helpful conceptually, especially in light of the connection between methodology and epistemology. The complex phenomenon that is religious fundamentalism is best studied using a variety of methods and theories of knowledge, and both metamethodology and epistemological flexibility support and are supported by metatheoretical thinking.

In order to travel the distance between Western intellectual culture and the internal culture of fundamentalist groups, flexibility is required on the part of researchers. I suppose we could wait for fundamentalist believers to become more flexible, open, and “reasonable,” but what we logic-bound Westerners perceive as unreasonableness in, for example, Muslim fundamentalist believers, is part of what defines them (at least to us) as fundamentalists. Though it is important to understand the objective aspects of religious behavior, this is not enough when it comes to fundamentalism research. It is largely the elements of religion that are not amenable to objective, quantified study (such as spiritual experience and conviction) that need most to be studied and understood. The visceral correlates or descriptive statistics associated with fundamentalism contribute valuable data, but these kinds of data do not have the potential to help build a dialogical and mutually respectful bridge between “us” and “them.”

**Epistemological Flexibility as a Dialogical Bridge**

The third and final point I have alluded to is that the dialogical engagement needed to bridge epistemologies is also needed to surmount the walls that separate fundamentalist believers from the scholars who study them. The epistemological divide between researchers and fundamentalists consists in the fact that fundamentalists do not fit within the predominant worldview of Western academia. Similarly, the values and purposes of Western academia do not
fit within the worldview of religious fundamentalists. Western scholars are at a particular
disadvantage when attempting to broaden their epistemological sensibilities. Because the West,
and especially the U.S., is seen as the main source of pain and trouble by many Islamic
fundamentalists, American researchers can easily become defensive, even subconsciously, at
being blamed for the very phenomenon they are studying. Intellectual and epistemological
rigidity, not flexibility, tends to result from a defensive posture. So rather than walking onto a
level playing field, Western researchers, epistemologically speaking, are staring out at a
disadvantage.

When scholars acknowledge personal barriers to the epistemological flexibility I am calling
for, the possibility of engaging the frame of reference of the fundamentalist presents itself. More
informed and effective methodological approaches to fundamentalism research would likely
follow from this sort of epistemological transformation. Dialogical encounters with the
lifeworlds of fundamentalist believers require an epistemological flexibility on the part of
researchers that forsakes the assumed transcendence of positivism, scientism, intellectualism,
and the Orientalist caricature of Islamic fundamentalist believers that is the current stereotype
held by most (even educated) Westerners.

Perhaps a practical example would be helpful. I am imagining two versions of a research
study, conducted by culturally Western researchers, that seeks to examine and better understand
some particular aspect of the experience of Islamic fundamentalist believers. In the first version,
a traditional quantitative study built on positivist epistemology would collect data or use data
already collected, analyze the data according to the guidelines of the scientific method,
disseminate the results to the rest of the scholarly community, and rest in having made some
contribution to our “knowledge” of the phenomenon. There would be no attempt to validate the
results against the lived experience of the research subjects because positivist epistemology,
supported by the scientistic self-understanding of the sciences, is able to reassure itself that
“truth” lies within the confines of the theory of knowledge it has created.

Continuing with our example, the second version of the study would employ
metamethodology, be based on flexible epistemology, and would also seek to examine and better
understand some particular aspect of the experience of Islamic fundamentalist believers. This set
of researchers would begin with the perspective of the phenomenon that is held by the
fundamentalist believers themselves, work backwards from there to establish the most
appropriate set of methodologies, and then backwards again to the epistemological foundations
needed to support and inform the selected methodologies. The attained results would then be
presented to the research subjects as a topic of discussion in order to ascertain how they compare
with the subjective lifeworlds of those being studied. This dialogical encounter between
researcher and researched is partially made possible by the fact that the study has been based on
and consonant with the values and sensibilities of the research subjects from the beginning.
Because the epistemological set of the researchers has been calibrated based on the
methodologies suited to the phenomenon under study, a bridge of common language and ideas is
already potentially at hand. This increases the likelihood that dialogue between researchers and
researched will be characterized by sameness of purpose, by a more accurate understanding of
the lifeworlds of religious fundamentalists, and by a sense among those being studied that
Westerners are making an honest, concerted, and sincere effort to understand them and to help
explain them and their position to other Westerners. This dialogical engagement is, in my opinion, the only way the “problem” of fundamentalism (as many Westerners think of it) will be effectively addressed.

Almond, et al. (2007) describe how some fundamentalists have a different perception of time, history, meaning and the future than most other people. How can non-initiates understand the experience of initiates if that understanding is based on a divergent perception of time, history and meaning? Refining and adjusting our epistemology to meet the needs of the group being studied is the first step toward the “dialogical hermeneutic” advocated by Zaidi (2007). When we expect the subjects of our study to conform to our worldview, we build a wall of misunderstanding between them and us that cannot be scaled by even the most astute methodology. Without an appreciative epistemology that includes the worldview of those we are studying, we may literally be “talking to ourselves” in that the data and insights we collect and publish have no meaning for anyone outside our small circle of like-minded intellectuals.

Metamethodological consideration of religious fundamentalism can only take place in an atmosphere that is epistemologically flexible and metatheoretical. Because each methodology brings with it the epistemic baggage of its founders and defenders, metamethodological insight requires an appreciative and inclusive, as opposed to rigid and essentialising, approach to research. Coming at the topic of religious fundamentalism from a number of different angles at once helps us to see that metatheoretical knowledge of religious fundamentalism must include some element of the contributions of each part of the whole: empirical and hermeneutic, quantitative and qualitative, Western and Eastern, secular and religious, believing and non-believing, theoretical and practical. It is the synergy of metatheory that is exciting, and it is the epistemological clarification and bridging engendered by metamethodological thinking about religious fundamentalism that holds some promise for improved dialogical interchange between two sides of an issue who appear, on the surface, to have nothing in common.

Conclusion

The basic argument of this paper can be summarized in two statements, one existential and one theoretical. First, my existential offering: The only way the “problem” of religious fundamentalism is going to be “solved,” especially the violent and militant type, is if the people to whom the ire of radicalized believers is directed (Westerners) do a better job of understanding, reaching out, communicating, responding and otherwise attempting to bridge the span that divides “us” from “them.” Second, I offer a theoretical model, which is complemented by a graphic representation (Figure 1). Beginning at the left of the diagram and working toward the right, researchers embark on the task of religious fundamentalism research with either an exclusive preference for positivist epistemology or with some measure of epistemological flexibility. Studies in the first category utilize quantitative methodology and are adapted to the tenets of the scientific method. Scientific self-understanding completes the loop which keeps these studies and their authors from penetrating the gap that exists between two very different cultures, epistemologies, and value systems (i.e., between Western researchers and religious fundamentalists).
Figure 1. Dialogical engagement as a function of epistemological flexibility and metamethodology.

Starting again at the left of the graphic and following the bottom track to the right, studies based on flexible epistemology are positioned to adopt metamethodology. Because metamethodology has the ability to adapt itself to the needs of the research subject(s), the chance of dialogical engagement between researchers and researched is optimized. Dialogical engagement is the bridge that has the potential to span the gap that separates “us” Western researchers from “them” fundamentalist believers.

This is only one way of conceptualizing these issues and what road we might take to address them more fruitfully. It is also true that this argument is based partly on my own value system. Again, a theory or a model is only helpful to the extent that it assists us in making a sticky or intractable problem clearer and more solvable. My hope is that these ideas, when combined with the ideas and contributions of other scholars, will move us a step toward mutual understanding.

If the issues that create and sustain the radicalization of religious fundamentalists are to be more fruitfully addressed, a bottom up change in how we think about and try to “solve” those issues is needed. This change will look different depending on the context (political, religious, social, academic, etc.), and the current effort relates to scholarly endeavors and the philosophies and theories that support them. In the scholarly context, wholesale restructuring begins with epistemology, because intellectual pursuit is about “knowing” things. Barriers that exist at the epistemological level must be exposed and worked around. Research methodology, which emanates from and is supported by epistemology, must attune itself to the phenomena being
studied. Metatheoretical constructions formulated in an environment of epistemological flexibility and metamethodology predispose the scholarly project toward appreciation, engagement, openness and dialogue and away from isolation and insularity.

References


Strategy as Metatheory

Alan E. Singer

Abstract: Business strategy or strategic management is a subject that has comprised a major part of the curriculum in business schools around the World for at least 40 years. It is routinely described as “integrative,” yet has arguably remained somewhat limited in its scope and philosophy. The purpose of this paper is to expand the scope of strategic management accordingly (to include ethics for example) but to do this in a way that arguably offers efficient insights to students and practitioners. The approach involves bringing together several formal metatheories while at the same time indicating how each of them can function as an integrative theory of strategy.

Keywords: Ethics, metatheory, modeling, optimality, rationality, strategy.

Introduction

Business strategy or strategic management is a subject that has comprised a major part of the curriculum in business schools around the World for at least 40 years. It is routinely described as “integrative,” yet has arguably remained somewhat limited in its scope and philosophy (cf., Burrell, 1989; Calori, 1999). The purpose of this paper is to expand the scope of strategic management accordingly (to include ethics for example) but to do this in a way that arguably offers efficient insights to students and practitioners. The approach involves bringing together several formal metatheories while at the same time indicating how each of them can function as an integrative theory of strategy.

In this paper the term “metatheory” refers to any general theory that elaborates upon a core behavioural construct or theme. For example, the term metarationality refers to a general theory that recognizes many distinctive definitions of rationality. Such themes transcend and thus potentially inter-relate the traditional disciplines that are usually associated with strategy. They include: ethics (ethicality), optimality, modeling, forecasting, recursivity and synergy. Each such metatheory is well-documented and can be succinctly reviewed by deploying a mixture of conceptual frameworks, natural language descriptions and mathematical formalisms. The central points of the present paper are that (a) each metatheory can be placed relative to strategy, in an appropriately expanded conceptual space, or epistemological landscape; and (b) these “placements” seem to inform strategic management in an efficient and effective way, even

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though they do not necessitate a mastery of each of the traditional academic disciplines with which they are each associated (e.g., moral philosophy, economics, ecology, sociology and psychology, management science and the cognitive sciences).

It is therefore an implicit suggestion throughout the paper that we might think of the metatheories as teachable content in business schools that potentially offers efficient insights (i.e., maximum understanding for minimum effort) as well as a degree of wisdom, to students and management practitioners. In contrast, the *status quo* in the study of strategic management involves a selection of historically determined discipline-based theories, large parts of which have only a remote bearing upon well-informed economic action. In other words, the set of metatheories can be thought of as a powerful and adaptable toolkit for the managerial mind.

**Rationality & Metarationality**

Rationality has well over 40 distinctive forms (cf., Singer, 1996, pp. 20-23; 2007, pp. 53-56), each of which has been explicitly defined within the spectrum of the social sciences and philosophy. These can be described as the elements of a rationality *set* that can, in turn, be placed in correspondence with core concepts in the domain of strategic management (i.e., a strategy-set). Metarational arguments then provide an integrative and high-level theory of strategy that in turn maps out its some of the *terra-incognita* and indicates directions for development. A general theory of rationality that maps out the structure of the rationality-set is like an interwoven fabric, as it involves not only the identification of multiple forms of rationality (elements of the rationality-set $R$), but also the specification or construction of:

1. *Classificatory* metarational criteria for classifying the elements (e.g., calculated vs. systemic forms; belief, means, ends-oriented forms, backward-looking forms, etc.).
2. *Evaluative* metarational criteria (e.g., universalizability, globality, level of self-support, etc.).
3. *Relational* metarational arguments that place elements and subsets of the rationality-set in relation to each other (e.g., utility-capture, relations between beliefs and ends, etc.).

Within the general theory, a distinction has been drawn between calculated versus systemic forms of means-rationality, then between other means-rationalities, belief-rationalities and ends-rationalities. It then becomes possible to identify direct linkages to, or correspondences with, almost every topic within strategic management. These correspondences between rationality concepts and strategy concepts can be made explicit, as follows:

3. Action rationalities ~ logical incrementalism.
4. Backward-looking rationalities ~ historical processes and learning.\(^2\)
5. Interactive rationality ~ predicting or diagnosing strategy.

\(^2\) Another example is the strategy concept of “planning as learning” (De Geus, 1988) which corresponds with backward-looking or retrospective forms of rationality, whose definitions contain explicit reference to past events, such as “thorough learning from past mistakes.”
7. Rational-morality ~ managerial ethics.

A relational structure can then be implanted in the rationality-set \( R \) (and hence also in \( S \), the strategy-set) using two types of metarational relationship:

1. \( r_I \) is a form of \( r_J \). For example, sympathy . . . is a form of . . . extended-ends-rationality.
2. \( r_I \) has significant common properties with \( r_J \), for example, expressive rationality (which involves communicative action like signaling) . . . has significant common properties with strategic-belief rationality (which is concerned with game-theoretic interdependencies).

![Figure 1. The concept of an isomorphism between a strategy set and a rationality set](image)

The relational structure in \( S \) is similar, and it is preserved (or in some cases identified, or implanted or transcluded) by assuming that the one-to-one correspondence between \( R \) and \( S \) is a structure-preserving mapping, or isomorphism. In that case, corresponding to 1 and 2 in \( R \), we have relationships between the images \( 1^* \) and \( 2^* \), as follows:

1*. Stakeholders-as-constraints...is a form of...organizational goal system.
2*. Positioning is an ingredient of organizational strategy. This strategy-concept...has significant common properties with...signaling behaviour.

More generally, this is to say that every form of rationality has its corresponding strategy-concept, whilst strategy interface concepts reflect the corresponding metarational relationships. The central tenet of “strategy as rationality” is that this statement provides a succinct (but somewhat fierce) summary of many lengthy academic articles on strategic management.\(^3\)

The overall conceptual framework of an isomorphism between a rationality-set and a strategy-set can be represented diagrammatically (Figure 1.) but it can also be expressed in a quasi-formal way, as follows (non-mathematical readers might skip the remainder of this paragraph). Let \((r_I, r_J)\) be any pairwise relationship in \( R \times R \) that is, a metarational relationship like those described above. The mapping \( I: R \to S \) gives \( I (r_I) = s_k \) and \( I (r_J) = s_l \) for some \( k \), \( l \). Then, for all \( i \), \( j \), we have: \( I \times I (r_I, r_J) = [I (r_I), I (r_J)] = (s_k, s_l) \), for some \( k \), \( l \), where the latter pairwise relationship in \( S \) is an interface relationship between a pair of strategy concepts.

\(^3\) A current reviewer identified the axiological framework (value-orientation) of “strategy as rationality” as “post-postmodern integrative normativism.” It might also be regarded as pre-post modern, that is, fitting between neo-classical type formalisms and postmodern narratives. An early review by Geoffrey Hodgson suggested linkages with the Classical Pragmatic tradition (cf., Singer, 2009a & b).
The mapping I is an isomorphism in the mathematical sense; that is, a structure-preserving map that identifies the two sets, R and S as essentially equivalent, even the same thing. An R ~ S isomorphism specified in this way effectively states that the concepts of strategic-management and plural-rationality are co-extensive, meaning that the language and underlying concepts of these two sets (or domains of knowledge) parallel one another. Accordingly, one can make the claim that it not only makes sense to view “strategy as rationality,” but that it also make good sense to assert that “strategy is rationality” and vice versa. This equivalence or sameness is no coincidence. It may explained by the simple observation that both sets (R and S) have been produced as a result of attempts by scholars and practitioners to grapple with quite general problems in human systems. These involve action and decision, behavior and exchange, production and communication. Put differently, there is no single valid theory of strategic decision-making (or decision-taking), there is only a metatheory of decisions.

**Ethics & Metaethics**

A similar approach can also be used to equate or identify strategy with ethics, via metaethical arguments (e.g., Van Gigch, 1991). It is at this level of inquiry and language use that we encounter the many incomplete arguments or formal paradoxes and contradictions that convey the difficulty of reconciling utility/profit based approaches with alternatives that involve expressive, Kantian, reflective and other forms of rational-morality. Accordingly, the conceptual framework of “Strategy-as-Rationality” extends to “strategy as moral philosophy” (e.g., Singer, 1994) in which plural rationalities, metarationality and metaethics become recast as a general normative theory of the strategy of productive entities.

Some forms of rationality may be captured by arguments that identify them, for at least some purposes, as special cases of Rational Utility Maximization (RUM), that is, the rank-ordering of, and selection from a set of objects-of-choice (including possible actions), according to formal preferences. Sen’s sympathy (preference incorporating others’ interests) or Etzioni’s interdependent utility (as in game theory and other studies of joint-optimization) are partly captured in this sense, as is bounded rationality after allowing for the costs of information and computation. RUM thus becomes an umbrella-term covering a subset of the rationality-set, or more accurately a fuzzy-subset whose membership is by degrees. The degree of membership in this fuzzy set is a matter to be settled through metarational arguments, often in natural language, that vary in their level of persuasiveness and coherence. Other elements of the rationality set are more elusive, or hard to capture. Examples include commitments (altruism), expressive rationality, and contextual forms. Within the present framework, the existence of these elusive forms implies that strategy should/ought to involve occasional (corporate) self-sacrifice; expression of (corporate) values; or the creation and maintenance of institutions and (corporate) traditions, in a way that cannot be entirely subsumed into profit-maximization.

Any given strategy concept may thus be evaluated and placed relative to others with reference to metaethical criteria (i.e., criteria for choosing rationalities and forms of ethical reasoning). The concepts of (a) capture (above) and (b) scope are salient examples of such criteria. Several concise metacriteria can be used to evaluate the “scope” of any given form of rationality or ethic, as follows:
Global versus Local Optimality. A globally-optimizing form maximizes total lifetime utility for the agent, after taking into account the impact of current decisions on the agent's own future preferences, learning, habit-formation and co-ordination with others (resolute-rationality is global, narrow-egoism is local, in this sense).

Universalizable versus Exclusive. A universalizable form is one that the agent prefers other agents to adopt (Kantian rationality is universalizable by definition, self-interest modeled as RUM is not, as made quite explicit in Prisoners' Dilemma games).

Self-Supporting versus Self-Defeating. A self-supporting form hypothetically chooses itself when used to select a form (cf., recursivity, below). While Kantian and commitment forms are self-supporting in this sense, formal-RUM can be self-defeating as also demonstrated in the Prisoners' Dilemma game context.

Collectively, these and other metacriteria (perfect-imperfect; precision-of-definition, etc.) characterize the prescriptive gap that currently separates the rationality assumptions of the mainstream (i.e., economic) theory of strategy from (business) ethics. Put differently, while the axioms of economics undoubtedly have powerful normative appeal, so also do the various metacriteria that RUM fails to meet fully. With the isomorphism in place, the metacriteria can be used directly as tools to evaluate the corresponding business strategy concepts.

Optimality & Metaoptimality

Over 40 years ago, C. West Churchman, a famous Berkeley systems-scientist, ethicist and management theorist declared (1994, p. 108) that “we do not know the meaning of optimum.” Since then it has indeed become increasingly apparent that optimality is “a far more profound and elusive state of affairs than can be derived from the most powerful of mathematical proofs” (Mason, 1994, p. 70) and that there are many definitions of optimality. In sum, different conceptual definitions of optimality have developed over time and there are many distinctive forms. As with rationality and ethics, some forms can be stated mathematically (e.g., Zeleny, 1996) while others require natural language statements to complete their definition. The same is also true of strategy; yet this is no coincidence. Optimality, “broadly defined” can be invoked as an organising principle in order to restructure and augment current thinking in the latter discipline. The converse is also possible, because empirical research in strategic management can potentially stimulate and refine ideas about the possible meanings of optimality.

As with the plural rationalities, the several forms of optimality correspond with strategy concepts, as listed in Table 1. These fall into two broad classes, under the metaoptimality criterion of elusiveness vs. capture. The captured forms are implicit in several traditional paradigms and they accordingly underpin the idea of an Economically Optimal Strategy (EOS).

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4 This might mean (a) we do not have a single definitive operational definition of optimum, so there are many distinctive forms of optimality (e.g., Zeleny, 1996). It might also mean that (b) we don’t know what is really the ideal human system, the best way of living with others, so we cannot be sure of the merits of any of our actions. As one reviewer put it, “the search for optimality is always relative, never absolute”
A second class, the Systemic-Ethical Optimum (SEO) with its corresponding strategy concepts, includes the elusive (non-maximising) forms (cf., Singer, 2007).

### Table 1. Optimality and Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of Optimality</th>
<th>Strategy Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximisation</td>
<td>Finance-theoretic decision models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cybernetic</td>
<td>Mgmt. by objectives, or exception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evolutionary</td>
<td>Environmental fit &amp; adaptation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherent</td>
<td>Org. dynamics &amp; dissipative structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimal design</td>
<td>Management without tradeoffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-criteria</td>
<td>Stakeholder model &amp; multiple objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic</td>
<td>Plural rationality &amp; embeddedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Co-production of human-goods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a practical matter one can then ask which class of “optimal strategy” is better? Attempts to answer this question require the invocation of metaoptimality criteria, such as (a) the proper scope of optimality formulations (i.e., optimal for which entities) (b) the reducibility or otherwise of goodness to betterness, and (c) the overall relationship between facts and values. Given the high level of ambiguity, contentiousness and incompleteness at this metalevel it is inevitable that strategic business decisions are often experienced in practice as “wicked messes.” Currently, the idea and ideology of EOS undoubtedly prevails, yet systemic perspectives are also evident. It seems that a more inclusive perspective\(^5\) is now appropriate, reflecting SEO and EOS. Such complementarities and possible synthesis at this level stands to expand the boundaries of conventional strategic thinking.

### Models & Metamodels

The analysis and development of firms’ strategies in practice is almost always carried out (pragmatically) with reference to diagrams, conceptual models and their surrounding narratives. Some of these are off-the-(library)-shelf and often appear to be offered in the spirit of one model fits all, while others are custom built by managers or consultants for a particular situation. These models can be reified and themselves depicted and described in a variety of ways (Table 1). For example, any conceptual model can be described as a set of images and expressions that depict and describe aspects of reality. More generally, a “conceptual metamodel” is therefore:

A CONCEPTUAL-MODEL OF (a conceptual-model of (aspects of reality)).

\(^5\) Some strategy concepts embody subsets of these forms. For example, as a reviewer noted, the evolutionary, systemic, ethical and design forms all appear to be embodied within an “eco-centric strategic business orientation” known as Biomimicry or Biomimetics.
That is, a set of images and natural language expressions, or patterns, or discourses, that describe and depict “conceptual models” of themselves. The relevant expressions then include terms such as comparison, design, transition, renewal, influence and replication (Table 2). In the “comparison” metamodel (Table 2), for example, a conceptual model is described as an object-of-choice within a static decision problem (Table 2 column 2). Some of the better-known conceptual models of strategic behavior (strategic management) involve competitive strategy, hyper-competition, stakeholder management, etc. An inquiring strategist (or metamodeler) might seek the richest possible description of these “objects.” Accordingly, features are identified, classified, and contrasted, as in a taxonomical approach.

Table 2. Metamodels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metamodel</th>
<th>Depiction of CM</th>
<th>Role of Inquirer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Object-of-choice</td>
<td>Analyser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Trigger</td>
<td>Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>End-state</td>
<td>Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Trigger</td>
<td>Self-producer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>Political entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication</td>
<td>Meme</td>
<td>Host</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A conceptual model can also be depicted as a trigger of a process of design (an “instigating causality” in von Bertalanffy’s terminology). The tension between a new model and prior understandings motivates an inquirer (e.g., strategist) to find a resolution. For example the competitive strategy model can be combined in a single figure with the stakeholder model, despite the evident underlying tension between them.

Design

The transition metamodel (Table 2, row 3) involves a process of accommodation (creation of a new cognitive schema). For example, a simple input/output model of the firm can be transformed by incremental steps into a more complex stakeholder model. The competitive strategy/advantage model can be transformed into the hyper-competition model. Here, features or elements of the first model, such as the existence of industries with weak forces are replaced with new elements, such as escalation of incumbent rivalry and multiple competitive “arenas.” This “transition metamodel” is very effectively communicated in a non-strategy context in the lithograph Liberation by the artist/designer Escher, in 1955, which shows a row of triangles transform, by barely perceptible steps, into birds in flight.

Transition

A conceptual model can also trigger a process of inner-directed change, or psychological renewal of the individual who interprets or constructs the model. Exploration of core values and
rationalities implicit in the model can result in individual and collective self-renewal. Psychologists have called this type of process “deep self referral” and have associated it with increased confidence and performance, making the individual more competitive (but not because of the explicit content of the conceptual model per se). For example, a person who reflects upon a model in which the category “trust” features prominently, might not only change their policy, but also refresh and renew themselves.

Influence

Models can also be deployed for political purposes. A person in a position of power (a manager) draws attention to a particular model, with the covert intention of influencing other's behavior. The models might be used to try to inculcate a culture, to create a team of like-minded players, or to direct attention away from (or towards) wider stakeholder concerns. People (e.g., subordinates, voters, etc.) thereby adopt a given model out of deference to power, which opposes or displaces the type of self-referral described above (see the later section on “pragmatism and power”). As Sennett (1998) put it, it can lead to a loss of identity, or the colonization of the self.

Replication

Finally, conceptual models can themselves be depicted as productive entities that co-produce many copies of themselves. Here, models are seen as distinctive abstract patterns that compete for share of mind. The “replication” metamodel is consistent with Foucault's description of “competing discourses” that he says characterize contemporary (post-modern) life; but perhaps it finds its sharpest expression in the idea of a model as a meme, or a chunk of information that lodges in brains or minds. The role of the model in an ecology of knowledge is then analogous to that of genes in biological systems. Every time an entity (e.g., an individual or a collectivity) attends to a meme (i.e., a model) a replication occurs. Yet, as suggested earlier, an entity that hosts any particular meme or model is not necessarily advantaged. The effect can also be neutral or destructive.

Strategy

Another revealing correspondence (or equivalence) exists between this metalevel perspective on modeling and an object-level perspective on strategy itself. For example, the replication metamodel implies that entity cannot freely choose a conceptual model, instead the model (a meme) is reproduced through cultural and behavioural processes such as imitation. A similar evolutionary model of “strategy” (at the object level) sees that a firm “cannot freely choose” its strategy. Questions of timing also recur at these two seemingly-separated levels of analysis: one can always question the timing of a strategic move, but equally the timing of any transition from one model to another.

This “correspondence” between strategy and metamodel can also be made more explicit (Table 3). Having identified the set of “metamodels” (comparison, transition, design, etc.) we can point to many corresponding concepts within strategy (e.g., strategy-selection, change-management, generation of strategic options, etc.). It is thus evident that the elementary categories of meaning that apply to the “real” (object-level) world of strategic management all
re-emerge during any sustained process of inquiry at the metalevel, where they can be applied to abstract conceptual models themselves.

Table 3. Metamodels and strategy concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metamodel</th>
<th>Strategy Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Strategic choice, selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Generate options, overcome tradeoffs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
<td>Management of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Develop Competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>Incrementalism, symbolism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replication</td>
<td>Emergent strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This type of recursive re-generation of a concepts is not only characteristic of metatheory and inquiry, it is also strikingly evocative of a phenomenon in Chaos Theory (dynamical systems theory) whereby essentially the same fractal patterns re-appear, with just slight changes, as one drills down ever further into the “edge of chaos;” for example the boundary of the Mandelbrot set. As this is done, using visual computer models, this boundary reveals the so-called baby-Mandelbrot sets that come into view successively and infinitely many times, as resolution continually increases. Put differently, sustained inquiry that moves beyond traditional disciplines and categories ultimately seems to generate something like the patterns found in nature.

Recursivity & Ecology

Recursivity and self-reference are found in many arguments and lines of inquiry that attempt to bring together of once-separated levels of description and representation, as in the above example of strategy and metamodels. This general abstract notion was first developed in Ancient Greece (cf., Hofstadter, 1979) where it found expression as Epimenides’ paradox: “this sentence is false.” More than 2000 years later, the notion was re-formulated in metamathematical terms as Russell's paradox: If we write “the set of all sets that are not members of themselves,” the proposition that “this set contains itself” quickly yields in the mind the idea that it does not. To resolve this paradox, a more elaborate Theory of Types was duly designed (in Principia Mathematica) that made an explicit distinction between signs (e.g., sentences, conceptual models) and their referents or semantics (this being a central theme in the field of Semiotics).

The link between recursivity and ecological systems becomes more apparent when Russell’s paradox is restated as a riddle involving self-production (i.e., Maturana & Varela’s (1972) concept of auto-poiesis), as follows: “In a certain village, there is a barber who only shaves the men who do not shave themselves. Who shaves the barber?” Here, the proposition that the barber shaves himself quickly yields its opposite; but this time the paradox is not so abstract: it concerns a physical entity that is producing a slight variant of itself (i.e., the shaved barber). In this way, something that initially expressed a purely abstract idea of self-reference becomes transformed,
by a small step, into a description of self-replication in the natural world. This particular transformation was explored in detail by Hofstadter (1979, p. 535), who compared several mechanisms that create self-reference with mechanisms that self-replicate and uncovered “many remarkable and beautiful parallels.”

Meanwhile, strategic management narratives have often referred to the idea that conceptual models and frameworks (like competitive strategy, stakeholder models, etc.) all compete for share of mind, in much the same the way that other intangible products such as websites do. It is perhaps less obvious that the models themselves might behave rather like the very entities (i.e., knowledge-producing firms) to which they refer. The full implications of this type of competition and self-reference, within an ecology of knowledge, has not been entirely worked through in business and economic theories. It has certainly been recognized that knowledge products act as (co-) producers (e.g., Ackoff, 1981; Evans & Wurster, 2000) and that this forces business entities in practice to “deconstruct” (i.e., to dismantle or re-configure) their business processes. Yet, at the same time, managers’ conceptual models of strategy also compete and co-produce, perhaps implying that they too must be periodically disrupted.

Despite the implied self-reference, theories based upon value-creating exchanges and mechanisms still remain at the core of business and economic thought. Marketing, for example, still describes itself officially as “the science of exchanges” while the modern theory of finance is constructed around the notion of equilibrium in market-based systems. While these ideas of exchange and mechanism remain at the foundation of much business theory and the engineering view of economics, they are slowly being joined (not necessarily displaced) by the equally elemental, foundational and ecological ideas of self-reference and self-replication. Put more technically, the formal preference-relations that lie at the base of the Neo-classical paradigm are being augmented by formal recursive relations in models of business strategy. The latter are much more closely associated with living systems and the kind of chaotic dynamic systems that generate the emergent patterns of “syntropy” found in nature.

**Synergy & Dialectics**

In addition to the many conceptual models within business strategy, several authors and consultants have advocated variants of dialectical reasoning in the strategy formulation process. Over 30 years ago, for example, Mason (1969) proposed a dialectical-inquiry method of policy formulation and since then others have advocated various forms of trinitarian thinking (thesis, antithesis, synthesis; triple-bottom line reporting, etc.) but often without explicitly mentioning the dialectic, as such. There are also numerous conceptual frameworks and philosophical (qualitative) discourses that involve oppositions or tradeoffs, together with some kind of designed synthesis (Table 4). For example, the notion of moral imagination (in philosophy and business-ethics) involves devising new ways of including others (e.g., the poor) in the business strategy discourse, thereby widening moral boundaries and the scope of justice. In the organizational behavior tradition, similar practices such as stakeholder learning dialogues and generative discourses have been advocated.

In systems theories, the multi-capital conceptual framework (arguably, yet another metatheory having “capital” as its central construct) depicts a set of forms of capital, including financial,
ecological, human, social, cultural, political and moral “forms.” These are almost always described as being highly inter-related, not fully commensurable (reducible to one overarching measure) and as forms that should be accumulated at the same time, with a view to achieving synergies. A rather similar prescription for synergy-seeking can also be derived from the general theory of rationality described earlier. A hyper-rational industrial system, in the sociological sense of the term (Ritzer & LeMoyne, 1991) is one that continually designs new patterns and structures that express and foster a synthesis of distinctive forms of rationality. Ritzer & LeMoyne confine their account of this idea to the Weberian forms (formal, practical, theoretical, substantive) and to entire industrial systems, but their core idea of hyper-rationality (i.e., synergy amongst forms) can easily be generalized and extended to include Kantian and expressive forms, and so on. A hyper-rational entity thus attempts to design ways of adding to income, identity and justice (deliberative rationality) all at the same time, but in a way that also seeks and achieves synergies. The general theory of optimality also offers some recognizably similar types of prescription, particularly in its concept of optimal design as formalized in de novo programming (e.g., Zeleny, 1996).

Table 4. Synergy elements within the metatheories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metatheory or Theme</th>
<th>Some Components &amp; Forms</th>
<th>Synergy Element</th>
<th>Implication for Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationality</td>
<td>Utility-max, Expressive, Weberian</td>
<td>Hyper-Rationality</td>
<td>Compete through synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Deliberative, Kantian, Moral-imagination, Pluralism</td>
<td>Moral-imagination, Pluralism</td>
<td>Combine forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimality</td>
<td>Maximisation, Ethical, Dynamic, etc.</td>
<td>Optimal design</td>
<td>Co-produce human goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>Dialectical Inquiry, Generative Discourse, Synthesis</td>
<td>Dialectical Inquiry, Generative Discourse, Synthesis</td>
<td>Forge stakeholder-synthesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-capital</td>
<td>Economic, Human, Social, Ecological</td>
<td>Synergetic design</td>
<td>Accumulate all forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All these frameworks (Table 4) involve some aspects of dialectical thinking. A single concept, such as financial capital formation, income-poverty reduction, or utility maximization, is expanded into a wider view, involving multiple forms. Then, the relationships, or *metarelations*, become the focus of attention and theory development. Finally, some form of synthesis is proposed, especially synergy-seeking (e.g., hyper-rationality, optimal–design, generative discourse, etc.). This last step can be thought of as embodying an important quality of the human spirit: that is, creatively overcoming tensions and oppositions involving self and others in various contexts (e.g., Basseches, 2005). This, in turn, is one of many dualistic elements of strategy, in which the search for synthesis and synergy has been linked to the wider quest for high performance (e.g., De Witt & Meyer, 2005).
Metatheories & Practice

Over 20 years ago, the works of Argyris (1982) and Schon (1983) on the reflective practitioner and double-loop learning drew attention to the role of managers’ mental models in the determination of business strategy and performance. They reported that the mental pathway from a model to a metamodel, or from a norm to a metanorm was often blocked in practice (Figure 2). This was taken to indicate a need for cognitive therapies (implying that some given models might be dysfunctional, or “sick,” as one reviewer put it) or socio-political interventions. Such “therapies” might then be structured around the explicit metatheories mentioned in this article, whilst a complementary “political” approach (see next section) involves cultivating or fostering metanorms, such as “It's OK to challenge norms,” as well as hypernorms that challenge or refine the metanorms.

Figure 2. Metatheory and practice.

Pragmatism & Power

All such hierarchies of reflective thinking linked to practice (including Argyris’ triple-loop learning) lead quickly to considerations of what, if anything, exists at the pinnacle? What is the
culmination of all this reflection? This might be the “ultimate meaning” mentioned at the outset, or perhaps as John Dewey once put it (and as a reviewer suggested) it is “the unity of all ideas and ends arousing us to desire and action.” Previous attempts to answer this question have considered processes, or how to get towards the top, as well as contents, or what you might find when you arrive. The latter approach dates back at least to Plato, who specified a set of human goods including justice, health, wealth and friendship. This idea of good as something more than individual preferences or desires has persisted in various forms, including notions of hyper-goods and hyper-norms. The latter are implicit social contracts or cross-cultural agreements about “fundamental conceptions of the right and the good” and they constitute yet another contemporary linkage between strategy and ethics that fits well with the metatheories.

The idea alluded to throughout this article - that sustained human inquiry culminates in hypothetical ideals but also guides practical action - is central to the Classical American Pragmatism expressed in the works of John Dewey, William James and Charles Sanders Peirce. Although Dewey and James are often regarded as foundational figures in educational theory and psychology respectively, their works are often omitted or downplayed in contemporary curricula, even in these disciplines, not to mention business studies. Ironically, however, their pragmatic (and pluralist) philosophy has been making a strong comeback during the last decade of progress in management and economic theory (e.g., Margolis, 1998; McVea, 2008; Rosenthal & Buchholtz, 2000; Webb, 2007; and Wicks & Freeman, 1998; to mention a few). Classical pragmatism readily accommodates the type of pluralism that has been expressed and analysed in this paper so far. Not only are the various elements and metatheories presented as if they were useful and efficient guides to ongoing action, but such actions are to be predicated on multiple perspectives and a sense of mutuality encompassing a decision maker (or any strategic entity) and its environment; an idea that is at last becoming mainstream.

There is, however, yet another type of metatheory within Sociology, one that (a) extends the political process model of strategy (e.g., Allison, 1971) as contrasted with the rational (or metarational) processes discussed so far; and (b) builds on the idea first developed by Burrell & Morgan (1979) of classifying sociological paradigms. Two decades later, Alvesson & Deetz (1998) set out a “metatheory of representative practices” in which four types of knowledge (rather than forms of rationality or paradigms) were distinguished. These types depend upon the political contexts within which entire research programs develop; rather than any particular patterns or contents of reflective inquiry. The four distinctive types of knowledge-production practices were then placed relative to each other. The types are: the normative (e.g., economic theory), the critical (e.g., critical management theory), the dialogic (e.g., minority and radical voices in a global context) and the interpretive (i.e., local communal understandings). Accordingly the Alvesson & Deetz metatheory draws attention to several sources of knowledge that differ with respect to the level of political power of their source, rather than their cognitive salience or persuasive power. At the same time it appears to place the four types (and their sources) on an apparently equal footing. That is, the minority voices, the local knowledge, the distinctive community-wide understandings and the so-called “elite discourse” of scholars and experts, might in principle all be given equal prominence and legitimacy.

This metatheory of representative practices is in considerable tension with the pragmatic ideal and the forms of pluralism that have been expressed and advocated so far in this paper. It is
perhaps aligned more closely with a contrasting philosophical position known as deep-pluralism (cf., Aitkin & Talisse, 2005) in which values (hence also some of the forms of rationality and ethics) are held to be incommensurable, or incapable of being adjudicated rationally. Deep pluralism implies that conflicts between values (or forms, or theories) must be settled through the exercise of power among the entities or “research communities” that uphold and express them; a position that, as one reviewer noted, “does not seem to add much;” but that more critically appears to point to the potential use of force, or at least to license it as an alternative to the kind of essentially dialogic and reflective notion of strategy considered previously.

Conclusion

In addition to relating theories to communities, as in the “representative practices” approach, we can also relate particular metatheories to source disciplines, such as sociology, economics, moral philosophy, management science and psychology. As mentioned at the outset, these traditional “disciplines” are supposed to be integrated in strategic management capstone courses in business schools (and in other interdisciplinary-studies programs). However, as every educator must surely be aware, all such attempts at the integration of entire disciplines suffer from a generic weakness, namely, that under contemporary cultural conditions there is little mastery of any of the disciplines, in the first place. Furthermore, even where a student is reasonably well grounded in one or two disciplines, these usually emphasize just a small subset of the “core” constructs, or elements of strategic behaviour that are to be found in any of the metatheories. This is not a new observation. For example, in a rather similar context Etzioni (1986) referred over 20 years ago to the “mis-education of economists” and by implication, of business students as well.6

Although it seems idealistic, if might be possible to teach metatheory directly to academically inclined students and practitioners. Perhaps the strongest case for this could be made in PhD programs, but programs that offer a cross-cutting focus on themes such as sustainability would also be a good fit. Certainly, a good awareness and understanding of all of the core themes: rationality, ethicality, optimality, synergy, dialectics, recursivity and power has often been considered the mark of a properly educated person, or generalist, or strategist. Business education has been notably lacking in this respect and the situation has long been unbalanced. Unfortunately, many have learned about exchange, property and ownership; yet they have never encountered ideas of ethics, recursivity and dialectics. At the level of practice, the potential of metatheory also remains untapped, due in part to the above-mentioned blockage on reflective thought amongst many of the practitioners who have been upheld as role-models or leaders; but also due to the narrow pecuniary motivations of many business students. Given the limits of human attention and the extent of institutional influence, a good case can now be made to propagate metatheory in the business curriculum while at the same time highlighting its direct link with well-informed reflective practice.

6 Many commentators, including the Premier of China (in 2009 on CNN) Patricia Werhane and a current reviewer, have noted that it is common to refer to Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations whilst overlooking or ignoring his Theory of Moral Sentiments.
References


Toward a Science of Metatheory

Steven E. Wallis

Abstract: In this article, I explore the field of metatheory with two goals. My first goal is to present a clear understanding of what metatheory “is” based on a collection of over twenty definitions of the term. My second goal is to present a preliminary investigation into how metatheory might be understood as a science. From that perspective, I present some strengths and weaknesses of our field and suggest steps to make metatheory more rigorous, more scientific, and so make more of a contribution to the larger community of the social sciences.

Keywords: Metatheory, science, social science, science of metatheory, theory.

Social Science – Flapping Around in Circles?

In the integral community, as with other fields of the social sciences, many authors have worked diligently to create effective metatheories. Wilber (2001) and Laszlo (2007), for example, have produced metatheories that are both interesting and popular. However, a storm of controversy surrounds such theories because the existing paradigm of the social sciences does not include effective conceptual tools for evaluating metatheory (or theory, for that matter). This is not the fault of the authors. Indeed, they should be lauded as brave explorers who are pushing the boundaries of human thought. The problem, and an important reason for the criticism of theory and metatheory, is that there is no generally recognized scientific framework by which we might judge them.

What is this thing called metatheory, and how might it be useful? This is a question that has been alternatively surfaced, ignored, considered, derided, and viewed with amazement around the world of the social sciences. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) these varied reactions, there has been little effort to create a coherent and comprehensive science of metatheory. The effort has not been made, perhaps because there appears to be no need for such an effort. Perhaps those in the social sciences are satisfied with their existing views of theory. More likely, the conceptual “building blocks” were not in place to support the creation of a new science.

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My greatest appreciation goes out to Mark Edwards for his many suggestions and support in the development of this article.
As to the question of “need,” we now face a seemingly endless array of local and global issues from psychology to policy. It is becoming increasingly clear that the challenge of those issues cannot be met with existing theory. That is at least one reason why we continue to develop new theory. Unless, of course, the bulk of academicians are insulated from these issues – which I think and hope is not the case! Because the development of more effective theory is so important, a critical question for the coming decade is, “How might we advance research and practice more rapidly to more effectively address the important issues of our time?”

The traditional approach of the social sciences is to apply expensive resources to the problem (time, money, researchers, facilities). This approach has generated thousands of theories and untold quantities of data. We have so many theories and so many data that it has become difficult to organize knowledge or resolve basic contentions within a field (N. D. Campbell, 2009). That befuddling excess of information can be traced to the origin of the social sciences. There, in an attempt to mimic the success of the physical sciences, social scientists were encouraged to seek objective facts through empirical research. A goal that has continued to the present day with calls for still more empirical research (e.g., Argyris, 2005).

What we seem to have overlooked is that a science, much like a bird, must have two strong wings if it is to fly. Empirical facts are understood in the light of a specific theory. And, theory can is built from a careful consideration of the facts. Indeed, theory and research are so intertwined that neither can exist without the other – and both are needed for a strong science. Theory and research are differentiable, but they are also inseparable – existing in a generative yin-yang relationship. While this is a generally accepted truism of science, the actual practice of science is rather different. Under the existing paradigm, a scholar presenting a research proposal is required to describe a specific and rigorous research methodology. However, that same scholar need present little or no justification for the theory. Indeed, some respected scholars have suggested that theory should be developed intuitively (Mintzberg, 2005).

There is the dichotomy that has hobbled the development of the social sciences. In contrast to the well-developed wing of research, the wing of theory is withered. We have made a habit of building and testing theory without a specific methodology, essentially relying on subjective intuition. As a result, we lack a solid metatheoretical perspective, we lack a rigorous and repeatable methodology for comparing research proposals on the basis of their theories (Dolan, 2007). We are left to consider the so-called facts of the situation without the benefit of a carefully developed and commonly understood context. This points to a vast gap in the literature; and, indeed, the science. Because theory and practice are (or should be) closely interrelated, the advancement as a science may be limited by the limitations of either. The science cannot advance without both.

Defining a science of metatheory is one important step. When that is done, scholars will be to seek and create theories that are more advanced – theories that can be tested according to the most rigorous and repeatable standards.

While much has been written on theory (for a good resource, see, for example, Van de Ven, 2007) the results do not seem to have enabled the success of the social sciences. Few of those methods require any degree of rigor. For example, the most commonly used claim of validity for
a presented theory is parsimony, but even that simple indicator is typically misunderstood and misapplied (Meehl, 2002). Further, by way of a thought experiment, if more parsimony led to better theory, we might conclude that the smallest theory would be the best of all – a difficult conclusion indeed. Based on this understanding of the necessary interrelationship between theory and research, it is reasonable to expect that the development of rigorous methodologies for developing and testing theory and metatheory will bring balance to the social sciences. This, in turn will accelerate the advancement of that science and aid in resolving the issues that face our world.

In short, there exists in the social science, a silent prejudice. Unrecognized and unabated, it eats at the heart of our science, destroying its legitimacy and impeding its advance. To create a more effective social science, we must first develop more mature, and more scientific approaches to the study of metatheory. In this, I refer to science as a process of investigation, replication, communication and the emergence of new and useful meanings. Not, as some think, of science as a complete set of natural laws where meanings are fixed.

A parallel concern is the ongoing struggle between modernism and postmodernism. Both are forms of metatheory (Ritzer, 2001) that shape the way we see the world. Briefly, and partially, traditional modernity emphasizes differentiation, simple-location, classification, and representation. While, in contrast, postmodernism is more about process, movement, interpretation, and change. The difference makes for interesting dialog (Chia, 2005), both inside each camp, as well as between them. Yet, drawing lines between the two is a modern approach and dialog is a postmodern approach. Both have something to offer the present paper that will help us to understand and advance scientific metatheory.

The potential benefits of advancing the science of metatheory are profound. First, by developing new metatheory, we gain the ability to become more effective in the application of theory for the alleviation of social ills and the optimization of the human condition. Second, and closely related, by working from a metatheoretical perspective, we gain the opportunity to understand and integrate theories across disciplinary boundaries. The insights and capabilities to be gained, for example, by linking human development and public policy are quite intriguing.

In first part of this article, I will review existing definitions of metatheory in hopes of finding a more complete, more useful, and less pejorative definition. In the second part of this article, I will present an outline for a scientific study of metatheory based on an authoritative, modern definition as a step toward legitimizing the study of metatheory, and the subsequent development of more effective theory. Third, I will present a postmodern view of science, combining and reflecting on multiple views of what it means to be a science. Fourth, I will combine the two in an integral approach that avoids the main concerns of each camp and combines the best of both. And, importantly, what seems to offer the most workable directions for a science of metatheory.

Many Understandings of Metatheory

The most basic problem is the lack of a clear definition of metatheorizing. Because of it, we have what appears a series of isolated works, isolated sub areas within types of metatheorizing, and isolated types of metatheorizing. Metatheorists often feel defensive about what they are
doing because they lack a clearly defined intellectual base from which to respond to the critics. Thus what stand out are the criticisms that often go unanswered. (Ritzer, 1990, p. 11)

In a search of the literature, Mark Edwards (with some support from the present author) found over 20 definitions of metatheory. While this search was not comprehensive, we believe that we have identified a good cross section of the field. One of the first things I noticed in reviewing these definitions is that the authors seemed to be describing different things. While some were describing the broader field of metatheory, others were describing related, yet subordinate, areas of metatheory such as the evaluation or categorization of metatheory. In this section, I will provide an overview of the field, based on the discovered definitions.

Broadly, metatheorizing is the process of performing metatheoretical research. That process includes many different kinds of activities including sorting theories and/or sorting their components into categories (Wallace, 1992, p. 53), the use of reflexivity (Ritzer, 2009), deconstruction and reconstruction (Ritzer, 1992, p. 11), statistical analyses of the literature (Meehl, 1992), and nearly 20 other suggestions (Turner, 1991). Just as theorizing results in the creation of theory, metatheorizing results in a “metatheorum” which is a statement about theory in general or a statement about a specific theory (Wikipedia, 2009).

Abrams and Hogg (2004) take an alternative, primarily metaphorical, approach to describing metatheory. They suggest, for example, that a metatheory makes a good travel guide. Sklair (1988, p. 697) describes a metatheorum as reflecting the coherence between epistemology and objects of knowledge. This coherence extends to include a set of assumptions about the constituent parts of the world, and our possibility of knowing them. Overton (2007, p. 155), in contrast, says that metatheorems define the context in which the theories are made, and refer to the theories, themselves. He also goes on to say that a metatheory is a set of interlocking principles that describe what is acceptable and unacceptable for theory.

Broadly, the field of metatheory includes the study of the “sources and assumptions; and contexts” (Finfgeld, 2003, p. 895), including the study of theorists and communities of theorists (Ritzer, 1988, p. 188), the process of theorizing (Zhao, 2010), and the analysis of the methods, findings, and conclusions of the research (Bondas & Hall, 2007, p. 115) the use of those theories (Bonsu, 1998, August) as well as their implications (Turner, 1990). Finally, the prescription that metatheorizing should produce theories that are open to empirical testing (Sklair, 1988).

Although they all address the same general theme, these definitions of metatheory contain more differences than similarities. Such disparity makes it difficult to draw useful conclusions about any shared definition of metatheorizing or metatheorems. Also, these descriptions are most often very sketchy and fragmentary; indeed, they are almost entirely “atomistic.” That is to say, most authors simply created a list of concepts that they considered important to the study of metatheory (e.g., metatheory is A, B, C, & D). Such an approach may be expected given the relative youth of the field. In contrast, more mature fields tend to contain concepts that are more closely integrated (e.g., A causes B and C, or A, B, & C are co-causal).

As the reader may notice, this broad range of definitions of metatheory overlaps with other areas of study. That overlap may cause confusion and concern (as well as the opportunity for
additional investigation and clarification). For the present article, however, I will focus on what might be considered the core of metatheory – without which, none of the other parts would be possible. This analysis begins by identifying the area of greatest agreement between the many definitions of metatheory.

**Table 1. Aspects of metatheory as described by various authors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/s</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Analysis of theories</th>
<th>Is (or creates) a theory of theory</th>
<th>Integrates multiple theories</th>
<th>Analysis of assumptions</th>
<th>Makes implicit assumptions explicit</th>
<th>Analysis of underlying structure</th>
<th>Analysis of structure of theory</th>
<th>Deconstructive</th>
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<td>Finfgeld</td>
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<td>x</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bondas &amp; Hall</td>
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<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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In Table 1 I list the authors of 21 definitions of metatheory and their key ideas. The more complete definitions are listed in the appendix. From this arrangement of the data, a few important conclusions may be drawn. There are also contradictions, which may prove troubling or prove to be a source of new insight.
First, and most simply, metatheory is focused on the analysis of theories. Ten of our 21 authors specifically agree on this point. In contrast to this general agreement around the core of metatheory, few authors describe metatheory as the analysis of context. Therefore, we may reasonably conclude that studies of theory are at the core of metatheory, while other studies (e.g., contexts, groups of theorists, methods, applications, etc) are less so. Second, it may be noted that six of our authors describe metatheory as making implicit assumptions explicit (Dervin, 1999), analysis of assumptions (Clarke, 2010; Finfgeld, 2003; Takla & Pape, 1985), analysis of underlying structure (Fuchs, 1991), and the analysis of structure (Turner, 1990). These are essentially deconstructive approaches (Dervin, 1999).

In contrast to this deconstructive approach, metatheory may also be understood to integrate multiple theories (Anchin, 2008b; Ritzer, 1988). The two approaches may be inseparable as one cannot combine integrate two theories without also integrating the assumptions, structures, and concepts of those theories. In short, metatheory (as the study of theory) may be conducted in at least two ways. It may be integrative (where multiple theories are combined). It may be deconstructive (where theories are parsed into their constituent components for analysis and/or recombination). Either way, the process leads to the creation of a metatheory, metatheorium, or “a theory of theory” (Craig, 2009; Gadomski, 2001; Wikipedia, 2009).

To summarize, the field of metatheory is richer and more complex than is expressed by any single definition to date. The following definition strives for conciseness, rather than completeness as the main focus of this article is the development of metatheory as a science. So, this definition (a simple, though useful, prelude) suggests that:

Metatheory is primarily the study of theory, including the development of overarching combinations of theory, as well as the development and application of theorems for analysis that reveal underlying assumptions about theory and theorizing.

This definition, it should be emphasized, reflects the state of understanding of metatheory to date. And, as noted above, this level of understanding has not proved sufficient for advancing theory or metatheory – perhaps because the terms are too fuzzy. In the process of creating this definition, however, a potentially clarifying co-causal relationship begins to emerge. Here, the analysis, evaluation, and integration of theory leads to the development of new methods of evaluation, which may then be used to evaluate the results. Far from a useless tautology, this suggests a path for the development of some conceptual constructs through the development of other conceptual constructs. By explicating this developmental process we may accelerate the development of such constructs. This occurs in much the same way that one may use a map to more easily locate a store for buying maps. Or, the way one may use telecommunication to collaborate on the creation of more effective telecommunication systems. These are positive feedback loops, rather than useless tautologies.

In the above section, I have briefly summarized the field of metatheory. However, a larger question lurks. It is generally understood that the reason for metatheory is the development of better theory. Indeed, many or all of the same “rules” that apply to the development of theory also apply to the development of metatheory. Because the two areas share a common heritage, they may also share a common failing. Who is to say, for example, that our failure to make
effective theory will not be replicated – leading to our failure to make effective metatheory? To avoid this trap, we must take metatheory to another level.

Where the creation of theory is understood to occur within a specific field of study, we might take a different view of metatheory and investigate metatheory as a field unto itself. However if the field of metatheory is to have any some degree of respect and usefulness, it must be understood as a legitimate science. As a science, we can expect metatheory to make advances and develop insights that may be applied to theories across the sciences. In the next section, I will investigate the idea of metatheory as a science from a modernist perspective.

**Towards a Scientific Metatheory**

Many voices have called for the advancement of social theory (e.g., Dubin, 1978; Leong, 1985; Popper, 2002; Van de Ven, 2007). To date, however, the methods for the scientific study and advancement of theory have been ineffective. For example, Meehl reports on 11 known methods for advancing theory (Meehl, 2002). However, he finds them to be primarily intuitive – and so unsuited for scientific investigation. Indeed, a recent study by HERA concluded that there was no method of evaluation that could be counted on to work effectively (Dolan, 2007).

To achieve greater effectiveness, we must reduce the epistemological indeterminacy around metatheory – we must learn to represent more clearly our knowledge about the similarities and differences between metatheories. In this, the ideas presented in this paper support the many excellent suggestions of Tom Murray (2006).

In this section, and the following sections, we will investigate how we might study theory and metatheory as a science unto itself. An important expectation is that following scientific methods will enable the creation of effective metatheory, effective theory, and more effective methods and practices. There are many understandings of what science is. So, in order to develop a deep and nuanced view, I will investigate the science of metatheory from multiple perspectives. In this section, I will investigate scientific metatheory from the modernist perspective. In the following sections, I will investigate scientific metatheory from a postmodern perspective. Then, I will discuss a combined perspective of a scientific metatheory.

To frame a modernist perspective of science, I begin with a recent and concise definition where, “Science is the pursuit of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence” (Science Council, 2010); which includes:

A. Objective observation: Measurement and data (possibly although not necessarily using mathematics as a tool)
B. Evidence
C. Experiment and/or observation as benchmarks for testing hypotheses
D. Induction: reasoning to establish general rules or conclusions drawn from facts or examples
E. Repetition
F. Critical analysis
G. Verification and testing: critical exposure to scrutiny, peer review and assessment
In this section, I will briefly review what is to have a modernist science, and explain how those standards may be applied to metatheory.

A – Objective Observation

Observation includes the description (and often measurement) of subjective, objective, and relational experience. Yet, in the social sciences, where two people might observe the same phenomena and arrive at dissimilar conclusions, the idea of objective observations becomes problematic. Because “There are no facts independent of our theories” (Skinner, 1985, p. 10) and “no observation may be totally theory-free” (Hull, 1988, p. 492) and, “no two scientists are ever in total agreement with each another” (Hull, 1988, p. 493). This situation has made advancements in the social sciences incredibly difficult and led to the fragmentation of many (perhaps all) fields of study.

In a post-positivist approach, with its attendant assumptions of uncertainty, there are great benefits associated with triangulation – combining multiple views to create a more effective understanding of our lived world (Rousseau, Manning, & Denyer, 2008, p. 486-487). Within a post-positivist world, there is little room for so-called “objectivity.” Yet, the word still carries weight. And, in the present paper, it may be understood as representing an approximately repeatable experience within a context of metatheoretical investigation. That is to say, if two researchers of similar education undertake an investigation of the same theories using the same research methods, they should reach the same result. The extent to which their results are similar is the extent to which the approach may be considered objective.

In contrast to the more general range of social sciences, the field of metatheory has an advantage in this aspect because metatheory is a primarily hermeneutic approach where, “Hermeneutics is the interpretation of texts” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 170). Thus, we metatheoreticians have access to books and journals that are (at least for a time) stable. That means, where many social events come and go in the blink of an eye, forcing researchers and their human subjects to rely on memory, we have the opportunity to revisit the texts with all the care and patience needed to fully understand the authors. In short, we are less subject to the transience of our observed subjects. Another benefit to the metatheoretical approach is completeness. That is, we have the possibility to analyze entire “worlds,” where other social scientists must make do with a small fraction. For example, if we wanted to create a metatheory based on all the works of Durkheim, we could (conceivably) collect and analyze his complete writings. In contrast, a social scientist who wanted to develop a new theory of child development could never observe all the children in the world.

In the scientific process of metatheory, the subject of analysis is primarily theory. The process of investigating theory, in part, involves the process of deconstructing existing theories (Dervin, 1999). Importantly, we can share those texts with other scholars to determine if we share the same viewpoints. That means we can begin to develop some degree of objectivity based on the similarity between our observations and interpretations of texts. In short, in the study of metatheory, we have the opportunity to be a more effective science than most fields of social theory because (in the area of objective observation) we suffer fewer effects of transience, easier opportunity for completeness, and greater opportunity for objectivity.
It is critical, however, to note that the opportunity to achieve these aims is not enough to make metatheory into a science. We must show through our work that our efforts have reduced transience, increased completeness, and increased objectivity. That, in turn, suggests that our metatheoretical analyses should include a large percentage of the available writings in a given area of study to exemplify completeness. Similarly our analyses should be collaborative efforts to exemplify objectivity.

**B – Evidence**

The collection of evidence is an important part of any scientific endeavor. Specifically, this refers to evidence that may be used to support (or contradict) one’s theory (or metatheory, in our field of study). Without the anchor of recorded evidence, the metatheorists may be accused of blue-sky speculation. Because this evidence consists of theories, the collection process may be fairly simple. One needs only collect the theories and hold them against the requirement of future reference. Evidence should also be identified and saved on the “next level” of analysis. For example, if a metatheorist has collected a number of theories and enumerated what percentage of those theories were actually tested, that too is evidence. And, the responsible scientist should keep that evidence available in case there is a challenge to the theory and a need to “show your work.”

As noted above, in the pursuit of metatheory, that evidence will come from the analysis of other theories. The evidence may be theories, the propositions within theories, or other data that is directly related to the theories. While Ritzer (1992) seems to suggest that metatheory should be focused on analyzing theories of the “middle range,” that seems to present an unnecessary limitation on the field of metatheory. There is no a priori reason why metatheory should not include the analysis of theories on all subjects – from subatomic particles through galaxies, including psychological, social, and economic theories along the way. Of course, in investigating such a range of theory it is important that the metatheorist identify some form of similarity. For example, causal and co-causal propositions are found in theories of the natural and social sciences (Wallis, 2009c).

Whether the evidence is collected from a broad range across disciplines and sciences, or the evidence is collected within a very narrow field of study, an important question remains as to how much evidence is enough? This is an opportunity for future investigation and clarification. The tacitly accepted practice seems to be that one has enough evidence when one is able to successfully convince others of the validity of one’s model. Yet, this is a weak standard as some people may be convinced with little evidence while others will not be convinced if they face all the evidence in the world. This concern leads to the need for testing.

**C - Experiment and/or Observation as Benchmarks for Testing Hypotheses**

Within the field of metatheory, two intertwined branches are emerging. One branch is primarily concerned with the creation of overarching theories, while the other branch is concerned with developing and applying rigorous and repeatable tests to theory. This is an important distinction to surface at the time because the hypotheses derived from each branch will be tested differently.
Metatheory Testing

Van de Ven (2007, p. 137) reflects on what might be the most common point of view for theory appraisal. Drawing on Weick and Thorngate, Van de Ven agrees that the creation of each theory requires a tradeoff between simplicity, generality, and accuracy. For example, a theory might be made more accurate, but that would require the theory to become more complex. This approach has led many theorists to claim that their theories are valid because they are parsimonious (Meehl, 2002). This is like claiming that something is good because it is tall – without a relative measure, the claim has no value.

By far, the strongest argument for testing theories comes from Popper (2002). Popper argues with strength and conviction that the only effective way to test a theory is to falsify that theory in practice. That view is, of course, itself a form of theory. And, importantly, has not been falsified. Adopting a metatheoretical perspective (see Wallis, 2008b), I noted how Popper was the product of a modern age. So, his search for modernistic “objective” knowledge seems to have blinded him to other forms of knowledge. By reframing Popper’s own ideas, I suggested three paths for the validation and falsification of theory.

In the “world of facts,” or data, a metatheory must (at the very least) be constructed of data – explicitly drawn from existing theory. A better metatheory would use data from multiple sources. The best metatheory is one where the theory may be applied to predict what future data will emerge. In the “world of meaning,” the metatheory must (at a minimum) make sense to the author. A better metatheory would make sense to the editor, reviewers and readers. At the highest level, a theory is accepted in a consensus of expert opinions and that theory is preferred over other theory of the same domain. Finally, in the “world of theory,” a metatheory must (at the very least) include logical arguments. A better theory is one that is constructed of specific propositions. And, the best metatheory is one that is constructed of carefully integrated, co-causal, propositions. The tests within any one of these worlds is certainly of limited efficacy. However, when combined, they create a potent standard for the evaluation of theory and metatheory.

A common argument for advancing the validity of a theory or metatheory is the claim that it “works” in practice. However, by itself, that is a weak claim because anything can be said to work. The deeper question become whether one theory or metatheory (and its derived hypotheses) works better than any other. For example, imagine an experiment where one prays for rain using a variety of techniques and direct those prayers to a variety of deities. I imagine that the results of such an experiment would not show much difference in rainfall. For another example, one might claim that the very popular management change process of Total Quality Management (TQM) is a valid theory because it is widely used, generally accepted, and seemingly successful. However, a more critical analysis find that the TQM fails more than 70% of the time (MacIntosh & MacLean, 1999). The more effective theory, or metatheory, is the one that can be shown to work better than another when applied within a specific context.

Rigorous evaluations should also be applied to those tests, and to the understanding of the context. It is not sufficient, for example, to claim that all theories are acceptable in some context and all theories exist in some context, so all theories are valid (a useless, non-generative,
tautology). So, to conclude this section, it seems that we have the opportunity to identify, clarify, formalize, and apply rigorous methods for testing theory and metatheory.

Theory Bounding

An additional approach related to theory building is the idea of theory “bounding.” It is an essentially metatheoretical process to delineate the boundary of a theory. Generally, a theory is bounded by additional explanation of where that theory may be legitimately applied – sometimes called the “limiting values” (Hitt & Smith, 2005). For example, a scholar might make a theory about team development. And, because the research was based in the telecom industry, that theory might be bounded by a statement such as, “This theory only applies to teams working in the telecom industry.”

In bounding the science of metatheory, we can say that our realm of study is theory. Further, the theorems that apply to the realm of theory, as a whole, are the theorems that are most central to the science. It is possible, of course, to subdivide the field of study. One might, for example, develop theorems that apply only to theories of sociology, or theories of health care. Such approaches, while they may drill-in to greater depth within a specific area of study (e.g., theories of sociology), are also less central to the science of metatheory, itself.

A legitimate science must be bounded in terms of subject matter. Further, the theory developed through the study of that subject matter might only be legitimately applied to that subject matter. For example, one cannot study galaxies and expect the resultant theories to work very well when used to choose a color for bedroom curtains. This simple idea brings with it some powerful conclusions. For example, if one is attempting to develop a “theory of everything” (TOE) the implication is that one must study everything. The impossibility of this requirement suggests the impossibility of developing a legitimate TOE. It is certainly possible to develop a generalizable abstraction – where a theory developed in the study of one organization may be legitimately applied to another organization. It seems less likely that one can studying a drop of water, develop a theory, and apply that theory to understand human development. Where exactly one draws the line is a matter for continued investigation.

D - Induction

An important part of science is the building of theory. And, in the field of metatheory, the building of metatheory (Craig, 2009; Gadomski, 2001; Wikipedia, 2009). As with the creation of theory, the process of metatheory creation is essentially one of induction – where a metatheoretician identifies related propositions within two or more theories and integrates them to generate an overarching metatheory or derive a rule for the analysis of future theories. By way of context, the inductive process begins with an abductive experience, “a surprising observation or experience. This is what shatters our habit and motivates us to create a hypothesis that might

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2 Yet, in theories of physics, we see no such bounding. For example, Ohm’s I=E/R relates to volts, amps, and ohms of resistance. Those are the aspects of the theory, and they do not apply to other things such as color or emotion. Therefore, it seems to make more sense to suggest that a theory is self-bounding – based on its constituent propositions.
resolve the anomaly” (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 101). Also, the inductive process may be seen in contrast to the deductive process, which is related to the testing of theory.

Drawing on Weick, Van de Ven suggests that from the myriad hypotheses, one might find the best theory by subjecting those hypotheses to a variety of thought-trials. “The greater the number of diverse criteria applied to a conjecture, the higher the probability that those conjectures which are selected will result in good theory” (Van de Ven, 2007, p. 109). While his approach may also prove useful, it also has a fatal flaw. Because, if one uses ten criteria, nine of them might be useless. In such a situation, the other nine that are not causally related to theory-improvement would overrule the one criterion that might result in a better theory. This is the same kind of problem faced by most people during an election campaign. One receives a flood of information, yet little of it has any true bearing on the qualifications of the candidates! Instead of developing a list of criteria, Van de Ven rests on the bench of “plausibility” Thus returning to a more or less intuitive form of evaluation. He extends that idea to link plausibility with conjectures that might be interesting to readers such as problems in society that need to be explained. This “appeal to the audience” is not a strong argument. Indeed, instead of leading to good theory, such an approach might lead authors to invent problems so that they may write persuasively to “explain” those problems and create supposedly “good” theories and metatheories.

This might be good literature but it is not good science – from the modernist perspective. And, as a result, the suggestion does not rise to the level of good metatheory. At this stage, however, there may be no way to avoid the rather abductive nature of the process. Instead, that moment where we think to ourselves – “That doesn’t make sense!” – is the moment when we begin a sense-making process. With careful effort, we find that something makes sense that did not before. This is part of making implicit assumptions explicit; an important part of metatheory (Dervin, 1999).

As the evidence of theory is collected, combined, analyzed, and insights begin to emerge, the results begin to resemble the integration of multiple theories – an important part of metatheory (Anchin, 2008b; Ritzer, 1988). Some tools of theory building include:

- Intuition
- Observation
- Abstraction
- Creating propositions
- Defining key terms
- Describing the domain of application
- Identifying the units of analysis
- Sampling some appropriate and relevant set of theories
- Analyzing the “data” using rigorous research methods
- Identifying core constructs and their interrelationships

In a detailed review of the *Handbook of Sociological Theory*, Treviño (2003, pp. 284-286) notes several forms of theory construction including: Jasso’s suggestion to engage in voracious reading and use of mathematics, Carley’s creation of computer simulations, Joas and Becket’s synthesis of existing theory, Turner and Boyns’ consolidation of theory within a grand analytical...
scheme, Bailey’s reduction in detail to focus on concepts, Lopreato’s call to discover general principles, and Lindenberg’s method of decreasing abstraction. From a complexity theory based approach, Ostroff and Bowen (2000) encourage theorists to note the degree of stability and change that occurs at each level under analysis. Also, Morgeson and Hofmann (1999) provide guidelines for theory-creation. Their process involves delineating the structure, function, and outputs of a given system. However, this view of an organizational system seems to be more descriptive than theoretical and Dubin (1978, p. 12) notes that theory is not merely describing, categorizing, or stating a hypothesis).

Sussman and Sussman (2001, pp. 90-92) claim that the golden rule of theory development is to make one’s hunches explicit by writing them down. This, they contend, also includes an assumption that the reader will be able to see more easily whether the theory is likely to be effective, and show who will benefit. To facilitate this process, they suggest four criteria for theory building (that may also be used for theory testing).

1. The theory should be plausible – it should make sense.
2. There must be enough variables within the theory so that the theory is useable.
3. The theory should be testable.
4. There should be a heuristic value to the theory – it should be useable across multiple situations.

The rules that apply to theory building also apply to metatheory building because each metatheory is also a theory – albeit one whose domain is understood as the study of theory. Importantly, combining, and integrating, multiple theories is an inherently metatheoretical process. Some call the results theory, while others call the results metatheory. However, because all theories are built from previous theories (or, a combination of existing theories and new data), and no difference has been shown in application between social theory and social metatheory, the two may be considered synonymous. This indicates an important area of study for the field of metatheory. Because, if it can be proven in application that metatheories are more effective than theories the social sciences, as a whole, will have taken a giant leap forward.

The existing state of metatheory building is, unfortunately, impoverished in regards to suggestions for building theory. One important source of information on how to perform metatheory building comes from the literature on the construction of middle-range theory. For example, Mintzberg (2005, pp. 361-371) encourages theory builders to use their intuition and to “be brave.” This might, conceivably, lead to brave theories, but there is no way to test the bravery of a theory (or the theorist). Nor is there any suggestion that a brave theory might be more effective in practice. Therefore, the theorist should be very wary about accepting advice that leads to untestable theories. For those theories cannot be tested cannot be improved. The same advice applies to metatheoreticians.

When building metatheory, the data used comes from the analysis of extant theory. Metatheoreticians investigate existing theory and extract or acquire insights from that set of theories. For example, one may look at a set of theories and perhaps categorize them (e.g., complex or simple) and abductively identify a categorical rule (e.g., parsimonious theories are easier to test and complex theories cover more ground). From what might be called a “content
metatheory” perspective, one may look at a set of theories – each containing a different set of concepts. One might conclude that all valid theories must include some (or all, depending on the rule) of that set of concepts. Van de Ven (2007) suggests that the process of abstraction, when correctly applied, can increase the generality of a theory (because a more abstract theory can be applied across a broader range of situations). Abstraction also makes it possible for a theory to become less complex while increasing accuracy.

While most suggestions for theory building are “one-shot” bits of advice (e.g., be creative), a more complex and rigorous approach is to transparently follow a particular methodology. One such methodology, designed specifically for metatheory is Reflexive Dimensional Analysis (RDA). RDA was derived from grounded theory, as well as dimensional analysis (Wallis, 2006a, p. 7). Because it involves constructing new theory from the combination of existing theories, RDA is essentially a metatheoretical process. RDA proceeds according to the following steps:

1. Define a body of theory.
2. Investigate the literature to identify the concepts that define it.
3. Code the concepts to identify relevant components.
4. Clump the components into mutually exclusive categories.
5. Define each category as a dimension.
6. Investigate those dimensions through the literature, looking for robust relationships.

Examples of this form of theory construction may be found in benchmark studies of complexity theory (Wallis, 2009a), complex adaptive systems theory (Wallis, 2006a, 2006b). Another approach that deserves some attention is the process of Grounded Theory (GT). GT is a rigorous process of theory creation (Glaser, 2002) representing a structured methodology for theory creation with good potential for use in the creation of metatheory. Importantly, GT could provide a clear link between the data (theory, in our field) and the resulting metatheory by moving the data through a set process (Goulding, 2002) that can be summed up as:

1. Coding the data
2. Thematizing the data
3. Finding relationships between the themes

Grounded theory suggests the use of an “open coding” process. There, the researcher intuitively codes the data. In that sense, the first step might be seen as an a priori one. In contrast, in the process of thematizing the data, the research is to look at the coded data and identify common categories for grouping them. This process might be seen as essentially a posteriori in the sense that the researcher begins with data, and then identifies a relationship. Similarly, the third step of finding relationships between the themes suggests an a posteriori approach – albeit one that calls for more creativity and abduction.

The iterative interactions between research and data, as well as developing relationships between the themes suggests a generative approach that is reminiscent of the mélange of social construction. Also, each step of the process is documented for transparency. However, with grounded theory, the process is surfaced for clarification. One of many examples may be seen in the development of a complex (yet useful) integrated strategic planning framework for dynamic
industries using Grounded Theory (Tsai, Chiang, & Valentine, 2003). It has yet to be shown if either grounded theory or RDA might be repeatable. Although, it seems that both methods seem like they would have a higher level of repeatability than (for example) intuitive methods of theory building.

To summarize the more general conversation on the construction of metatheory, it seems that metatheory has offered little that is new in terms of theory building. Our field has adopted calls for triangulation (framing this as the use of multiple theoretical lenses). Authors with a focus on metatheory have echoed calls for techniques such as imagination and discipline. And, they have (to a small extent) formalized existing approaches to theory building. This lack of rigorous methodology may account for some criticism of metatheory. Similarly, for the process of building metatheory, I have only seen scholars use the same tools as have been used for building theory. Therefore, in looking at metatheory, theorists are able to see and criticize in our work what they do not see in their own. That is, a lack of methodological rigor. This lack of rigor may be exemplified as the lack of repeatability in the process of theory creation.3

It may be impossible to develop repeatable experiments for theory creation because the origins of theory seem shrouded in the mists of imagination. Who is to say exactly where Newton’s ideas for laws of motion arose? In this, I do not refer to some apocryphal apple, rather the formal mathematical relationships. The inspirations and ideas are lost in moments long past. In the study of the creation of metatheory, on the other hand, explicit theories and metatheories remain for study. This may indicate a more fruitful direction for the advancement of a scientific field of metatheory – which will be explored in the following sections.

E - Repetition

Repeatability has long been a mainstay of science. For a negative example, about twenty years ago, two physicists claimed that they had achieved nuclear fusion at room temperature (instead of the millions of degrees of temperature required by generally accepted theories of physics). They shared their news with the world, and many scientists eagerly repeated their experiment. However, the same results were not forthcoming. This attempt at repetition allowed the world to quickly determine what worked and what did not.

Innovation, as with theorizing, is also important to the process of metatheorizing. Used by itself, however, it may take on the appearance of blue-sky speculation. In a science, we balance the trend toward speculation by applying the more rigorous standard of repetition. Applying the process of repetition to scientific metatheory, we might expect (from a modernist perspective) that two scholars who begin with the same source data and apply the same techniques for metatheory building, while working to address the same topics, should develop the same

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3 Dubin notes that the process of theory construction may be inescapable as man creates models of the sensory world then uses those models to comprehend the world. Or, put another way, a theorist is one who observes part of the world and seeks to find order (Dubin, 1978, p. 5-6). While it may be inescapable, that does not mean it is hopeless or useless. For example, we cannot negate gravity, but we can use it to our advantage (e.g., downhill skiing, accelerating space probes through a “slingshot effect,” enjoying the benefits of rainfall, and more).
metatheory. However, to the best of my knowledge, this kind of study has never been attempted. This lack of repeatable studies suggests a great opportunity for metatheoretical study.

For example, a teacher or researcher could conduct a classroom exercise by providing a set of theories to three (or more) groups of students – with the assignment that each group should develop a set of metatheoretical insights based on the data set. The results should prove interesting – and highly stimulating to the science of metatheory. It may be expected that each group of students might employ a different methodology – and perhaps have different aims in their exercise. One group might simply combine all the theories to create one large (and amorphous) theory. Another group might identify similarities of structure between the theories, while a third group identifies new insights based on what the existing theories did not cover. In short, without some guide, it is unlikely that there will be repeatability in the science of metatheory.

In light of the difficulty of obtaining repeatable results in the creation of theory, it may be more useful to develop formal tools for the analysis of theory. These should be rigorous so as to enable repeatability. This is not, in any way, to restrict the imagination and creativity of the metatheoreticians (which, fortunately, is rather irrepressible). Instead, this is to channel that creativity to where it might be more usefully applied to advancing the science\(^4\). In short, in order to have repeatability, we must have the rigorous methodology of critical analysis.

**F – Critical Analysis**

Where the tree of metatheory is beginning to blossom is in the area of critical analysis. The idea that theories may be evaluated seems to instill some with a sense of dread (Fiske & Shweder, 1986, p. 2); as if any method for evaluation must somehow be arbitrary. Yet, it is important that we evaluate theory to ascertain if it is, indeed, a valid theory. And, those methods of analysis need not be arbitrary. Without some form of objective evaluation, we are left with a situation of complete relativism which renders everything meaningless (D. T. Campbell, 1983, p. 124).

The analysis of theory is an inherently metatheoretical exercise – as in Ritzer’s M\(_a\) (Ritzer, 2001, p. 18) and occurs more frequently than most imagine. For example, every academic paper involves the implicit and/or explicit examination of extant theories, a consideration of which theories (or parts of theories) might be suitable for advancing a new theory or research project. What is being coalesced and clarified here is a set of evaluative methodologies that might be called metatheorems because they are useful for conducting metatheoretical analysis. This, of course, is rather different from the kind of “metatheories” that would be understood as

\(^4\) Imagine a poet who is using a word processor. Each time she types a word; the computer inters a random word in its place. Can poetry be made this way? No – the very process of creativity requires reliable tools. During the scientific revolution, each scientist had his own theory – a very creative situation. Today, each person still has the opportunity to have his or her own theory. Yet, there is one prevailing (perhaps dominating) set of laws for electricity. While some might see those laws as infringing on more creative interpretations, I would suggest that those laws enable creative work in the design of electronic devices such as cell phones and computers. And, in turn, those devices enhance creativity, art, and communication in myriad ways.
overarching a range of theories and/or disciplines. Both of these, of course, are different from “metatheory” as the entire field of metatheoretical endeavor.

To the extent that the metatheoretical methodologies described in this paper are fuzzier, they will be less useful to the development of metatheory as a science. To the extent that they are more rigorous and repeatable, they will bring the field of metatheory closer to the status of a science. In this, one may conduct fuzzy metatheory and be legitimately accused of conducting bad science. However, before the accusation may be considered valid, we must have reliable, repeatable, critical methods of analysis. In this section, I will present a number of methods as a way of starting a conversation that will allow us to keep criticism in its appropriate place.

Within the study of metatheory, there is broad agreement that the analysis of theories is an important part of metatheory (Bondas & Hall, 2007; Bonsu, 1998, August; Colomy, 1991; Faust, 2005; Faust & Meehl, 2002; Finfgeld, 2003; Paterson, Thorne, Canam, & Jillings, 2001; Ritzer, 1988; Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991; Zhao, 2010). Indeed, given the breadth of that agreement, critical analysis be considered central to the field of metatheory.

In his recent book, Edwards (2010, pp. 206-214) applies an impressive array of tests that may be applied to metatheories. Derived from Ritzer and others, these include:

- Nesting – ensuring that the metatheory is grounded in theory.
- Linkage – identifying and describing relationships between conceptual elements of theories.
- Comparative Techniques – qualitative comparisons and calibrations between theories under analysis.
- Conservation – integrating theories without supplanting them completely.
- Uniqueness – does the metatheory provide something new?
- Parsimony – keeping to the minimum number of explanatory factors needed.
- Generalizability – what other areas of research might the metatheory be applied?
- Level of Abstraction – how many variables and theories might be integrated?
- Internal Consistency – how relevant are the lenses of the metatheory to one another?
- New Factors – can a new theory, or lens, be identified?
- Relationships Between Factors – have the theoretical lenses been carefully identified, and linked and have the internal facets of each lens also been identified?
- Credibility – is the underlying logic reasonable?

Advancing these methods to the point where they may be applied with objective, repeatable rigor will be a boon to the science of metatheory. Among the more objective methodologies developed for the critical analysis and evaluation of theories are:

- Complexity – as a measure of parsimony (Ross & Glock-Grueneich, 2008).
- Static Robustness – as a measure of the internal integrity of a theory (Wallis, 2008a).
- Dynamic Robustness – measuring the stability of a theory as it moves between scholars (Wallis, 2009b).

It is important to note that while these essentially metatheoretical methods have been applied to the analysis of theories, they have not been applied to the analysis of metatheories. So, again,
the field of metatheory could benefit greatly from continued investigation along these lines. In the following sub sections, I will briefly describe a number of other methods that may prove useful to the metatheorist.

Categorization

One approach for conducting metatheoretical analysis is categorization. This is a fairly simple method for conducting metatheoretical analysis, which aids in the process of generating metatheory. One way of looking at the processes of metatheorising is to combine the models of Ritzer (2001) and Colomy (1991) which categorize metatheoretical activity based on the aims of the researcher. This gives us four categories of metatheorising: (a) reviewing the theories within some domain, (b) preparing to create middle-range theory, (c) creating an overarching metatheory and (d) determining the strengths and weaknesses of other theories and metatheories.

Another method is suggested by Gregor (2006, p. 620). Her five interrelated types of theory are distinguished as: (a) theory for analyzing, (b) theory for explaining, (c) theory for predicting, (d) theory for explaining and predicting, and (e) theory for design and action.

Kaplan (1964) suggests six forms of structure for theoretical models. His forms of structure include a literary style (with an unfolding plot), academic style (exhibiting some attempt to be precise), eristic style (specific propositions and proofs), symbolic style (mathematical), postulational style (chains of logical derivation), and the formal style. This last, the formal style avoids “reference to any specific empirical content” to focus instead on, “the pattern of relationships.”

It is also possible to categorize theory in a number of other ways. For example, one might create a category based on some specific context (historical, geographical, etc). Similarly, one might also describe a history of theory, identify schools of thought, or identify geographical differences (e.g., European and African) in the origin or use of theory. Each of these methods, and many others, may provide useful to scholars. Categorization, however, does not necessarily require a deep engagement with the theories under analysis (although, of course, it might). For example, one might engage in a metatheoretical categorization of existing theories by the date those theories were published. In such an approach, one need never look at the theory at all. Therefore, while it may be useful in some context, categorization may not be central to the field of metatheory.

General Norms of Validation

Kaplan (1964, pp. 311-322) discusses the validation of theories in terms of three types of norms (correspondence, coherence, and pragmatics).

Norms of correspondence. "Truth itself is plainly useless as a criterion for the acceptance of a theory." Indeed, an appeal to facts rests on a bedrock of common sense; yet, those presuppositions also stand in the way of scientific advance, "and progress has required the courage to thrust them aside." "What counts in the validation of a theory, so far as fitting the
facts is concerned, is the convergence of the data brought to bear upon it, the concatenation of the evidence - beautifully illustrated, to my mind, in Ernst Jone's essay on Symbolism."

**Norms of coherence.** This norm suggests that new theories must be fit into the existing body of theory. In this area, Kaplan discusses the simplicity of a theory, and the need to assess that theory in comparison to other theories. Essentially asking which is the best theory to use for a particular situation.

**Pragmatic norms.** This norm asks if the theory seems to work in practical application. Interestingly, he also notes, "From this standpoint, the value of a theory lies not only in the answers it gives but also in the new questions it raises."

For each of these three norms, Kaplan notes strengths and weakness - essentially suggesting that no one norm by itself is sufficient for judging the efficacy of a theory. These three norms may be understood as general categories for other forms of analysis.

**Maturity**

Another approach to critical evaluation suggests that a more effective model might be understood to be one that is more mature. (Commons, Trudeau, Stein, Richards, & Krause, 1998) develop innovative and useful insights into the structure of theoretical models. They accomplish this by drawing a parallel between the less-understood development of models and the better-understood development of individuals, organizations and cultures. In each area, the system that is understood as more evolved is the system that is more complex. In their maturation model of theory, the stages are:

1. Abstract Stage (stories become cases, events are abstracted to data).
2. Formal Stage (two or more Abstract Stage variables are related).
3. Systematic Stage (developing simple hypotheses from Formal Stage relationships).
4. Metasystematic Stage (creating models that account for all relevant relationships).

Importantly, in this maturation model, the “Systematic Stage” is one where there is a formal description of how variables interact in relation to one another. This stage requires “multiple input variables” and may suggest multiple outputs as well. This view stands in contrast to less complex (and so less mature) models that suggest simple, linear, causality. Creating a parallel between complexity and some sense of maturity seems to have validity – and is reflected across a broad section of literature.

**Strong Actuarial Thesis**

Yet another approach (or set of approaches) is suggested by the Faust-Meehl “strong actuarial thesis” which surfaces the difficulty of evaluating theories and asks, “What features of theories predict their long-term survival?” and, “To what extent are those features similar across disciplines and domains?” (Faust & Meehl, 2002, p. S186). Usefully, Meehl (1992, pp. 408-426) examines many forms of theory evaluation and describes the weaknesses of each (empirical studies, ceteris paribus, simplest explanation, aesthetic beauty, logical possibility, unconnected
postulates, reducibility, etc). And (Meehl, 1992, p. 438), suggests that logical-mathematical theories are more true/accurate/useful than explanatory theories.

**Causal Structure**

Stinchcombe (1987) suggests another form of analysis. Specifically, he investigates the causal structure between the concepts within a theory. These methods provide useful guidelines for graphically mapping the structure of a theory. Among his interesting insights, he explains how to critically analyze a theory to remove useless aspects – thus rendering the theory simpler, with little or no loss of explanatory power. For an abstract example, consider a theory that describes causal relationships between three observable things. Changes in A cause changes in B that cause changes in C. This theory has three concepts connected by two linkages. If we are using this theory to understand the end result “C,” Than the intermediary “B” is extraneous. The theory might just as well say that, A causes C.

**Propositional Analysis**

A theory or metatheory may be understood as an “ordered set of assertions” (Southerland, 1975, p. 9). Yet, this begs the question of how well ordered these assertions actually are. One answer to this problem is seen in the use of propositional analysis (Wallis, 2008a) which appears to be the most rigorous method for analyzing a body of theory. This multi-step process begins by finding the propositions within the body of theory. Those propositions are then compared with one another to identify overlaps, and redundant concepts are dropped. Next, the propositions are investigated for conceptual relatedness. Those aspects that are causal in nature are linked with aspects of the theory that are resultant. Those concepts that are explained by or resultant from two or more other concepts are considered to be “concatenated.”

Concatenated aspects are privileged because they are better explained than others – to the extent that the better understanding is transcendent. Bateson (1979) describes how two eyes are better than one because the two views combined also provide the viewer with depth perception – something neither eye alone could achieve. Similarly, it is generally accepted that when two people combine their views on a single topic, a new and more comprehensive view emerges. Or, from a metatheoretical perspective, two lenses of theory are better than one.

The formal “robustness” of the theory is then determined by dividing the number of concatenated aspects by the total number of aspects to provide a number between zero and one. A value of zero represents a theory with no robustness – as might be found in a bullet point list of concepts. A theory with a value of one suggests a tightly structured theory, such as Newton’s F=ma. For an abstract example, lets say we have a theory consisting of the following propositions: A is true; B is true; A causes B; Changes in B cause changes in C; Changes in D and changes in C cause changes in E. There are five aspects (A, B, C, D, and E). Of those five, only E is concatenated (D and C cause E). This gives a ratio of well-integrated aspects to poorly integrated aspects of 0.20 (the result of one divided by five).

This represents an important advance in the critical evaluation of theory for at least three reasons. First, because it provides an alternative logic for understanding theories. Second,
because it provides a method for objectively delineating the structure of a theory. And, third, because progress in advancing theory toward a measurably higher level of structure seems to be related to advancing a theory toward revolutionary improvement in theory and practice (Wallis, 2009c).

Litmus Test

In conversations, some scholars have reported to me that they apply a “litmus test” to theories and metatheories as a way to determine validity. For example, one might say, “Any theory that purports to promote freedom is a good theory.” While this appears to be a laudable goal, it is a weak scientific standard – primarily because it must fall back on other theories and other interpretations. It begs all sorts of questions such as, “What does it mean to promote?” or, “What is freedom?” and, “Freedom for whom? Or “Freedom for how long?” Further, it leaves unanswered questions about the actual efficacy of the theory or metatheory. A problem highlighted in the phrase, “freedom is slavery” (Orwell, 1949, p. 7). In short, simple litmus tests do not seem to be good science. They are essentially an act of faith or intuition.

When theorists and metatheorists resort to litmus tests or intuition in place of rigorous, repeatable, analysis, it may be because the more rigorous methods are not well understood, or there may be a cultural bias against their acceptance. Whatever the reasons for past analyses, our science would benefit from the continued development, articulation, and application of these methods in analyses of theories and metatheories, alike. These methods need to be developed both individually, and in comparison with one another. One pioneer in this area is the late Paul Meehl. Meehl found that parsimony is the most used, and most problematic of the claims for the validity of a theory (Meehl, 2002). More frequently used, though less specifically cited, is the test of “logic” (e.g., Wacker, 1998). This test is so common that it has faded into the background. It is simply assumed that each theory has some logic to it.

Indeed, it may be said that a theory is constructed of logical arguments (e.g., Gregor, 2006). And, that logic may be accepted as a routine test for theories undergoing peer review. However, that approach has proved insufficient to the task of advancing theory. Possibly because there is no clear demarcation for what Set of logical arguments is better than another. That is to say, the logical arguments need only be “good enough” (whatever is appropriate for the needs of the journal). One problem with logic is that it is often constructed in “chains” (A is true because of B, B is true because of C, etc) (Steiner, 1988). Steiner concludes that the last link of a chain remains undefined. So, although one may claim validity based on acceptable logic for a theory, there often lurks the unspoken method of intuition.

Meehl (1992, p. 358) notes that there are few or no metatheoretical rules of what he calls “universal form.” Therefore, metatheorists have nothing to guide them but their intuition. And, studies have shown intuition to be unreliable (Meehl, 1992, p. 370). Meehl (2002) also argues at some length against intuitive methods of evaluation because intuition has been shown to be a weak tool for evaluation – even among experts working within their own field.

To conclude this section on forms of critical analysis, we should note that some of these forms might be more useful than others, depending on the needs of the metatheoretician. For example,
if one is conducting a historical analysis of theory, the process of categorization might be more useful. If one is comparing theories to determine which might be best applied in practice, one may be better off choosing propositional analysis. There is a great opportunity for investigating these forms of analysis. They could, and should, be tested and compared with one another to identify the efficacy of each approach in various fields of study and for various purposes. Given the range of tools presented in this section for the metatheoretical analysis of theory, it should be apparent to the reader that she or he need not rely on weak tests of logic, litmus, or intuition for evaluating theory or metatheory.

G – Verification and Testing

It is absolutely imperative for the advancement of any science that the work be exposed to scrutiny; including peer review and assessment. Without the dissemination, comparison, and testing of theories and metatheories, one may become a lone hermit, talking to one’s self and digging one’s self deeper into some self-satisfying view of the world. It is much better for the science if we develop more useful, shared, understandings. Some metatheoretical models may be held and even used subconsciously – used, but never detected or explicated. In order for the theory to make sense to others, the theorist must surface tacit mental models for explanation and publication.

As analysts, we escape the trap of our own assumptions by making our theory and methodology explicit (Scheff, 1997, p. 142). Without that clarity, we incur at least two problems. First, we may be overwhelmed by data. Second, we are less able to perceive what is new or different. By having data, we might know what but not why. We become trapped by seemingly inescapable facts. With theory, we transcend – we gain a new perspective and are able to take action. This is the importance of metatheory – that starting assumption that we may understand the world (and ourselves) in a different way – that we may become more than we are. Following this path, we may more easily gain the ability to change our world and to change ourselves.

In Cultures of Inquiry, John Hall (1999) describes a “third path” of inquiry that is primarily neither objective nor subjective, rather is essentially reflexive where meaning is created in a socially constructed sense. Similarly, Ofori-Dankwa and Julian (2001) work to identify a bridge from the traditional notions of theory building, and novel, paradoxical approaches that reflect complexity and chaos theory. Where an individual metatheorists might build a metatheory from one of these, or another of many approaches, those approaches are still rooted in the individual – however carefully contemplative and reflexive that individual might be. In a science of metatheory, another level of reflection is gained by exposing a metatheory to social evaluation.

In the following section, I will investigate the arguments for a postmodern approach to science, review a range of postmodern approaches to scientific inquiry, and investigate how these approaches might be applied to the study of metatheory.

From Modern to Postmodern

Kitcher (1993, p. 7) notes how “there is no theory-neutral body of evidence to which scientific theories must conform.” This, theory-laden nature of (so-called) facts is reflected in the study of
metatheory. That is to say, there is no metatheory-neutral body of theory. Each of us has a set of assumptions (a.k.a. models, mental models, schema) that shape the way we understand and engage. The same applies to the way we engage theory (and metatheory). This view appears to hold true for modern and postmodern approaches. Historically, “The postmodern period follows the supposed triumph of science and rationality, calls into question, and produces an array of diverse and divergent conceptions of knowledge” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 1).

To understand something, one approach of modernist science is to idealize it. That is to say, to assume that everything behaves in a certain way. Applied to humans, one might assume that “all humans are rational decision makers.” These kinds of assumptions may be useful in that they allow the researcher to have a set assumption upon which to build additional work. One problem with this approach is that those assumptions are always illusory. There is no way to be completely objective – to understand some absolute truth, because there are always assumptions.

There is no real way to avoid this. Modernist science tried very hard by differentiating scientific inquiry form political, artistic, and religious inquiry. As a result of those reductionist assumptions, fantastic advances were made. As another result, we are starting to see some of the weaknesses of those assumptions – including the weakness of reductionist thinking, itself. Kitcher (1993) engages this conversation at great length and depth. And, he concludes, that we should not attempt to rid ourselves of modernist science. Rather, we should seek to change it – to enrich it. One way to do that is to integrate modernist science with postmodern insights into the value of religion, art, human interaction, creativity, and values.

Objective truth does not seem to exist. And, if it does, we humans do not have access to it. What we do have is the ability to access multiple ways of understanding. We can sit in the presence of a person, we can admire the beauty of a work of art, and we can revel in the novelty of surprising insights. If we attempt to engage the world with a single method, we become guilty of methodolatry. To avoid this trap, “scholars have urged researchers to put aside their theoretical silos to uncover the potential of using interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives in research.” Using, “border-crossing notion of bricolage,” combines multiple methods as appropriate to the research context (Abes, 2009). This brings to mind Bateson’s “double description” (Bateson, 1979). His essential idea is that we may reasonably ignore concerns for objectivity or ultimate reality and pragmatically accept that two descriptions of something are better than one.

Modernist approaches to science tend to seek an absolute truth about the nature of reality. This totalizing view discounts alternative views, approaches, and ways of knowing. Thus, modernist science serves as a point of view – a metatheory that both enables and restricts how a user of that view approaches the world and investigations of the world.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, stands in contrast to this monolithic view. Lyotard (1984), for example, suggests that it makes more sense to see society as a range of dualities and oppositions, rather than some undifferentiated whole. For Lyotard’s postmodern view, science is about the process of conversation, not some pile of knowledge. Similarly, Shotter and Tsoukas (2007) decry the absolutist position and argue for its replacement with approaches that are intuitive and contextual. Calás and Smircich (2005), for example, question the faulty logic of
modern knowledge and suggest a range of new logics to support research that will foster change and emancipation.

Broadly, postmodernism suggests multiple paths for investigation and ways of knowing. There is not a single storehouse of well-ordered knowledge. Rather, “Knowledges are incomplete and disordered” (Law, 2010, p. 8). Therefore, it is useful to recognize that knowledge is always situated in a particular context. And, recognizing that there are multiple ways of knowing, we should learn to tolerate the differences between them so that we can explore those differences, rather than attempt to privilege one over the other. Deetz (1996, p. 191) seems to agree – exhorting readers to “Fight the tendency to reduce conceptions to categories or reduce sensitizing concepts to definitions.” There are difficulties and dangers in categorization because that which reveals also conceals.

Specifically, Chia (2005) notes some contrasts between modern and postmodern approaches. Modernism emphasizes differentiation, simple-location, classification, and representation. And, in contrast, postmodernism is more about process, movement, interpretation, and change. The imperatives for postmodernity, he argues, are: (a) Change – that might be understood through history; (b) Workability or usefulness of a theory; (c) Attention to surprise – seeking what is not there and appreciating accidents and novelty.

From another postmodern approach, Law (2009) talks about performativity – how we can enact realities. Generally, he suggests that good postmodern research includes: (a) Looking at our practices - what is being done and how it is being done, (b) Avoiding the assumption that there is an absolute reality beyond what we experience, (c) Asking about how processes turn representations into “windows on the world” (d) There is no way to escape from practice, (e) Look for gaps between practices and realities.

However, postmodern inquiry is not entirely about practice. For example, Rosenau notes how, “For these [skeptical] post-modernists, theory is reduced in stature, but they neither reject it altogether nor call for an absolute equality of all theories” (Rosenau, 1992, p. 22). Which is a fortunate because if postmodernism did not recognize the legitimacy of theory, there would be no opportunity to write about postmodernity (as every form of writing is a form of theory as well as a form of practice). Shotter and Tsoukas (2007) similarly decry the absolutist position that science should replace our intuitive understanding of a situation. Instead, they suggest that reflective conversation within a specific context (rich in description) and everyday use of language should be applied. However, their description of the process seems remarkably like the process of induction - as such talk may lead easily to theories and practices. So, again, we find ourselves back in the realm of theory.

There are (appropriately) a wide variety of postmodern approaches to inquiry and so science. The following table provides a distillation of some approaches by a dozen authors. From this, I hope the reader will gain an appreciation of the vast range of possibilities for postmodern scientific exploration. And, I hope, be encouraged to develop more approaches.
Table 2. Aspects of postmodernity as defined by various authors

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From a postmodern perspective, as you may infer from the above table, there are more than a few ways to conduct scientific inquiry, “So, it is not at all the case that there is something like a unified “scientific method” that governs all intellectual inquiry” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 86). Inherent in this diversity is the idea that we can continue to develop new (and more diverse) approaches that may have some validity and usefulness in a postmodern context. And, to a greater or lesser extent (as with modernist approaches), these postmodern approaches might serve as useful indicators of progress for a science of metatheory. In the remainder of this section, I will investigate some potential benefits and limitations of these postmodern concepts as they relate to metatheory.

Anything goes is a difficult thing to measure. In the present context, it seems related to the idea that we should avoid ontological arrogance; and, in that process, strive toward more creative approaches to analysis. Indeed, we are not restricted to a single mode of analysis, rather we have a range of possible methods – and that range continues to expand. When applied to metatheoretical analysis, this suggests that it is valid to develop new methods of validation. Although, it should not be seen as ruling out existing approaches.

Deconstructing existing texts (especially those that appear to be privileged) is a process that is inherent to metatheory. Because those texts are the subject of analysis, it is difficult to avoid some form of deconstruction! There is also an important piece of recursion here because metatheoretical methods are themselves theories. Therefore, it is possible to use metatheory to deconstruct metatheory. We might measure the rate of deconstruction by tracking the level at which the deconstruction of a theory occurs. For example, a postmodern researcher might write in general terms about a theory (as a whole) – and that might represent an engagement on one level. If the researcher analyzes the propositions of a theory, that is another level. Then too, if the researcher investigates individual words - that is still another level. Deconstructing on all three of these levels (or any two) would be more effective than using any one.

In contrast to the modernist desire for objective knowledge, the postmodern approach recognizes the contextual nature of knowledge. For an analysis of theory, a metatheoretical approach might simply accept and appreciate all theory as providing useful material. Or, it might be said (for example) that a particular analysis will investigate theory from a specific context, perspective, or draw on theory from a specific source (e.g., theories of the 21st century). Identifying the context may be a form of categorization. For example, only theories made in the 20th century would be considered valid in a study of 20th century theory. It is also useful to recall that a process of social construction may serve to create new contexts. For example, Lyotard (1984) explains:

From this point of view, an institution differs from a conversation in that it always requires supplementary constraints for statements to be declared admissible within its bounds. The constraints function to filter discursive potentials, interrupting possible connections in the communication networks: there are things that should not be said. They also privilege certain classes of statements (sometimes only one) whose predominance characterizes the discourse of the particular institution: there are things that should be said, and there are ways of saving them. Thus: orders in the army, prayer in church, denotation in the schools,
narration in families, questions in philosophy, performativity in businesses. Bureaucratization is the outer limit of this tendency. (Lyotard, 1984, p. 14)

The hermeneutic nature of metatheory also lends itself to the postmodern perspective. That is because theories, the subject of investigation, are inherently textual. Here again, it is important to qualify and quantify the range and number of theories that are involved in an analysis. It would not be good science to say (for example), “I developed a metatheory based on some theories.” The sources of those theories should be clearly articulated. A good practice for our nascent field of study might be to include our data – either in quotations within the text or in an appendix. That way, it is easier for other members of the metatheory community to evaluate the process and the results.

When one is exploring existing theory, the postmodern perspective offers an important, and interrelated set of relationships to look out for. Within one theory, or between two theories, one might seek to identify instances of paradox. This offers opportunities for finding new insights when the paradox is appreciated (perhaps experienced and embodied) and resolved. Galileo’s experience provides one example of this approach. In ancient times, the prevailing theory of downward motion was that small objects fell slowly while large objects fell quickly. Galileo wondered what would happen if a small object were connected to a large object. And, through that thought experiment, recognized a paradox of the prevailing theory. That recognition impelled him to drop objects from tall buildings and so develop better theories of gravity. We might, enumerate the number of paradoxes found within a between theories as a simple path to evaluation.

Similarly, in studies of theory, we have the opportunity to investigate the complexity of theories and bodies of theory. Indeed, the complexity of a theory may be an indicator of that theory’s maturity – suggesting a useful way to measure the potential usefulness of that theory (Ross & Glock-Grueneich, 2008). This approach may be easily employed by enumerating the concepts and/or connections within a theory. Theories may then be easily compared on at least one dimension. An opportunity exists here for a metatheorist to enumerate all the forms of enumeration within theory.

Because theory may be generally understood as a tool for reducing uncertainty (by providing an explanation of events), the idea of investigating the uncertainty within a theory bears a certain intriguing recursion. Often, we are able (by experiment or practical application) to test how well a theory works. The extent to which one’s use of the theory enables one to predict future events may be regarded as a test of that theory’s effectiveness. And, as a result, it is possible to compare two theories. However, postmodernism (along with complexity theory) holds that nothing is completely predictable. Therefore, if one finds a theory works ‘perfectly’ one may also be sure that one has fooled one’s self.

In such situations, it is important to seek and appreciate the ambiguity of a situation. To purposefully seek out those events that are not predicted by the theory – those experimental anomalies that we know must exist, even though they may not be evident at the moment. This leads to a most important, difficult, and subtle postmodern technique – looking for things that are not there. In the analysis of theory, the discovery of a “missing link” can be an exciting find. As
an example, from my personal experience, I am usually unimpressed by computer modeling experiments where the experiment merely confirms the researcher’s expectations. Instead, I appreciate results that the researcher finds surprising.

*Change* is also a useful “thing” to look for in the study of theory. One might note, for example, that certain theories of physics have remained unchanged for hundreds of years… and wonder why. One might also investigate the great rapidity with which theories change and evolve as they are adapted by various authors over time, or as they change between the contexts of differing publications. One way to measure this is to determine the “dynamic robustness” of the theories (Wallis, 2008a).

One point of congruence between modernist and postmodernist approaches is the need for critical analysis. This has been addressed above in some detail. In contrast, reflexive approaches are more postmodern in nature – involving forms of social construction. To make these approaches more valid, it is useful for the metatheoretical researcher to describe the process by which the original theory was created, and/or the process by which the new metatheory or metatheoretical perspective was developed. A more rigorous quantification of the reflexive approach may be difficult because of the inherent complexity of the process. Here, again, is an opportunity for a deeper more comprehensive exploration of reflexive approaches to metatheory.

Far from understanding such indeterminacies as an impediment, the postmodern perspective sees such looseness as an opening for interpretation by the researcher. To provide some sense of validation, some introspection is useful. Here, the researcher should provide readers with some indication of that introspective process. This may include surfacing one’s inspirations, concerns, and excitements. The process of introspection may lead to spiritual insight. This is, as history has shown, rather difficult to validate from an outside perspective. And, from the inside view (one’s own sense of spirituality) may not make a great difference to the larger community. If the researcher avoids such self-revelation, the analysis might be seen as primarily intuitive or artistic.

In the postmodern world, the prevailing view is that we should appreciate the artistic and the intuitive in all sciences – including theory and metatheory. We are also encouraged to recognize that each work of art has more validity in some contexts, than in others. So, for validating a theory or metatheory as an art form, it is important to consider the artistic tradition from which it emerged and the context in which it is being used. I find an example in my own experience as a life and business coach. To me, the process side of coaching follows a series of questions such as: What worked well? What might you do differently next time? The artistic aspect, to me, comes in my ability to engage the client in a way that makes him or her feel that this is all part of a very natural conversation and leads to profound revelations of self and life. If other members of that community share my view of the art of coaching, they can evaluate the extent to which my coaching was artistic, or merely mechanically following a set of rote questions. For evaluative purposes, it seems that the analyst should describe the artistic standards to which the theory conforms (or creates).

The modern view of science is further enhanced by the postmodern ideas of humanistic inquiry, which calls for an increased awareness of the human condition. These include a range of
value-based inquiry including naturalist, feminist, and neo-Marxist approaches that seek to educate, emancipate, and improve the human condition. These approaches may be evaluated from a number of directions – most or all of which are useful for “decolonizing” or de-emphasizing privileged texts in favor of more localized insights (Smith, 1999).

One might ask of one’s self, “What is my intention in this investigation?” Or, we might ask, “Who benefits from this research?” Or, from the perspective of the possible participants, “To what extent does this research address our concerns?” These are, of course, a few of the many possible questions. Recursing briefly, it seems important to ask those who might be impacted about their opinions! Calás and Smircich (2005), for example, question the faulty logic of modern knowledge and suggest a range of new logics to support research that will foster change and emancipation. When applied in practice, one effective approach was to avoid the idea of expert knowledge, and to engage co-researchers in our collective experiments of all kinds. Generally, we may consider theories more valid to the extent that they are more able to raise awareness, educate, and emancipate. Thus, again, two theories may be compared and the more preferable one advanced.

One problem with soft sciences is abduction without critical examination (Hammersley, 2003). A reader may be “taken” with an idea; and, as a result, may feel that a theory appears “too good to be false.” As a result, researchers might believe their theories or values are of the highest importance because, perhaps, those values have not been examined or deconstructed. Susan Haack (2001) seeks to differentiate truth and meaning by investigating four possible relationships between the two. She accepts the idea that there is an overlap between the two – that sometimes truth and ethics are one and the same, while other times that does not appear to be the case. Here, however, she relies on that elusive idea of truth. In a brilliant work (that includes a thoughtful conversation on Haack’s paper), Martyn Hammersley notes, “I am not convinced that the distinction between what is morally wrong and what is epistemologically wrong can be sustained” (Hammersley, 2003). Rather than recounting millennia of thought, suffice to say that “truth” is an illusion that is sought by modernists and postmodernists alike. However, as “truth” seems so elusive, it seems an unlikely measure for validity and progress of metatheory.

Instead of a narrow, modernist science, Hammersley (2003) argues for link between epistemology, and morals, and calls for validation by a research community. This, in turn, seems to suggest that each and every paper should receive a thorough review by a close circle of readers. How do we accomplish such a thing? With all that is being written, who has time to do all that reading? Do we raise funds to pay for a large cadre of readers? It is an interesting possibility. Without funding, we might work to encourage readers to become more involved in the process – providing feedback to the authors and discussing the material more among themselves.

Then too, if knowledge is only valid if collaborative, should we require all that papers be co-authored? Or, is the act of learning, writing, review, reading, and conversation a sufficient level of collaboration? One might be tempted to say yes – it would certainly be easier to continue as we have – and to follow the traditions of modern academia. However, I feel that we are looking for something more. Instead of drawing a line and saying, “that side represents an unacceptable
level of collaboration and this side is acceptable,” we can pass beyond that dialectic and recognize that each written work may be represented on a scale of collaboration. And, reviewers, editors, and readers may rate that level of collaboration as a partial indicator for the collaborative-validity of the text.

For example, a book written by a single author would have a relatively low level of collaborative-validity compared with a paper written by two authors who received feedback from two reviewers. A book could claim a higher degree of validity where, for example, a team of authors determined among themselves the focus of the book, the focus of their individual chapters, and how those chapters would be linked, and where those authors spent a month sitting around a table co-authoring and co-editing one another’s work.

Many concerns of validity are absorbed in another postmodern approach, which is more closely related to practice than to theory. Specifically, praxis-oriented methods that develop and show the usefulness of specific practices and points of view, within a specific context have shown themselves to be fairly effective. For example, the Action-Research approach. These methods, it seems may best be evaluated from within the group that develops and applies them. One such approach is the Future Search process (Weisbord & Janoff, 2000) which includes the creation of a mind map – a shared sense of the situation. This mind map may be understood as a form of theory, because it may be used to improve understanding and guide action. This approach suggests we may evaluate theory creation, at least in part, by the level of collaboration involved in the construction process. We might say that having more people involved indicates a quantitative measure of collaboration, while their satisfaction with the mind map indicates a qualitative measure of success.

These approaches to evaluation suggest that the only one who can truly evaluate the success of one’s own method is the person who employs it. This phenomenological approach has its own limits. For example, one person might believe that plants grow better with fertilizer, while another believes that music is more conducive to plant growth. If, as outside observers, a community sees these two people growing food in their gardens, and one is more successful than the other, we might take that success as an indicator of a more effective underlying theory. We might (and probably should) also inquire about the details of those methods. For example, are they sustainable? Do they lead to negative environmental impacts? And, importantly, is there another, as yet undiscovered explanation for the differences observed?

In the academic review process, one author might develop and apply a method which he or she sees as very effective. Yet, the larger community might find very different results. One test of many is to determine if a theory is practical / workable. This might include purposeful experiments or simply some application in daily life. A strict postmodern stance might give equal validity to all theories that are applied because each one seems workable to the person who is employing it. And, the simple fact that a person is using the theory and finding it workable is certainly one level of validation. Also, the more people who find a theory workable might lend another level of validity.

This leads to at least two other extensions. First, that within one’s own mind, an individual should seek to evaluate multiple theories to find if one is more workable than another. This
might be seen as similar to an individual seeking a religion or spiritual practice that works best for him or her. Second, is the idea that the practicality or workability of a theory might be evaluated through the lenses of other postmodern approaches. For example, We might look at two theories and determine that one is more workable than the other based on the amount of change or the amount of emancipation is provides.

Over the course of time and communication, the above methods of investigation, communication and participation may be broadly understood as a form of social construction. That perspective suggests rich and complex interactions that include theory, practice, intuition, art and inspiration. This opens yet another interesting recursion because, ”the theory itself creates—it socially constructs—the terrain. A theory entails imposing interpretations (definitions, categories, and understandings) on behavior. Once we have a theory in mind, we pose questions that take those definitions, categories, and understandings for granted” (Landreine & Klonoff, 2001, p. 103).

This perspective points to a strength and limitation of the postmodern perspective. First, we are looking at mirrors through mirrors – so we can never be certain about what we see. This may cause difficulty for those who seek some absolutist foundation upon which they can rest. This difficulty may even impel some to a useless level of skepticism where they believe that nothing is real (and, in consequence, nothing has meaning). It is unfortunate that one result of this stance is that some abandon the search for new and more wonderful insights. Instead, this constructionist perspective also indicates that we recognize our limitations. And, from there, we can go on to transcend them.

Implicit in many of these approaches is the idea that the development and/or assessment of theory and metatheory are part of a process. In the field of metatheory, the development of a specific theory or metatheory is (from one perspective) understood to occur through the iterative process of induction and deduction (e.g., Hitt & Smith, 2005, p. 2). And, there are many other process-based perspectives to suggest paths for creating and evaluating theory. These process-based approaches may also be applied to a science of metatheory – suggesting an iterative process of creation and testing. It seems important to the science of metatheory that we develop new tests and test those tests. Further, there is a great opportunity to identify the processes by which each of these methods of creation and validation lead to one another.

An important tool for building and evaluating theory and metatheory is creativity. Because, if we are stuck within the map of our theory, no matter what the apparent efficacy of that theory, no matter what level of validation it exceeds, we know that we will always benefit from new and more creative approaches. Each new approach adds to the existing range of approaches; and, suggests ways to integrate and extend them. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) the range of options reflected upon in this section,

It is far from evident that replacing conventional social science methodology with postmodern methods of interpretation and deconstruction constitutes any improvement in the social sciences. If adopted without modification, post-modern methodology leaves social science with no basis for knowledge claims and no rationale for choosing between conflicting interpretations. (Rosenau, 1992, p. 124)
Kitcher (1993) makes the important point that postmodern views, such as those presented in this section, should not be seen as existing in opposition to the views of modernity with the goal of eliminating the modernist view. Rather that these humanistic, artistic, and other diverse approaches actually serve to expand and change the modernist approaches. Changing the overall understanding of science to make it more rich, full, and inclusive. In the next section, I will investigate how we might understand a combination of modern and postmodern approaches. Not as a longer list of potential methodologies, but instead as existing in a carefully integrated relationship – an integral approach to science.

Integral Approaches to Metatheory

In moving metatheory toward a more scientific practice that includes modern and postmodern approaches, many forms of scholarship are possible. First, one might use any of the methods suggested here for creating and evaluating theory and metatheory. Another, more comprehensive approach, would be to use multiple methods. A more nuanced and sophisticated scholarship would involve a combination of methods that are mutually supporting – that is to say, integrated. This perspective is, in part, an answer to Fred Kofman’s (2010) call to avoid ontological arrogance with our underlying ideology, and so encouraged us to accept alternative views. This approach is postmodern; and, the call also holds true for our ideology about postmodernism. We should be on the lookout for what is missing and how postmodernism might be improved. This is especially important as there is a lack of agreement on key issues – even within the postmodern community (Rosenau, 1992).

Between modern and postmodern there are many disconnects. For example, Critchley (2001) tells how the Vienna Circle sought a science free of emotion, religion, and metaphysics. While, in contrast, an integral approach is about exploring how they might be rejoined as in The Marriage of Sense and Soul (Wilber, 1999). There, Wilber explores in some depth the importance of integrating science and religion. This is an appealing perspective because the traditional role of science is to find truth, while the traditional role of religion is to find meaning. This kind of integrative approach suggests that we are creating something that is more than the sum of the parts.

There are also overlaps between modern and postmodern approaches. Both seek knowledge and understanding, both call for critical analysis, and both appreciate the benefits applying theory (“testing” for modernists and “usefulness” or “workable” in postmodern terminology). What is missing between the two versions of science is a focus on how they might work together. This is an integral approach, which recognizes the benefits of both and seeks to bring them together to create a more complete and effective understanding. Kitcher (1993) suggests the need for overlapping and interlinked methods for measurement and Murray states:

Integral approaches give equal importance to the subjective and objective aspects of world. Seen through this lens science and technology are not divorced from questions of meaning, identify, aesthetics, and ethics. . . . It does so not mere by critiquing other theories but my proposing an integrative framework that coordinates these theories and also by incorporating subjective and Intersubjective matters of self, culture, and spirit. (Murray, 2006, p. 215)
Let us move now to an exploration of approaches for a scientific advancement of metatheory that interlinks the best of modern and postmodern worlds. This approach is called triangulation which works under the assumption that it is desirable, to use a mix of approaches. This process is supported by a growing number of scholars (e.g., Edwards & Volkmann, 2008; Lewis & Grimes, 1999; Roe, 1998). An excellent application of this approach may be found in Lewis who notes in an introductory explanation of her study:

The strategy—Metatriangulation (Lewis & Grimes, 1999) —entailed using paradigm lenses to construct alternative accounts of AMT implementation. The second section summarizes these accounts, which highlight varied vicious cycles during the change process. Third, I use paradox literature to build a metaframework, depicting change as a multidimensional cycle, swirling around cognitive, action and institutional paradoxes. Paradigm lenses detail each paradox, revealing complex, systemic tensions between stability and change. The conclusion addresses implications for managing change paradoxes and future research. (Lewis, 2009, p. 109)

A reading of Lyotard (1984) suggests triangulation using a combination of categorization, critical evaluation, and application. Koller (2006) suggests using a purposeful blend of approaches including contemplation (spirit), reason (mind), and body (senses). These kinds of triangulation suggest more than a range of coverage within a single sphere of thought, they also suggest an interrelationship between worlds. To expound on one such relationship, I draw on my recent work from the *Integral Review* (Wallis, 2008b).

Briefly, one may usefully and effectively view theory validation from three general points of view – or three worlds. Those three worlds are summed up as Theory, Facts/Data, and Meaning/Emotions. Within each world there are (at least) three levels of validation – with each level having more validity than the one below it. From an “outside” view, each theory may be seen to have greater or lesser validity within any one of the three worlds (see Table 3).

| Table 3. Dimensions of Validity (Wallis, 2008b) |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **World One**   | **World Two**   | **World Three** |
| (Facts or data) | (Meaning,      | (Theory)        |
|                  | emotions)       |                  |
| **Level 1**     | **Level 2**     | **Level 3**     |
| Uses objective data. | Uses objective data from multiple sources. | Future facts are predicted. |
| Makes sense to author. | Makes sense to editor, reviewers, and readers. | Consensus of expert opinion (this theory is preferred over other theoretical options). |
| Includes logical arguments. | Theory is constructed of specific propositions. | Theory is constructed of co-causal propositions. |

Another point is that there are two general ways to evaluate a theory or metatheory. One is to evaluate it from “within” one of the worlds; the other is to evaluate it from two or more perspectives “between” worlds. From an “outside” view, we can look at validation between the worlds. “Significantly, this distribution of worlds creates the opportunity to understand each of the three worlds in integral, co-causal relationship to one another” (Wallis, 2008b, p. 78). For
example, a theory that is essentially a metaphor might have little or no validity in the world of theory. It might, if it were a compelling metaphor, have greater emotional/spiritual validity. If that metaphor were applied successfully to an organizational change effort, it might be seen to have greater perception/data based validity.

On another part of the spectrum, a theory from physics might have a high level of validity on the world of theory – and on the world of facts/data may prove very effective. On the other hand, on the world of meaning, the theory may be entirely uninspiring. One might see a well-written or inspirational, book as having great validity in the world of feeling and spirit, yet have little validity as a theory or in practical application. In contrast, a profundity of raw data might have great validity within its own world, but without a theory to make sense of it, it is merely noise – so has no validity within the world of feeling/spirit.

In the same way that great art calls for great reflection, a high level of validity in any one world seems to call for the generation of new understandings in each of the other worlds. And, we might imagine that a high level of validity in two worlds might create a very strong pull for increased validation in the third world. For example, having a great amount of data seems to call for a theory to make sense of it. Then too, a great deal of data also has a sensory component, so it calls for reflection and appreciation.

Popper’s (2002) famous (and famously modernist) work suggests the best way to validate a theory is in the way it allows for predictions in perceptual data. A theory of physics, which fails to predict change, should be rejected. However, in the social sciences, the process is a highly complex issue of recursion. Changes in theory might cause changes in productivity but they may also alter an individual’s values (e.g., one’s personal feeling about what is important). So, an individual may no longer place the same value on the items being produced. Indeed, “individuals working on an assembly line might (based on an emerging mindset) change their minds and decide that the human producer is more important than the objects on the conveyor belt” (Wallis, 2008b, pp. 80-81). There is a great opportunity for scholars to investigate the potential interrelationship of the many approaches presented in this article and this special issue, as a whole.

**Advancing the Field**

In *The Trouble With Physics: The Rise of String Theory, the Fall of Science and What Comes Next*, Lee Smolin (2006) reflects on his experiences as a physicist who was dedicated to the development of string theory – the creation of a single one, best, totalizing theory of physics. Smolin concluded that such a development is impractical and perhaps impossible. His experience turned him away from a staunch modernist perspective (and, may provide some insights for our exploration here). Smolin found that progress in science seems to take two forms – innovation and consensus. The two seem closely interrelated – we need both to advance.

This article has presented some basic ideas to clarify and encourage the continued emergence of metatheory as a science. To the extent that metatheoretical methodologies and processes seem to fit a fairly specific definition of science, it seems that we have the basic pieces in place to conduct a legitimate science of metatheory; although, more development and clarification of
methodologies appears to be required. Further, if we are to be a science, we must also apply these rigorous methodologies – something the broader field of the social sciences has mainly avoided. There is reason to hope that we are moving toward a change – an improvement – including a more purposeful application of metatheoretical principles.

One may anticipate that metatheory, as a science, will not be immediately adapted by all social scientists. First, some may too deeply invested in the present paradigm. They might, for example, be interested in creating theory for publication instead of application. Second, by their seemingly successful experience, these academics may believe that they “know” how to create good theory – and so do not need to change their approaches. We might liken their theory-creation ability to the ability of a cook to bake a cake. They need no recipe because they have a great deal of experience in this department. Their students, however, have not yet learned the knack. And, the students may benefit most from learning how to follow a recipe. In short, we might achieve some success in advancing the practice of theorizing by developing and implementing a cross-disciplinary program to teach metatheory to graduate students. After all, they have not “grown up” with the fragmented fields of social theory, so may need additional tools to cope with the plethora of theories.

In the above sections, I have noted many opportunities and directions for future studies to advance scientific metatheory. Meehl (2002, p. 343) states, “I view this disparity between a (purported) logical truism and scientific practice to be one of the most important and badly neglected metatheoretical puzzles.” A great opportunity exists for metatheorists to conduct cliometric analyses and so advance our understanding of theory, metatheory, and more. Another important opportunity exists for advancing the metatheory conversation through the application of metatheory. One place that this can occur with some ease is in the classroom. For example, professors could assign students to conduct purposefully metatheoretical analyses. Combined in a public database, the results might provide a useful source for metatheoretical analyses.

Reviewers of academic journals could aid in advancing the field by applying clear metatheoretical metrics when evaluating submissions. This way, each pass through the review process would result in better theory (rather than the creation of theory that is simply different). Similarly, those who review research proposals could also apply metrics to determine which theories are more likely to be effective than others.

The study of theory is appropriately referred to as metatheory (or metatheorizing) where, “The problem lies in how we differentiate between these different kinds of big pictures and the various ways of creating them. We have almost no way of formally distinguishing between metatheory as a scientific process of building metalevel conceptual frameworks or metatheory as grand storytelling or metatheory as philosophical musing. For the sake of all different forms of creating grand narratives this situation needs to change” (Edwards, personal communication, October 18, 2009). In this article, I hope that I have created a framework that we may use to address these issues.

Our nascent science is not at a point where we can apply labels with great confidence (although many have tried). It may be that we need to do some experimenting – we need to try out various methods of metatheorizing in quasi-controlled experimental settings and decide from
the results what is our best tool for a particular project. We might find, in time, that certain metatheoretical approaches are useful for creating theory, while others are more useful for evaluating theory. Specifically, we need to have and to use a rigorous, scientific, and repeatable approach to metatheory if this field is to have any legitimacy; and, of greater importance, if we are to develop effective theories for addressing the many personal and societal issues of our age.

There are, of course, limits to the emerging science that I have sketched in this paper. I do not intend this to be the “last word” so much as a preliminary investigation of relevant components. My hope is not to be seen as some “absolute expert” so much as a “conversation-starter.” As noted above, there are many opportunities presented in this paper for additional exploration. These include more nuanced investigations into each of the above-mentioned building blocks of modernist science, as well as investigations into how those blocks might be more carefully integrated with one another. Additionally, there are alternative definitions of science that might be explored and contrasted with the one presented above.

**Reflections**

In the development of this paper, I received a strong call from one reviewer to conform to the dictates of postmodernism, rather than modernism. Due to many personal stresses, I initially resisted that call. Taking time to breathe, and be more open, I worked to answer the call towards greater inclusiveness; I also worked to avoid the totalizing call of postmodernity and modernity, both. As a result, I was impelled on to a more integral approach that combines modernity and postmodernity.

It occurred to me that there is a key distinction between modernity and postmodernity. First, modern science sees progress as an accumulation of knowledge. Second, postmodernity seems to loosen the “direction” of what constitutes valid knowledge by accepting multiple forms of knowledge. Yet, postmodernity seems also to retain the idea that accumulation is important. This should come as no surprise, as accumulation serve to immediately validate any and every insight. It cannot be discarded without reducing the storehouse of knowledge – be it a modern or postmodern storehouse. What remains is the question of what to do with that storehouse of knowledge.

Integral approaches suggest that identifying interrelationships between existing forms of knowledge may create new knowledge. This takes us beyond simple accumulation and moves toward more effective approaches. This, in turn, implies the need for methods for creating theory and metatheory – where they are understood to be integrated knowledge, rather than simple accumulations. When one identifies relationships between previously unconnected bits of knowledge one tends to experience a sudden, perhaps spiritual, sense of wonderment or awakening. And, one is on the path to the creation of theory and metatheory.

**Conclusion**

It may be true, from a modern perspective, that we will benefit from validating theory and metatheory. It may be true, from a postmodern view, that there is no single approach to validating theory and metatheory. From an integral perspective, it seems reasonable that these
forms of validation must be interrelated. In creating a science of metatheory, it seems we must recreate what it means to have a science.

At the risk of creating another layer of “meta-ness” it seems that the most useful approach will be to validate each theory and metatheory by using at least three forms of evaluation. And, importantly, those forms should be as different as possible. For example, it might be useful to evaluate a theory using a combination of spiritual, creative, and aesthetic measures. However, a more effective (and more challenging) approach would integrate more diverse points of view to provide very different measures (e.g., artistic, structural, and practical). In this, it may be seen that the greater diversity will lead to greater strength and the many will lead to the one – just as the success of one theory leads to greater diversity in application.

In this article, I have identified and investigated a variety of components needed for recognizing metatheory as a rigorous, and legitimate science from modern, postmodern, and integral perspectives. Those methods should be reflected, as rigorously as possible, in the multiple building blocks of science that point the way to advancement. Our ability to advance metatheory is founded on our ability to meet multiple requirements in an integrated way – not simply one or two. Implicit in this article is that idea that metatheoreticians must be rigorous in their pursuit and application of these scientific ideals. We don’t want metatheory to be flapping around in circles.

As metatheoreticians strive to meet these goals, we will strengthen the withered wing of theory and so enable the bird of science to fly. Extending that metaphor slightly, we may recognize the need for a body – that connects those wings and provides a sense of purpose for that flight. For this body, we need to develop research communities whose members agree to conduct careful, rigorous, repeats of experiments and studies in metatheory (including building, testing, identifying the range of metatheories).

This new community will be reflected in our journals. This, in turn, implies that editors who are interested in supporting the emergence of a new science should stand ready to publish works that do not meet the more traditional “literary” standard of innovation, but instead rise to meet the equally high (and possibly more important) standard of scientific repetition. An interesting and useful collaborative effort might begin with a single metatheory, and ask seven authors to address that metatheory – each from the perspective of a single building block of science.

This article serves as a starting point for conversations on metatheory as a rigorous science, and how that science (as a process) might be improved for the development of better metatheory. Improvements in this field will improve our ability to advance our effectiveness as scholars working within and between other branches of the social sciences. In turn, those advances will have a profound effect on our ability to work for the betterment of our world.
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Appendix: Definitions of Metatheory


A metatheory is like a good travel guide - it tells you where to go and where not to go, what is worthwhile and what is not, the best way to get to a destination, and where it is best to rest a while. Metatheoretical conviction provides structure and direction, it informs the sorts of questions one asks and does not ask, and it furnishes a passion that makes the quest exciting and buffers one from disappointments along the way. (p. 98)

A metatheory should provide an alternative framework for asking particular questions, not a complete explanation for all phenomena. The appropriate mission is not to convince others that the metatheory is right and that others are wrong, but to show how a particular metatheory can be useful to account for a specific class and range of phenomena. (p. 100)

A strong metatheory helps to put the body parts together in a meaningful structure and then to theorize the links between those parts. In addition, identifying the metatheory behind a particular theory helps reveal potentially interesting and useful links to other theories. (p. 100)

[Metatheory] encourages the integration of concepts across contexts. (p. 100)

Jack Anchin (2008b)

Unifying knowledge in any field of endeavor requires metatheory comprising a conceptual scaffolding that is sufficiently broad to encompass all of the specific knowledge domains distinctly pertinent to the field under consideration, that can serve as a coherent framework for systematically interrelating the essential knowledge elements within and among those domains, and that extends conceptual tendrils into other fields of study. (p. 235)

Jack Anchin (2008a)

Among vital purposes served by metatheory is its function as scaffolding for integrating more specific theories that conceptually and empirically map different aspects of the phenomena under study. (p. 804)

Terese Bondas & Elisabeth O. C. Hall (2007)

Metatheory analysis is an examination of theories to determine the link between the theoretical perspective that frames each primary study and the methods, findings, and conclusions of the research. (p. 115)

Richard Clarke (2010)

Metatheory is the 'theory of theory,' to be precise, the study of those underlying assumptions which shape particular theoretical perspectives.
Robert T. Craig (2009)

Metatheory is theory about theory.

Brenda Dervin (1999)

One major point here is that metatheory can be used in such a way that it releases research in always partial but still significant ways from implicit assumptions and draws these assumptions out into the light of day where they can be examined, interrogated and tested. (P. 748)

Metatheory must be an inherently deconstructive enterprise.

David Faust (2005)

As data form the subject matter for theories, theories and other scientific products form a key subject matter for metatheory or meta-science, organized and directed by methods that, in large part, remain to be developed.

Deborah L. Finfgeld (2003)

[Metatheory is the] Analysis and interpretation of theoretical, philosophical, and cognitive perspectives; sources and assumptions; and contexts across multiple qualitative studies. (p. 895)

Adam Maria Gadomski (2001)

A meta-theory M may represent the specific point of view on a certain class or set of theories T and this viewpoint generates meta-properties of T. Meta-properties are the consequence of the relation between M and T, but they are not the properties of any T application domain. More formally speaking, a theory T of the domain D is a meta-theory if D is a theory or a set of theories. For example, in computer science, the Theory of Data Bases Organization is a meta-theory for every specific (domain-dependent) theory of the data organization/structuring and management.

Willis Overton (2007)

A metatheory is a coherent set of interlocking principles that both describes and prescribes what is meaningful and meaning-less, acceptable and unacceptable, central and peripheral, as theory – the means of conceptual exploration – and as method – the means of observational exploration . . . a metatheory entails standards of judgment and evaluation. Scientific metatheory transcend . . . theories and methods in the sense that they define the context in which theoretical and methodological concepts are constructed. Theories and methods refer directly to the empirical world, while metatheories refer to methods themselves. There are many important features of metatheories, including the fact that they are ubiquitous – all theories and methods are formulated and operate within some metatheory – and the fact that they often reside quietly and unrecognized in the background of our day-to-day empirical science." (p. 154)
A metatheory is a coherent set of interlocking principles that both describes and prescribes what is meaningful and meaningless, acceptable and unacceptable, central and peripheral, as theory – the means of conceptual exploration – and as method – the means of observational exploration – in a scientific discipline. In other words, a metatheory entails standards of judgment and evaluation. Scientific metatheories transcend (i.e. ‘meta’) theories and methods in the sense that they define the context in which theoretical and methodological concepts are constructed. Theories and methods refer directly to the empirical world, while metatheories refer to the theories and methods themselves. (p. 155)

Barbara Paterson, Sally Thorne, Connie Canam and Carol Jillings (2001)

Meta-theory is a critical exploration of the theoretical frameworks or lenses that have provided direction to research and to researchers, as well as the theory that has arisen from research in a particular field of study.

Meta-theory involves the analysis of primary studies for the implications of their theoretical orientations. (p. 92)

George Ritzer (1988)

Metatheory is concerned . . . with the study of theories, theorists, communities of theorists, as well as with the larger intellectual and social context of theories and theorists. (p. 188)

A metatheory is a broad perspective that overarches two, or more, theories (Ritzer, 2009).

Leslie Sklair (1988)

A metatheory is a set of assumptions about the constituent parts of the world and about the possibility of knowledge of them. The distinguishing characteristic of a metatheory is that it refuses to accept any burden of empirical proof by displacing the burden of empirical proof onto the theories that are logically deducible from it. An effective metatheory is one which manages to create a high degree of coherence between epistemology and the objects of knowledge (roughly, abstractions). . . . The hallmark of a metatheory in science is that it invites empirical proof (or, in some versions, refutation) by producing theories and hypotheses that can be tested.

Tendzin Takla and Whitney Pape (1985)

By metatheory we refer to the cluster of fundamental, but often implicit, presuppositions that underlie or embed a theory.


Metatheory [is] the study of the frames of reference used in a set of primary studies. (p. 1357)
Jonathan Turner (1990)

... it is reasonable to conclude that metatheory should come after we have produced some theory. Metatheory is not about what assumptions and presuppositions sociology should have, but about the structure and implications of existent theories. (p. 38)

... let me offer some proscriptions and prescriptions about how best to perform metatheorizing.

First, here are some proscriptions or metatheoretical taboos (p. 39):
1. Avoid talking about theorists; instead, talk about theories.
2. Avoid discussions of intellectual context, place, and time; instead, discuss social processes denoted by concepts, models, and propositions.
3. Avoid debates over philosophical issues; instead, commit one's energies to the simple assumptions that there is a world out there and that it can be understood with concepts, models, and propositions.
4. Avoid commitments to ideologies; instead, develop concepts, models, and propositions that denote operative processes in the universe (there will always be someone to expose ideological biases without your help).
5. Ignore the particulars of history; instead, examine those more general and generic processes that cut across time and place (leave something for historians to do; or, if history is used, let it involve an empirical test or assessment of a theory or model).

Here is my list of prescriptions (pp. 40-41):
1. Evaluate the clarity and adequacy of concepts, propositions, and models.
2. Suggest points of similarity, convergence, or divergence with other theories.
3. Pull together existing empirical (including historical) studies to access the plausibility of a theory.
4. Extract what is viewed as useful and plausible in a theory from what is considered less so.
5. Synthesize a theory, or portions thereof, with other theories.
6. Rewrite a theory in light of empirical or conceptual considerations.
7. Formalize a theory by stating it more precisely.
8. Restate a theory in better language.
9. Make deductions from a theory so as to facilitate empirical assessment.

Walter Wallace (1992)

Synthetic metatheory sorts whole theories into two or more overarching categories. Analytic metatheory parses each theory into two or more components and then sorts these components into categories representing various types of assumptions, observable variables and causal relations among such variables. (p. 53)


Metatheory treats the multiplicity of theorizations as an opportunity for multiple operations of analysis and synthesis (p.140).
[Metatheory] has a concrete empirical referent, sociological theory, and studies its ‘underlying structures’... As a... theory of theory, metatheory is simply that part of a general sociology of knowledge which happens to take sociology and sociological knowledge as its empirical referents. From the critic’s perspective, there can be nothing objectionable about this kind of metatheory, for it opens up a substantive and empirical research agenda” (pp. 287-288).

**Wikipedia (2009)**

A metatheory or meta-theory is a theory whose subject matter is some other theory. In other words it is a theory about a theory. Statements made in the metatheory about the theory are called metatheorems.

**Shanyang Zhao (2010)**

Metatheory is a subtype of metastudy that focuses on the examination of theory and theorizing.
Extended Abstract in English

Given the increasingly complex nature of conflicts, a corresponding increase of new methods can be observed in Peace and Conflict Studies. At this juncture, metatheories aimed at integrating this labyrinth of diverse methods is becoming necessary. This paper will draft a conceptual proposal, discussing two well-known holistic approaches of mediative conflict management in an integrative context:

- The Conflict Management Approach by Prof. Dr. Friedrich Glasl (2004).
- The Conflict Transformation Approach (The Transcend Method) by Prof. Dr. Johan Galtung (2000).

The theoretical assumptions of this paper are based on the integral approach by Ken Wilber (2001) – a highly discussed “Theory of Everything“ that has thus far remained widely ignored in...
Peace and Conflict Studies, yet. Therefore, it is also of interest to scrutinise the integral approach with regard to its contribution for an integrated Peace and Conflict Studies. The analysis was conducted as follows:

1. Introduction of two holistic Peace and Conflict Studies approaches:

   a. The *Conflict Management Approach* by Glasl implies a number of categories and entry points (Ansatzmomente) resulting in a complex intervention spectrum. In this regard, the consideration of escalation levels is highly important, integrating perception-oriented (low escalation), emotion-oriented (medium escalation) and behaviour-oriented (high escalation) measures. The spectrum may be combined with other categories such as conflict type (hot or cold) or criteria of conflict analysis (issues, conflict trends etc.).

   b. The *Conflict Transformation Approach* by Galtung is characterised by a three-fold schematic, enabling a complex understanding of violence (direct, cultural, structural), conflict (behaviour, assumptions, contradictions) and peace (non-violence, empathy, creativity). Moreover, Galtung’s model implies three conflict phases (before, during, after violence) as well as five styles of conflict management.

   c. The integral approach can be understood as a “Theory of Everything“ presupposing that no perspective can be 100% wrong (but “partially true”). Its methodology is based on “map making” by categorizing established paradigms, methods and theories in a holistic metacontext. By means of five categories – quadrants, levels, lines, types, states (altogether AQAL: All Quadrants All Lines) – the integral approach claims to consider as many aspects of reality as possible in a holistic concept.

2. Outline of an integration model:

   a. **Possibility of an epistemological integration of the introduced methods:**

      The five AQAL-dimensions enable the epistemological foci of the approaches by Galtung and Glasl to be revealed. A point in which both approaches may complement each other becomes apparent by combining a vertical spectrum of escalation levels (Glasl) and a horizontal axis of different fields of violence (Galtung). It might be of further research interest to analyse the potential extent of a correlation to evolution oriented level schemes (Wilber), e.g., referring to development psychology or evolution theory. Are there different development levels (Wilber) of direct, cultural and structural violence (Galtung)? Is there a correlation between levels of development (Wilber) and regression (Glasl)? This paper concludes for both cases a cautious “yes.” In doing so, the consideration of the other AQAL-dimensions (types, lines, states) provides further information.

   b. **Proposal for an integral heuristic:**

      The consideration of vertical (levels) and horizontal (quadrants, types, lines) AQAL-categories is also useful to integrate heuristics. However, the integral approach itself does not represent a method of heuristic and practical effect, though it is useful to adapt the AQAL-categories and to consider new tools that are highly relevant for the Peace and
Conflict Studies. The heuristic integral concept is based on the vertical conflict scheme by Galtung (three conflict phases) and Glasl (escalation model) and additionally considers horizontal analysis categories (e.g., types: conflict type; quadrants: fields of violence) on each level. A complex integral Peace and Conflict Studies heuristic is the result, under the consideration of an adapted AQAL-model.

3. Conclusion and critique:

The analysis shows that the primary use of the integral approach for Peace and Conflict Studies lies in its ability to integrate the epistemological benchmarks of different approaches. Thereby, the integral concept provides information about some points in which the epistememes and heuristics of Glasl and Galtung may complement each other which could enrich the construction of a metatheory in the Peace and Conflict Studies (especially with regard to the combination of Glasl’s escalation model and Galtung’s three-folded schematics). However, it should be noted that the examples of Glasl’s and Galtung’s meta-approaches provide other important integration and categorisation concepts which are not yet covered by the integral approach (at least in its present form). Thus, the AQAL itself may be inappropriate to integrate methods in the context of their orientation (e.g., process, client, solution oriented) or regarding the modus operandi (e.g., (a) conflict analysis, (b) intervention planning, (c) action). The AQAL is not only lacking meta-categories which are adapted to the particular heuristic requirements of Peace and Conflict Studies, also the contextualisation of its dimensions – e.g., the evolutionary scope of the level dimension – may not always be adequate and useful.

Generally, it can be concluded that metatheory building requires to consider different – in some respects contradicting – possibilities of formulating meta-categories. With regard to Peace and Conflict Studies, there remain a lot of research questions to be opened, since different meta-contexts may follow differing “main interests.” Preliminarily, it can be concluded that a really integrated Peace and Conflict Researcher should be familiar with epistemological and heuristic contexts, but also metatheoretical and theoretical contexts as well.

Abstract - Deutsch

Angesichts immer komplexerer Konflikte ist in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung eine zunehmende Methodenvielfalt zu beobachten sowie ein entsprechender Bedarf, diese metatheoretisch zu integrieren. Im Rahmen des vorliegenden Papers soll hierzu ein konzeptioneller Vorschlag skizziert werden, indem zwei holistische und bekannte Ansätze der mediativen Konfliktbearbeitung in einem integrativen Kontext diskutiert werden:

– Der Konfliktmanagement-Ansatz nach Prof. Dr. Friedrich Glasl (2004).
– Die Transcend-Methode nach Prof. Dr. Johan Galtung (2000).

Die Untersuchung verlief wie folgt:

1. Vorstellung der in der Untersuchung berücksichtigten Ansätze:


b. Die Konflikttransformation nach Galtung zeichnet sich unter anderem durch dreigeteilte Schematisierungen aus, die ein komplexes Verständnis von Gewalt (direkt, kulturell, strukturell), Konflikt (Verhalten, Annahmen, Widerspruch) und Frieden (Gewaltlosigkeit, Empathie, Kreativität) ermöglichen. Darüber hinaus, unterscheidet Galtung unter anderem auch drei Phasen des Konflikts (vor, während, nach der Gewalt).

c. Der IA versteht sich als eine Methode des metatheoretischen „Map makings“. Mittels fünf Kategorien – Quadranten, Ebenen, Linien, Typen, Zustände (zusammen AQAL) – folgt der IA dem Anspruch, so vielen Aspekten der Realität wie möglich in einem Gesamtkonzept Rechnung zu tragen.

2. Skizze eines Integrationsmodells:

a. Möglichkeit zur epistemologischen Integration der vorgestellten Konfliktbearbeitungsansätze:
   Mittels der fünf Dimensionen des AQAL lassen sich die epistemologischen Schwerpunkte der Ansätze von Glasl und Galtung darstellen. Ein gegenseitiger Ergänzungspunkt bietet sich vor allem bei der kombinierten Berücksichtigung eines vertikalen Spektrums von Eskalationsstufen (Glasl) und eines horizontalen Rasters von mehreren Gewaltbereichen (Galtung).

b. Vorschlag für ein heuristisches Gesamtkonzept:
   Der IA stellt keine heuristisch-praktische Methode dar, daher ist es in diesem Fall sinnvoll, die AQAL-Kategorien anzupassen und sogar neue Kategorien, die für die Friedens- und Konfliktforschung besonders relevant sind, zu berücksichtigen. Das heuristische Gesamtkonzept nimmt das vertikale Konfliktchema von Galtung (drei Phasen des Konflikts) und Glasl (Eskalationsmodell) zum Ausgangspunkt und berücksichtigt zusätzlich auf jeder Ebene horizontale Untersuchungskriterien (z.B. Quadranten: Gewaltart etc.)

3. Fazit und Kritik:

Die Untersuchungen dieser Arbeit verdeutlichen, dass der Mehrwert des IA für die Friedens- und Konfliktforschung vor allem darin liegt, die epistemologischen Bezugspunkte unterschiedlicher Ansätze zu integrieren. Am Beispiel der Ansätze von Glasl und Galtung zeigt sich aber auf, dass ein heuristisches Metamodell zusätzliche Metakategorien erfordert, die von
der Schematisierung des IA nicht erfasst werden. Es lässt sich daher schließen, dass sich die Metatheoriebildung für die Friedens- und Konfliktforschung, vielfältigen Herausforderungen und weiterführenden Forschungsfragen gegenübersieht, zumal sich mehrere Metakontexte unterscheiden lassen, mit differierenden Geltungsansprüchen und „Integrationslogiken“. Ein wirklich integrierter Friedens- und Konfliktforscher sollte sich im Idealfall sowohl im Bereich der epistemologischen und im heuristischen, im metatheoretischen und im theoretischen Kontext sicher bewegen können.

Schlüsselwörter: AQAL, Dialog, Ebene, epistemologisch, Eskalation, Frieden, Galtung, Glasl, heuristisch, integral, Konflikt, Konfliktmanagement, Konflikttransformation, Kontext, Linie, Metatheorie, Quadrant, Typ, Wilber, Zustand
Einleitung

Problembereich der Untersuchung

Angesichts immer komplexerer Konflikte ist in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung ein Zuwachs immer neuer Methoden zu beobachten. Mit der Vielfalt an Ansätzen und ihrer wachsenden Professionalisierung, die die letzten Jahre mit sich brachten, wächst in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung nicht nur die Unübersichtlichkeit, sondern es zeigen sich zunehmend auch methodische Defizite und Grenzen.


In der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung herrschte bislang vor allem ein interdisziplinärer Ansatz vor, der sich aber als begrenzt erweist, unterschiedliche Perspektiven in einen holistischen Gesamtzusammenhang zu integrieren. Zu den wenigen und zugleich bekanntesten metatheoretischen Ansätzen in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung dürften zum einen die Konflikttransformation nach Johan Galtung (TRANSCEND)3 und der Konfliktmanagementansatz nach Friedrich Glasl4 gehören.


Ein metatheoretischer Ansatz, der dazu beitragen könnte, die stetig zunehmende Vielfalt innovativer Methoden in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung zu integrieren, dürfte kaum an den

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Theoretische und normative Grundannahmen


Darüber hinaus folgt die vorliegende Arbeit der normativen Grundannahme, dass eine nachhaltige Konfliktbearbeitung erstrebenswert ist und nur durch Methoden erfolgen kann, die

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**Vorgehensweise der Untersuchung**

Unter diesen oben genannten Gesichtspunkten stellen sich folgende Kernfragen, die es im Rahmen der Untersuchung zu beantworten gilt:

- (Wie) lassen sich – am Beispiel der Methoden von Glasl und Galtung – unterschiedliche Methoden dialogischer Konfliktbearbeitung epistemologisch und heuristisch auf der Basis des IA kategorisieren und integrieren?
- Worin bestehen hierbei die Grenzen, Möglichkeiten und Erweiterungspotenziale des IA in seiner Anwendung auf die Friedens- und Konfliktforschung?

Diese Fragen im Hinterkopf behaltend, gliedert sich das Forschungsvorhaben wie folgt:

- In einem deskriptiven Teil werden die Ansätze von Glasl, Galtung und Wilber, auf denen diese Untersuchung aufbaut, möglichst prägnant vorgestellt.
- Danach wird mit Hilfe der Kategorisierungsinstrumente des IA eine Möglichkeit aufgezeigt, die Methoden von Glasl und Galtung bezüglich ihrer theoretischen Bezugspunkte epistemologisch zu verorten und in einem gemeinsamen Zusammenhang zu integrieren.
- Darauf aufbauend, wird auf Gemeinsamkeiten und Ergänzungspunkte praxisbezogener Kategorien der metatheoretischen Ansätze von Glasl und Galtung eingegangen, die nicht von Wilbers IA abgedeckt werden. Im Rahmen dieses heuristischen Metakontexts soll vor allem auf die Grenzen und Erweiterungspotenziale des IA eingegangen werden.
- Danach erfolgt eine Darstellung der Herausforderungen in der Metatheoriebildung im Allgemeinen sowie in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung im Besonderen.
- Die Ergebnisse werden abschließend in einem Fazit zusammengefasst.

**Kurzdarstellung der Methoden von Glasl, Galtung und Wilber**

**Konfliktmanagement nach Friedrich Glasl**

Im Konfliktmanagement-Ansatz von Friedrich Glasl definiert er den „Konflikt“ als eine Interaktion zwischen mindestens zwei Akteuren, in der mindestens ein Akteur eine Unvereinbarkeit im Wahrnehmen, Fühlen, Denken, Wollen mit dem anderen Akteur in der Art erlebt, dass beim Verwirklichen dessen, was der Akteur fühlt, denkt oder will eine Beeinträchtigung durch einen anderen Akteur(e) erfolgt (vgl. Glasl 2004a, S. 17). Der soziale Konflikt beginnt also nicht mit den Unvereinbarkeiten, sondern mit der Art und Weise der Austragung (vgl. Glasl 2004b).
In Glasls Ansatz sind zwei Grundkriterien für die Konfliktbearbeitung von Bedeutung: Einerseits werden allgemeine Komponenten und Ansatzmomente, andererseits konkrete Situationsmerkmale in der Intervention unterschieden.

**Generelle Komponenten und Wirkungsrichtungen der Interventionen**


Bei niedrigen Eskalationen: Perzeptions- und denkensorientierte Interventionen:
1. *Perzeptionen*: Vorurteile der Parteien abbauen etc.
   - Bei mittleren Eskalationen: Auf Gefühle und Einstellungen gerichtete Interventionen:
   - *Gefühle und Einstellungen*: Gefühle der Feindseligkeit etc. überwinden und wieder Vertrauen zueinander fassen.
   - *Willensfaktoren (Trieb, Motive, Intentionen)*: Die eigenen Absichten reflektieren; Ziele und Mittel neu überdenken etc. (vgl. ebd., S. 325-341).
   - Bei hohen Eskalationen: Verhaltens-orientierte Interventionen:
   - *Äußeres Verhalten*: Das unkontrollierte destruktive Verhalten wieder in konstruktive Bahnen leiten; Gewalthandeln reduzieren etc.


| Tab. 1: Beispiele für die Überschneidung von Interventionsansätzen (Glasl 2004a: 381) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Issues** | **Konfliktverlauf** | **Parteien intern** | **Beziehungen zwischen den Parteien** | **Grundeinstellungen** |
| Perzeptionen und Denken | Issues definieren, transponieren | Konfliktpartitur, Eskalationsprognose | Erkennen des Rollentypus, Analyse der Vertreterbeziehungen, Denkmal | Analyse der Rollenbilder, imaginäres Eskalieren und De-Eskalieren der Abhängigkeit von Konfliktlösungsbehandlungen | Evaluieren der Grundauffassung |
Indikatoren für eine flexible Strategie- und Rollenwahl

Vier Indikatorenbereiche sind für die Strategie- und Rollenwahl bei der Konfliktbearbeitung von entscheidender Bedeutung. Diese umfassen:

- **Aktueller Eskalationsgrad**: niedrig, mittel, hoch
- **Konflikttypus**: Dominante Erscheinungsformen, Soziale Arena, Reichweite der Konflikte
- **Rahmenvorgaben** der Konfliktbearbeitung: Ressourcen, Grenzen etc.
- **Kulturelle, gesetzliche und wirtschaftliche Rahmenbedingungen** (vgl. Glasl 2004b)


*Aktueller Eskalationsgrad*


6 GRIT = Gradual Reduction in International Tension

Bei einer geringen Eskalation (Stufen 1-3) geht es darum, die vorhandenen Selbstheilungskräfte der Konfliktparteien zu stimulieren und zu initiieren. Hierzu bieten sich Ansätze wie das Facilitating, Moderation, Supervision und der Scrivener Mediation an (vgl. Glasl 2004a, S. 404-408).

Bei einer mittleren Eskalation (Stufen 4-6) können die Parteien den Konflikt nicht aus eigener Kraft lösen. Hierbei sind Interventionen geboten, die die Entwicklung von gegenseitiger Empathie fördern und Selbst- und Fremdbilder auflösen. Dazu zählen Ansätze der Supervisory Mediation und der Prozesskonsultation (bis Stufe 5) oder der sozio-therapeutischen Prozessbegleitung (bis Stufe 6). Bei einer höheren Eskalation (bis Stufe 7) wird mittels Shuttle Mediation auf Kompromisslösungen hingearbeitet (vgl. ebd., S. 408-425).

Das sich hieraus ergebende Spektrum von Interventionsansätzen, die an die jeweilige Eskalationsstufe angepasst sind, wird durch die vorliegende Grafik schematisiert:

![Grafik 2: Spektrum von Interventionsansätzen nach Eskalationsgrad (Glasl 2004a, S. 397)](image)


Konflikttypus


Tendenziell sieht die Konfliktbehandlung von heißen (überhitzen) Konflikten de-eskalierende Strategien vor (z.B. Entschleunigung durch Begrenzen von Themen, Personen, Zeit
etc.), während die Behandlung von kalten (unterkühlten) Konflikten hingegen eskalierende Strategien (z.B. emotionale Äußerungen stimulieren) impliziert (vgl. 2003, S. 293).


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>De-eskalierend (heißer Konflikt)</th>
<th>Eskalierend (kalter Konflikt)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Präventiv</td>
<td>In Anwesenheit des Beraters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Um Kommunikationsproblemen</td>
<td>werden Sorgen, Ängste,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vorzubeugen, werden</td>
<td>Unterstellungen gezielt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informationsspielregeln vereinbart;</td>
<td>angesprochen;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training in Kommunikationsmethoden.</td>
<td>Konfrontationssitzung um zu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vermeiden, dass ein beginnender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Konflikt kalt gemacht wird.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurativ</td>
<td>Bestehende kalte Konflikt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der Konfliktverlauf wird</td>
<td>werden durch Rollenspiele</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rekonstruiert und geklärt;</td>
<td>dramatisiert, übertrieben;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Konfliktanteile klären ihre</td>
<td>Ein Interessenvertreter ermutigt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unterschiedlichen Perzeptionen</td>
<td>seine Klienten sich stark für ihre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>des Verhaltens.</td>
<td>Standpunkte einzusetzen.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Konflikttransformation nach Johan Galtung**

Johan Galtungs Konflikttransformation-Ansatz besticht vor allem durch seine sehr umfassende, „dreifaltig“ aufbereitete, Theorie von Gewalt, Konflikt und Frieden:

**Theoretische Grundlagen**

Gewalt definiert Galtung „als die Ursache für den Unterschied zwischen dem Potentiellen und dem Aktuellen, zwischen dem, was hätte sein können, und dem, was ist.“ (Galtung 1975, S. 9). Die drei Eckpunkte von Galtungs Konfliktdreieck haben ihre Entsprechungen in einem Gewaldreieck:

- Die akteurszentrierte Gewalt wird von den beiden subtilen Gewaltformen begünstigt und manifestiert sich in einem aggressiven Verhalten (vgl. Galtung 2000, S. 115f.).

Ein großer Teil von Gewaltzusammenhängen wurzelt in seinen Tiefendimensionen:

- Die strukturelle Gewalt erwächst aus Tiefenwidersprüchen innerhalb der unbewussten Beziehungsmuster unterschiedlicher Gesellschaftssektoren. Hierunter können folgende Trennlinien unterschieden werden:
  - Umwelt: Mensch vs. Natur.
  - Gender: Männlich vs. Weiblich (Sexismus).
  - Generation: Alte vs. „Erwachsene“ vs. Junge.
  - Hautfarbe: Hell vs. Dunkel (Rassismus).
  - Klasse: Mächtige vs. Ohnmächtige (a) politische Macht: wer entscheidet über/unterdrückt wen? (b) Militärische Macht: wer marschiert wo ein/okkupiert wen? (c) Ökonomische Macht: wer beutet wen aus? (d) Kulturelle Macht: wer durchdringt/konditioniert/entfremdet wen?
  - Normales vs. Abweichendes (Stigmatisierung).
  - Nationalität („Ethnie“) / Kultur (Religion) / Zivilisation: Dominante vs. Dominierte (Nationalismus, Fundamentalismus).
  - Territorium: Staatenwelt, Zentrum vs. Peripherie (Zentralismus). Der strukturellen Gewalt liegt eine Pathologie zugrunde – das sog. „PSFM-Syndrom“: Das Machtungleichgewicht der besagten Trennungslinien beinhaltet Penetration (als Gegenteil von Autonomie), Segmentation (Gegenteil: Integration), Fragmentation (Gegenteil: Solidarität), Marginalisation (Gegenteil: Partizipation) (vgl. ebd., S. 117f.).
  - Gewalt ist nicht mit Konflikt identisch, allerdings impliziert Gewalt immer einen zugrundeliegenden Konflikt. Der Konflikt birgt aber stets die Möglichkeit zum kreativen
und konstruktiven Umgang. Frieden steht hierbei für die Fähigkeit, „einen Konflikt mit Empathie, Gewaltfreiheit und Kreativität“ anzugehen und dabei den Konflikt in seinen drei Manifestationsbereichen zu behandeln (vgl. Galtung/Tschudi 2003, S. 9f.). Konkret bedeutet Galtungs Friedenstheorie:

- Bei der strukturellen Gewalt müssen durch die Förderung von Kreativität die Begrenzungen der Trennlinien überwunden werden.
- Bei der direkten Gewalt muss Gewaltfreiheit aufgebaut werden, indem die Grundbedürfnisse aller Parteien respektiert und befriedigt werden.

Für die Bearbeitung gewalttätiger Konflikte bedeutet die Schaffung von Frieden konkret die Vermeidung (Prävention) und Reduzierung (Heilung) von Gewalt und die Umleitung der Konfliktenergie in eine positive Richtung (Transformation).

**Konfliktintervention im Konfliktlebenszyklus**

Bei gewalttätigen Konflikten richtet sich die Konfliktintervention im Idealfall nach dem Lebenszyklus des Konfliktes. Sofern nicht unterbrochen, sind drei Phasen zu unterscheiden, die aufeinander folgen: (a) vor der Gewaltanwendung, (b) während der Gewaltanwendung und (c) nach der Gewaltanwendung (vgl. Galtung 2000, S. 13f.).

Im *Phase I*, also vor dem Ausbruch der Gewalt, gilt es vorbeugend auf Gewalt legitimierende Kulturen, repressive Strukturen, und gewalttätige Akteure einzuwirken.

- Ausbeutende Strukturen gilt es gemeinsam zu reflektieren, Friedensstrukturen gemeinsam einzuführen.
- In den Konfliktkulturen müssen konstruktive Elemente herausgefunden, gefördert und eingeführt werden.

Konfliktbewältigung durch Konflikttransformation

Im Groben können fünf Möglichkeiten der Konfliktbewältigung unterschieden werden:


Unter all den Möglichkeiten der Konfliktbewältigung ist die Konflikttransformation langfristig vorzuziehen. Sie fußt auf einer spezifischen Dialog-Methode.


1) Träume: Festlegung einer gemeinsamen konstruktiven Zukunftsvision;
2) Trauma: Diagnose der destruktiven Aspekte der Vergangenheit;
3) \textit{Ruhm}: Diagnose der positiv-nostalgischen Aspekte der gemeinsamen Vergangenheit;

4) \textit{Ängste}: Negativprognose (vgl. Galtung 2008, S. 83, 225f.).

\textbf{Der Integrale Ansatz nach Wilber}


\textbf{Methodologie}


1. \textit{Injunktion}: Der Wissenschaftler führt eine festgelegte Handlungsanweisung (Paradigma) durch, um vergleichbare Daten zu gewinnen;

2. \textit{Datengewinnung}: Das erfolgreiche Experiment enthüllt Daten, die vom Forschenden wahrgenommen und gesammelt werden.


Diese universellen Schritte der Erkenntnisgewinnung sind gleichsam auf einen „eng“ und einen „weit gefassten“ Wissenschaftsbegriff anwendbar:

- Unter ersterem fallen die naturwissenschaftlichen Disziplinen, die auf der empirischen Beobachtung der materiellen Welt fußen (z.B. Physik).

- Unter die „weite“ Wissenschaft fallen die Geisteswissenschaften, basierend auf Kommunikation/Interpretation (mit) der intellektuellen Welt (z.B. Hermeneutik), aber auch spirituelle Praktiken (z.B. Meditation) (vgl. Wilber 2002a, S. 339f.).

Der IA unterscheidet fünf wesentliche Untersuchungsdimensionen: (a) Quadranten, (b) Ebenen, (c) Linien, (d) Typen, (e) Zustände. Sie werden in einem sog. AQAL-Modell (All Quadrants All Lines) schematisiert.

\textbf{Quadranten}

Die Quadrantendimension trägt der Orientierungsverallgemeinerung Rechnung, dass alle wesentlichen Sprachen der Menschheit Fürworte der ersten, zweiten und dritten Person haben (ich, Du/wir, und es). Da nach Wilber diese drei Grundperspektiven bereits in vielen Formen von

**Vier Geltungskriterien**

Die Nichtreduzierbarkeit aller Quadranten beruht unter anderem auf ihren unterschiedlichen Geltungskriterien:


- **Kollektiv-subjektiv (Quadrant unten-links): kulturelles Passen:** Die intersubjektive „Wir“-Perspektive macht deutlich, dass sich Akteure auf eine Moral und gemeinsame Symbole verständigen, um im selben Bedeutungsraum leben zu können (vgl., S. 152-155). Dieser Quadrant umfasst vor allem ethische und hermeneutische Ansätze (vgl. ebd., S. 131f.).


Grafisch lassen sich die wesentlichen Inhalte der vier Quadranten wie folgt darstellen:

\(^7\) Die sog. „Großen Drei“ finden sich nach Wilber z.B. in Poppers drei „Welten“ (Welt 1 [Es], Welt 2 [Ich] und Welt 3 [Wir]) in Habermas‘ drei Geltungsansprüchen (Wahrheit [Objekte], Aufrichtigkeit [Subjekte], Gerechtigkeit [Intersubjektivität]) oder in Platons „Schönes“ (Ich), „Gutes“ (Wir) und „Wahres“ (Es) wieder (vgl. Wilber 2002a, S. 187).
Tab. 3: Vier Quadranten (Wilber 1997, S. 145)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INNEN</th>
<th>AUSSEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUBJEKTIV</td>
<td>OBJEKTIV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wahrhaftigkeit</td>
<td>Wahrheit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aufrichtigkeit</td>
<td>Entsprechung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrität</td>
<td>Repräsentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertrauenswürdigkeit</td>
<td>propositional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tab. 3: Vier Quadranten (Wilber 1997, S. 145)**

![Diagram of four quadrants with perspectives and methods](image)

**Acht Horizonte**


![Diagram of eight paradigms divided by methodologies](image)

**Grafik 4: Acht Hauptparadigmen unterteilt nach Methodologien (Wilber 2003a: D-I)**
Die Kriterien dieser acht Ereignishorizonte lassen sich wie folgt zusammenfassen:

- **Innen von „Ich“ und „Wir“:**

- **Außen von „Ich“ und „Wir“:**

- **Innen von „Es“ (Singular, Plural).**
  - Dem *Innen eines „Es“ im Singular* wird durch Methodologien, wie beispielsweise der biologischen Phänomenologie und der *Autopoiesis* erfasst.

- **Außen von „Es“ (Singular, Plural).**
  - Die *Außendimensionen eines „Es“ im Singular* lassen sich durch empirische Methodologien wie z.B. dem *Behaviorismus* erfassen.

**Ebenen**

In Anlehnung an die Kartografien alter Weisheitstraditionen und moderner Evolutionstheorien geht der IA von Entwicklungshierarchien aus. Hierbei ist nicht die spezifische Einteilung an sich entscheidend, sondern das Hierarchieverhältnis der Daseinsbereiche zueinander. Die


- **Türkis (WholeView):** Holistisches Denken vereinigt Fühlen und Wissen und macht eine komplexe Perspektive, wie z.B. den IA, möglich. Alle Ebenen spielen in der Gesamtspirale eine entscheidende Rolle (vgl. ebd., S. 25).


### Linien


### Typen

Auf jeder Ebene der Entwicklungsrichtungen (Moral, Kognition etc.) sind auch noch unterschiedliche Entwicklungstypen zu unterscheiden. Je nach Kontext und Quadranten lassen sich unterschiedliche Typologien berücksichtigen, wie z.B. Persönlichkeitstypen (OL), kulturelle Zugehörigkeit (UL) (vgl. Wilber 2001a, S. 61), Verhaltenstypen (OR), Zugehörigkeit zu einer bestimmten sozialen Klasse etc. (UR).

---

9 Im IA nimmt die spirituelle Dimension und ihre Vereinbarkeit mit der Wissenschaft eine besondere Stellung ein. Aus Komplexitätsgründen muss dieser wesentliche Aspekt des IA in dieser Arbeit allerdings ausgeklammert werden.
Zustände


Konfliktdimensionen im Integralen Ansatz

Obwohl der IA keine Konflikttheorie darstellt, eignen sich die Schlüsseldimensionen des AQAL zu einer sehr allgemeinen Einordnung der Konfliktpotenziale des menschlichen Lebens. Jede dieser Dimensionen impliziert vielfältige Konfliktpotenziale, die sich in Form von „Absolutismen“ ausprägen können. Kennzeichnend für Absolutismen ist, dass der Inhalt einer Seite zu Gunsten einer anderen unterdrückt wird. Einige Beispiele wären:

- **Quadranten-Absolutismus**: Ein oder mehrere Quadranten dominiert über ein oder mehrere andere, z.B. Staat (Dominanz der kollektiven Quadranten: Totalitarismus) vs. Individuum (Dominanz der individuellen Quadranten: Anarchie)
- **Typen-Absolutismus**: Dominanz eines Typen, z.B. im Rahmen eines „Kampfes der Kulturen“
- **Ebenen-Absolutismus**: Moderne (Orange) vs. religiöser Fundamentalismus (Blau).
- **Zustands-Absolutismus**: Nur die Wahrnehmung im Wachzustand wird als „real“ angesehen (Verdrängung z.B. von Traumrealitäten).


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Konzeptioneller Vorschlag zur epistemologischen und heuristischen Integration


Epistemologische Einordnung und Integration

Im Folgenden werden die epistemologischen Bezugswelten der Ansätze von Glasl und Galtung in Bezug auf die fünf Untersuchungsdimensionen (Quadranten, Ebenen, Typen, Linien, Zustände) des IA integriert.

Konfliktmanagement nach Glasl


**Typen:** Die Typendimension findet in Glasls Modell in Bezug auf die Unterscheidung „heißen“ und „kalten“ Austragungsformen des Konfliktes (OR) Berücksichtigung. Darüber hinaus gibt es aber noch viele verschiedene Typen oder Stile von Konfliktmanagement, z.B. die Bevorzugung direkter Auseinandersetzung oder indirekter, mediierter Formen etc, aktive oder vermeidende etc.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Außen (Ebenen: Eskalationsstufen)</th>
<th>Außen (Ebenen: Eskalationsstufen)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zustände: Eskalationen sind flüchtig und dynamisch</td>
<td>Horizont: Außenbetrachtung von Interaktion (s. Ebenen, s. Typ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intention</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verhalten</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Außen (Ebenen: Eskalationsstufen)</td>
<td>Außen (Ebenen: Eskalationsstufen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horizont: Außenbetrachtung von normativen Strukturen (s. Typ) und von kollektiven Perzeptionen (s. Ebenen)</td>
<td>Horizont: Außenbetrachtung von Beziehungsmustern (s. Ebenen, s. Typ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weltbild</strong></td>
<td><strong>Beziehung</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Außen (Ebenen: Eskalationsstufen)</td>
<td>Außen (Ebenen: Eskalationsstufen)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transcend nach Galtung</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quadranten:** Durch die Ausdifferenzierung von drei Gewaltbereichen und ihrer Tiefendimensionen werden fast alle acht Horizonte des IA abgedeckt. Die Dimension der kulturellen Gewalt lässt sich dem Außenbereich des „Wir“ (UL) zuordnen. Sie untersucht Symbole, kollektive Motivationsstrukturen etc., die direkte Gewalt legitimieren. Die Tiefendimension kultureller Gewalt erschließt sich durch die hermeneutische Untersuchung kollektiver Mythen und Traumata und lässt sich daher dem Innenbereich des UL-Quadranten zuordnen.
Die strukturelle Gewalt wird vom Außenhorizont des UR-Quadranten erfasst. Hierbei wird den sozialen, ökonomischen und anderen Konfliktfaktoren Rechnung getragen. Die Tiefendimension der strukturellen Gewalt ordnet sich dem Innenbereich desselben Quadranten (UR) zu, weil die acht strukturellen Konfliktlinien und das PSFM-Syndrom einen wesentlichen Einfluss auf die Selbsterhaltung des Konfliktsystems haben.


In Bezug auf die Konfliktbereiche bezieht sich Transcend zumeist auf Inter- und Intra-Meso- und -Makro-Konflikte, nicht jedoch auf (Intra-)Mikro-Konflikte.


Hierbei wäre von weiterführendem Interesse, Galtungs Theorie der drei bis sechs Gewaltbereiche um vertikale entwicklungspsychologische Einsichten zu erweitern.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innen: Grundbedürfnisse</th>
<th>Außen: direkte Gewalt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intention</strong></td>
<td><strong>Verhalten</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kultur</strong></td>
<td><strong>Struktur</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Außen: kulturelle Gewalt</td>
<td>Außen: strukturelle Gewalt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innen: Tiefenkultur</td>
<td>Innen: Tiefenstruktur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fokus: Makro- und Mesobereich</td>
<td>Fokus: Makro- und Mesobereich</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grafik 5: Epistemologische Bezugspunkte von Transcend im Quadranten-Schema (Fathi 2008, S. 52)
Epistemologische Überschneidungen und Ergänzungen beider Methoden

Zwischen den epistemologischen Bezugswelten der beiden Ansätze ergeben sich Überschneidungen und auch Ergänzungen. Die wichtigsten lassen sich in einer AQAL-Gesamtschau wie folgt skizzieren (vgl. hierzu Grafik 5):


Um kollektive Akteure wie Staaten in einem für die Konfliktforschung angemessenen Ebenenkontext untersuchen zu können, müssten neben entwicklungsstrukturalistischen Methoden zur Erforschung der inneren Entwicklung (Wertstrukturen, Motive) auch andere (rechtsseitige) Erhebungsindikatoren hinzugezogen werden, auf die jedoch im Rahmen dieses Papers nicht näher eingegangen werden kann (näher hierzu Fathi 2008). So sei lediglich darauf hingewiesen, dass Modelle, wie die Spiral Dynamics, z.B. nicht erklären könnten, warum die hochentwickelten USA [Orange] seit 1945 einen unerreicht hohen Index-Wert von etwa 67

11 An dieser Stelle lohnt es sich auch zu überlegen, inwieweit die “fünf Arten des Konfliktumgangs” (Grafik 3) den Ebenen des Eskalations- (Glasl) oder des Entwicklungsspektrums zugeordnet werden können (näher hierzu Fathi 2008).
globalen Interventionen (davon 56 direkte Gewaltanwendungen) aufweisen (vgl. Galtung 2003, S. 130f.).

Aufschluss für einen schlüssigeren theoretischen Zusammenhang zwischen Eskalation (Glasl) und Entwicklung (Wilber) dürfte auch die zusätzliche Berücksichtigung der Zustands- und Liniendimension des IA geben.


Linien: Ein theoretischer Zusammenhang zwischen Entwicklungsniveaus und Tendenzen zur Eskalation dürfte plausibel sein, wenn Entwicklung in mehreren Kontexten kartografiert wird. Wie oben erörtert, besteht aber noch Forschungsbedarf zu erörtern, die Tendenz eines Akteurs zu einer bestimmten Konflikttaustragung einer Eskalationsstufe zuzuordnen – bei individuellen Akteuren z.B. in Bezug auf die kognitive, interpersonelle, moralische Entwicklung, bei kollektiven Akteuren in Bezug auf den Zusammenhang zwischen der Entwicklung von Wirtschaft, Menschenrechtsstandards, Demokratie, technologischer Stand etc.

Typen: Ein wesentlicher Beitrag des Ansatzes von Glasl ist die Unterscheidung von Konflikttaustragungstypen. Für die weitergehende Forschung wäre es lohnenswert, dieses Schema mit anderen Typologien in Beziehung zu setzen, z.B. Kulturen (OL), Persönlichkeitstypen (z.B. Myers-Briggs [OL]) etc.

Zusammenfassend lassen sich die Ergebnisse der epistemologischen Integration der vorgestellten Ansätze im AQAL wie folgt grafisch schematisieren:
Ein Vorschlag zur heuristischen Integration der vorgestellten Methoden

Bei der Skizzierung eines heuristischen Metamodells geht es darum, ein allgemein anwendbares Grundgerüst zu skizzieren, das Lagebeurteilungen, Entscheidungsfindungen und Problemlösungen in komplexen Konfliktsituationen ermöglicht. Hierbei erweisen sich die eher epistemologisch ausgerichteten Metakategorien des AQAL-Rasters als nicht ausreichend und nennenswerte Verbesserungsvorschläge zu seiner Erweiterung haben sich bislang noch nicht

Integration unterschiedlicher Interventionsmethoden in ein vertikales Schema


Horizontale Integration unterschiedlicher Interventionsmethoden

Auf jeder Eskalationsebene dieses in Grafik 6 dargestellten Konfliktbogens lassen sich die Interventionen nach horizontalen Typologien weiter ausdifferenzieren, die von den Modellen von Glasl und Galtung formuliert wurden.

Hierbei unterscheidet Glasl auf jeder der ersten sechs Eskalationsebenen zwischen kalten und heißen Konflikten und dazugehörigen Interventionsstrategien (eskalierend, de-escalierend), wie bereits in Tabelle 2 skizziert. In Verbindung mit Tabelle 3 lässt sich zusätzlich das Konzept der Galtung’schen Konfliktphasen berücksichtigen: Die präventiven Methoden tragen der Konfliktphase „Vor dem Gewaltausbruch“ Rechnung und die kurativen Interventionen beziehen sich auf die Phase „Nach dem Gewaltausbruch“.


Eine kombinierte Berücksichtigung horizontaler (hier z.B. Quadranten, Typen, Linien) und vertikaler Dimensionen (hier z.B. Eskalationsebenen) ist für eine Metatheorie der Konfliktbearbeitung sinnvoll. Mit der Integration wesentlicher Aspekte der Ansätze von Wilber,

Schematisch wird hier eine Kartografie vorgezogen, die das vertikale eskalationsorientierte Spektrum als Ausgangsmodell nimmt – sprich: die Grafik 6 – und die anderen horizontalen Dimensionen des epistemologischen Modells (Quadranten, Typen, Linien) hineinintegriert. Hieraus ergibt sich ein idealtypisches dreidimensionales Schema, das sich wie folgt darstellt:
**Grafik 8: Integration horizontaler und vertikaler Interventionsaspekte (Fathi 2008, S. 63)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadranten: Gewaltbereiche nach Transcend + intentionale Gewalt (nach GFK)</th>
<th>Vertikale</th>
<th>Horizontale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Phase 1</em> (niedrige bis mittlere Eskalation): Konfliktprävention</td>
<td>konstruktive Konfliktkulturen (UL), -strukturen (UR), Intentionen (OL) und Verhalten (OR) fördern</td>
<td>Vor dem Ausbruch (<em>Phase 1</em>): Konfliktprävention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phase 2</em> (hohe Eskalation): Friedenskonsolidierung</td>
<td>Waffenembargos und Friedenstruppen (UR); Evakuierung von Zielen (OR); Demoralisierung von Soldaten (UL); Negativprognosen an alle Parteien (OL)</td>
<td>Während des Gewaltausbruchs (<em>Phase 2</em>): Friedenskonsolidierung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Phase 3</em> (niedrige bis mittlere Eskalation): KonfliktNachbearbeitung</td>
<td>konstruktive Konfliktkulturen (UL), -strukturen (UR), Intentionen (OL) und Verhalten (OR) wieder herstellen; Versöhnung</td>
<td>Nach dem Ausbruch (<em>Phase 3</em>): KonfliktNachbearbeitung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Typen:** Austragungsformen nach Glasl (vgl. Tab. 3)

- Präventiv: De-eskalierend (heiß); eskalierend (kalt)
- Kurativ: De-eskalierend (heiß); eskalierend (kalt)

**Kriterien der Konfliktanalyse nach Glasl (Bezug zum vertikalen Interventionsspektrum vgl. Tab. 1)**

- z.B. Issues; Konfliktverlauf; Parteien intern; Parteien extern (Beziehungen); Grundeinstellungen
- z.B. Issues; Konfliktverlauf; Parteien intern; Parteien extern (Beziehungen); Grundeinstellungen
Herausforderungen für die Metatheoriebildung


Allgemeine Herausforderungen für die Metatheoriebildung

Im Wesentlichen sieht das metatheoretische Map Making vor, verallgemeinerbare Metakategorien zu definieren und darin die inhaltliche Komplexität unterschiedlicher Perspektiven zu integrieren. Hieraus erwachsen allgemeine Herausforderungen, von denen sich einige wesentliche gut am Beispiel des IA und seinem Konzept der Orientierungsverallgemeinerungen darstellen lassen.


Dennoch dürfte sich die Metatheoriebildung auf allen Ebenen (theoretisch und metatheoretisch) Konfliktpotenzial in mannigfaltiger Form ausgesetzt sehen. Da Metakategorien klar auf der metatheoretischen Ebene anzusiedeln sind, indem sie, über verschiedene Gebiete hinweg, Muster ordnen, die nur auf dieser Ebene sichtbar werden, können und müssen sie nicht einen Grundkonsens zwischen ForscherInnen innerhalb spezifischer Felder widerspiegeln (wie von Wilber behauptet). Vielmehr ist anzunehmen, dass es in den seltensten Fällen Konsens innerhalb spezifischer Forschungsfelder gibt und noch weniger Konsens über verschiedene Forschungsfelder hinweg. Hinzu kommt noch, dass wissenschaftliche Aussagen an bestimmte
Paradigmen und Vorannahmen gebunden sind, die untereinander auch nicht zwangsläufig in einem Konsens sind. Auf diesen Punkt wird näher im nächsten Kapitel am Beispiel der drei Ansätze einzugehen sein.

**Spezifische Herausforderungen für die Metatheoriebildung in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung**

Im Folgenden möchte ich auf einige wesentliche Herausforderungen für die Metatheoriebildung in der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung eingehen, die sich vor allem aus der vorliegenden Untersuchung ergeben haben. Hierzu ist es notwendig, die zum Teil unterschiedlichen Ansprüche der Metatheoriebildung im epistemologischen sowie im heuristischen Kontext zu berücksichtigen.

**Epistemologischer Kontext**


Kritisch ist jedoch anzumerken, dass das AQAL nur ein begrenztes Modell darstellt, die hier vorgestellten Methoden in einen, von vielleicht anderen denkbaren Metakontexten einzuordnen. Diesen Integrationskontext müssen und können die ProtagonistInnen der integrierten Methoden nicht immer zustimmen.

„Ausschnitten“ aller drei Ansätze dar, da die oben angedeuteten (epistemologischen) Widersprüche weiterhin ausgeklammert bleiben.


**Heuristischer Kontext**


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aber erwähnt, dürfte der Beitrag des hier skizzierten Modells eher beispielhaft, denn repräsentativ-verallgemeinerbaren Charakter haben. So ergeben sich durchaus vielfältige, in der weiterführenden Forschung zu erörternde, Veränderungs- und Ausgestaltungsmöglichkeiten des Modells – schon alleine für den Bereich der „Konfliktanalyse“.


Aus einer anderen pragmatisch-strategischen Perspektive fragt sich, ob und inwieweit „simplifizierende“, also: „gewollt reduktionistische“, Metatheoriebildungen für die Konfliktbearbeitung sinnvoll sind. So betont z.B. der Ansatz der systemischen


andere Fragen in spezifischen Konfliktsituationen zu erforschen, wie gesagt, weiterführenden Studien vorbehalten.

In heuristischer Hinsicht besteht also insgesamt vor allem die Herausforderung der
- Formulierung von Metakategorien, die für die Friedens- und Konfliktforschung relevant sind und das AQAL-Modell sinnvoll ergänzen können (z.B. allgemeine Operationalisierungsschritte der Konfliktbearbeitung);
- kritischen Hinterfragung bestehender AQAL-Dimensionen auf ihren pragmatischen Nutzen hin und ihrer Anpassung an die spezifischen (praxisbezogenen) Erfordernisse der Friedens- und Konfliktforschung und

Fazit


Insgesamt lassen sich am Beispiel des AQAL-Modells im Wesentlichen folgende Herausforderungen für die Metatheoriebildung zusammenfassen:
- Die Metatheoriebildung eröffnet Chancen, wissenschaftliche Diskurse auf mehreren Ebenen zu führen. Gleichzeitig birgt sie vielfältige Herausforderungen, da sich diese Diskurse (und ihre Lösungen) nun als wesentlich komplexer gestalten.
- Daneben ist entscheidend, unterschiedliche Kontexte der Metakategoriebildung zu unterscheiden, mit jeweils unterschiedlichen (hier z.B. epistemologischen und pragmatisch-heuristischen) Ansprüchen und „Integrationslogiken“. D.h. im weitesten Sinne zeichnen sich auch noch Spannungsverhältnisse zwischen Metatheorie und Metapraxeologie ab, die für die weiterführende Forschung von Interesse sein dürften.

Fathi: Metatheoriebildung in der dialogischen Konfliktbearbeitung

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Eine wirklich integriert arbeitende Friedens- und KonfliktforscherIn müsste sich also im Idealfall sowohl im epistemologischen, wie auch im heuristischen, im metatheoretischen und im theoretischen, aber auch im metapraxeologischen und im praxeologischen Bereich sicher bewegen können.

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Evolutionary Psychology as a Metatheory for the Social Sciences

Annemie Ploeger

Abstract: Evolutionary psychology has been proposed as a metatheory for the social sciences. In this paper, the different ways in which scholars have used the concept of a metatheory in the field of evolutionary psychology is reviewed. These different ways include evolutionary psychology as a unification of different subdisciplines, as a nomological network of evidence, as Lakatosian hard core, as a tool for conceptual integration, and as a theory that addresses the major issues in the social sciences. It is concluded that evolutionary psychology has been successful as Lakatosian hard core, that is, it has been fruitful in generating new hypotheses. However, it has been less successful in unifying different subdisciplines. It is also concluded that evolutionary psychology needs to broaden its scope by including insights from evolutionary developmental biology in order to become a unifying framework for the social sciences.

Keywords: Evolutionary developmental biology, evolutionary psychology, metatheory.

Introduction

Evolutionary psychology is psychology that is informed by theory and research of evolutionary biology, with the idea that knowledge about the evolutionary background of psychological phenomena will contribute to the understanding of these phenomena (Cosmides, Tooby, & Barkow, 1992). The main tenet of evolutionary psychology is that the mind consists of a set of information-processing mechanisms, which have evolved by natural selection. These mechanisms are adaptations that are functionally specialized to deal with problems in particular circumstances, and therefore must be content-specific and richly structured (Tooby & Cosmides, 1992).

It has been argued that evolutionary psychology may provide a metatheory for psychology and the other social sciences (Buss, 1995; Cosmides, Tooby, & Barkow, 1992). Evolutionary psychology is considered to be an overarching theory whose principles can be applied to all fields in the social sciences (Duntley & Buss, 2008). In the present article, I review the different ways in which researchers have used the concept of a metatheory in the field of evolutionary psychology. In addition, I evaluate whether these attempts have resulted in the desired metatheory for the social sciences.

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Different Ways to Use Evolutionary Psychology as a Metatheory

Several authors have contributed to the discussion on the metatheoretical status of evolutionary psychology. In this section I give an overview of these contributions, and I discuss whether these contributions are useful in achieving the desired metatheory for the social sciences.

Evolutionary Psychology Can Unify Different Subdisciplines in Psychology

Buss (1995) argued that evolutionary psychology could be a metatheory for psychology. Psychology is currently in conceptual disarray, with each branch, such as social, developmental, or organizational psychology, working on its own mini-theories. There is no overarching theory that integrates or unites the empirical findings in the different subdisciplines. Behaviorism used to be a metatheory for psychology, but explaining human behavior and cognition only by stimulus-response relationships appeared to be a too simple picture of how the mind works (e.g., Seligman, 1970). In response to behaviorism, cognitivism arose and claimed that the human mind consisted of information-processing mechanisms that could be compared to the working of a computer. But also the mind-as-a-computer appeared to be an oversimplified metaphor (e.g., Searle, 1990). Evolutionary psychology may fill the remaining hole by offering the process of natural selection that applies to any part of nature, as a unifying construct in social science.

The metatheory of evolutionary psychology that Buss (1995) proposed, consists of a hierarchy of levels of analysis. At the top of the hierarchy is general evolutionary theory, as represented by inclusive fitness theory (Hamilton, 1964). Inclusive fitness refers to the fitness of a genotype measured not only by its effects on an individual who possesses the genotype, but also by its effects on genetically related individuals. Inclusive fitness theory predicts that organisms behave to maximize their inclusive fitness. Evolutionary psychologists assume that this general theory is correct, and do not test this general theory directly. However, this does not imply that this general theory remains untested. Inclusive fitness theory has been tested by thousands of evolutionary biologists, in field experiments, lab experiments, and with computer simulations; thousands of tests have confirmed inclusive fitness theory, so this theory is broadly accepted by scientists (Buss, 1995).

Evolutionary psychologists do test theories that are derived from inclusive fitness theory, such as the theory of reciprocal altruism (Trivers, 1971) and the theory of parental investment (Trivers, 1972). Buss (1995) referred to these theories as middle-level evolutionary theories. From these middle-level theories, specific hypotheses and predictions can be derived. These predictions can be tested by "normal" scientific procedures, such as experiments, questionnaire methods and psychophysiological techniques.

Buss (1995) outlined what evolutionary psychology can contribute to research questions on social, personality, developmental, and cognitive psychology. For example, evolutionary psychology may be a fruitful approach for social psychologists that work on the issue of alliance formation and friendships. Based on reciprocal altruism theory, it is predicted that humans will form alliances and friendships with unrelated individuals, but only if the costs are less than or equal to the benefits. In a recent paper, Duntley and Buss (2008) go even further and argued that:
evolutionary psychology also unites the field of psychology with all the other life sciences, including biology, economics, political science, history, legal scholarship, and medicine; it unites humans with all other species, revealing our place in the grand scheme of the natural world. (p. 31)

According to evolutionary psychologists, the key research issue that all psychologists (and social scientists in general) should address is the identification of adaptive problems that humans had to deal with repeatedly over our evolutionary history, in order to learn what the mechanisms of the mind are "designed" to do. This claim is in accordance with Daniel Dennett’s (1995) *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, the idea that natural selection is the central process in any complex form alive on earth. Because human behavior and cognition can be considered to be complex, the origin of most human behavior and cognition can be explained by referring to natural selection, including social behavior, community behavior, personality, and psychological disorders.

Today, fifteen years after the publication of Buss' (1995) proposal, how far are we away from a bridge between the different subdisciplines in psychology? Evolutionary psychology as a new approach has been successful, with hundreds of new discoveries that had eluded other psychologists (e.g., Buss & Reeve, 2003). For example, the work of Daly and Wilson (1985) on stepparenthood and the increased risk of child abuse is inspired by and congruent with inclusive fitness theory. However, being empirically successful is not the same as providing a unification of different subdisciplines. In the last fifteen years, evolutionary psychology appeared to develop into a successful approach, but more or less separately from the other subdisciplines. It has become a subdiscipline by itself. Why did it turn out that evolutionary psychology has not been embraced as the metatheory that unites all subdisciplines in psychology?

One major reason is that evolutionary psychology has met with substantial criticism (e.g., Davies, 1996; Fodor, 2000; Lewontin, 1998; Looren de Jong & van der Steen, 1998; Richardson, 1996). For example, Lewontin (1998) argued that we will never know how our cognition evolved, because it is impossible to collect the necessary evidence. Cognition does not fossilize, and our ancestors (e.g., *Homo habilis*, *Homo erectus*) are extinct so we have no recent sister species with which we can compare our cognition. According to Lewontin, these kinds of evidence are necessary to decide whether a given psychological mechanism is an adaptation or not. If it is not possible to collect the necessary evidence, then the whole enterprise of evolutionary psychology will be a failure, and the desired metatheory is still far away. In response to these criticisms, different approaches to evolutionary psychology as a metatheory have been formulated. One is evolutionary psychology as a nomological network of evidence.

**Evolutionary Psychology as a Nomological Network of Evidence**

According to evolutionary psychologists, it is not impossible to provide empirical evidence for the existence of evolved psychological mechanisms. One way to solve this problem is creating a nomological network of evidence (Schmitt & Pilcher, 2004). Evolutionary psychologists collect data from a wide variety of sources, which together provide evidence for the putative adaptation. In order to conclude that a psychological mechanism has evolved by natural selection, Schmitt and Pilcher recommend collecting data from eight different sources. First of all, there has to be a theory, grounded in evolutionary biology, cost-benefit analyses,
and/or computer simulations. The next step is to provide psychological evidence, with methods accepted by psychologists, such as experiments or surveys. In addition, one needs medical evidence, for example from fertility and fecundity studies. Next, physiological evidence is required, for example from neurobiological research. Genetic evidence can be collected by means of behavioral or molecular genetics studies. Phylogenetic evidence can be found by means of comparative or paleontological methods. Hunter-gatherer data can be collected with cultural anthropological research. In addition, cross-cultural evidence can be gathered with ethnological comparisons or with a search for human universals. By collecting data from several sources, a nomological network can support evolutionary hypotheses about the human mind.

For example, Schmitt and colleagues (2003) have argued that there is a sex difference in desire for sexual variety, and that this sex difference is an adaptation. In general, men tend to long for more sexual short-term relationships than women. This hypothesis is derived from parental-investment theory, which is grounded in evolutionary biology. Schmitt and colleagues gathered data from 52 nations on 6 different continents and provided cross-cultural evidence for this hypothesis. There is also ample psychological evidence (based on surveys, behavioral experiments, etc.); comparative studies have shown the same tendency in nonhuman species (i.e., phylogenetic evidence), and physiological studies have indicated that testosterone and morphological characteristics play a role in the manifestation of this adaptation. Many pieces of evidence have been collected so far, although some components of a full evolutionary explanation are missing, but future studies may fill this gap.

This example shows that it is possible to provide evidence for an evolutionary hypothesis, but it also shows that an ambitious research program is necessary in order to create a satisfying nomological network. However, the question remains whether nomological networks of evidence for certain individual hypotheses provide a metatheory for psychology. A nomological network of evidence can provide support for the existence of a psychological adaptation, and this shows that the framework of evolutionary psychology has scientific value. However, such a nomological network of evidence does not show that all other researchers in the social sciences should use evolutionary psychology as their metatheory. A related proposal about evolutionary psychology as a metatheory, based on Lakatosian philosophy of science, may provide insight in this issue.

Evolutionary Psychology as Lakatosian Hard Core

It has been argued that evolutionary psychology can be a metatheory by providing a set of consensually held assumptions that lead to the generation of new theories and hypotheses (Ketelaar & Ellis, 2000). Philosopher of science Lakatos (1970) called these assumptions the hard core of a metatheoretical research program. The hard core operates like a map - it shows which roads to take and which roads to avoid; it provides heuristics, which narrow the scope of research to a set of plausible a priori hypotheses. The hard core of evolutionary psychology is represented by Hamilton's (1964) inclusive fitness theory, which is assumed to be true. This assumption is not just a belief - it is grounded in the myriad of empirical findings that evolutionary biologists gathered in favor of inclusive fitness theory. The auxiliary hypotheses - the protective belt, in Lakatosian terms - are subject to empirical testing. Metatheories are evaluated by the performance of the protective belt. If the metatheory generates new hypotheses
and explanations, then the metatheory is judged to be progressive; if not it is judged to be degenerative.

As was argued before, evolutionary psychology has been a fruitful empirical approach, with many new discoveries and explanations (Buss & Reeve, 2003). In this sense it has been a progressive metatheory. So if we adopt a Lakatosian view of a metatheory, evolutionary psychology is evaluated as a fruitful metatheory. However, it is still problematic that evolutionary psychology so far is more a subdiscipline on its own, rather than an integrative, overarching theory for the social sciences. This leads to the following intriguing suggestion: the generation of novel hypotheses may lead to the creation of more areas of investigation, which results in the development of more subfields and eventually to an increasing fragmentation of the science, rather than a unification of different fields. Although it is hard to prove this idea, it may lead to the conclusion that a hard core theory that generates many novel hypotheses is not necessarily a metatheory that should be used by all social scientists. A good metatheory is a framework that all social scientists use to evaluate their theories. There are two approaches to evolutionary psychology as a metatheory that have not been described yet, which may offer a way out of the isolation of evolutionary psychology from other scientific disciplines.

**Evolutionary Psychology Provides Conceptual Integration**

It has been suggested that evolutionary psychology may be a metatheory for psychology by providing *conceptual integration*, or *vertical integration*, that is, the principle that all scientific disciplines should be mutually consistent (Cosmides, Tooby, & Barkow, 1992). In the natural sciences, different disciplines are already mutually consistent, for example, the laws of chemistry are compatible with the laws of physics. Cosmides and colleagues argued that in the social sciences compatibility is lacking, leading to theories that contradict each other and leading to theories that may not be feasible from an evolutionary point of view. Conceptual integration may lead to the solution of problems in one's own discipline by adopting methods and knowledge from other disciplines:

Evidence from evolutionary biology can help social psychologists generate new hypotheses about the design features of the information-processing mechanisms that govern social behavior; evidence about cognitive adaptations can tell evolutionary biologists something about the selection pressures that were present during hominid evolution; evidence from paleoanthropology and hunter-gatherer studies can tell developmental psychologists what kind of environment our developmental mechanisms were designed to operate in; and so on. (Cosmides, Tooby, & Barkow, 1992, p. 12)

The proposal that evolutionary psychology can provide conceptual integration has been challenged by Looren de Jong and van der Steen (1998). They argued that evolutionary biology does not provide any laws, such as laws in physics or chemistry. Concepts such as adaptation and fitness are not fixed entities covering general patterns of evolution. Whether one calls a trait an adaptation depends on the criteria that one sets for an adaptation. These criteria are still highly debated in evolutionary biology (e.g., Brandon, 1990). Looren de Jong and van der Steen argued that evolutionary biology is not united at all, and it does not provide causal laws of hard science, so it cannot bring conceptual integration.
Lickliter and Honeycutt (2003) argued that psychology could be conceptually integrated with evolutionary biology, but that conceptual integration failed because evolutionary psychology so far has focused too much on inclusive fitness theory, a gene-centered theory. It would be more fruitful for psychology to focus on developmental systems theory. Developmental systems theorists do not view the gene as the center of evolution, but the whole developmental system at all its levels: molecular, cellular, physiological behavioral and environmental (see also Gottlieb, 2000). A true evolutionary metatheory for the social sciences should not only include inclusive fitness theory, but also an integration of the fields of genetics, embryology and developmental biology.

So far we can draw three conclusions with regard to the metatheoretical status of evolutionary psychology, one positive and two negative. The positive conclusion is that evolutionary psychology has been fruitful as a Lakatosian metatheory that generates new discoveries and explanations. A negative conclusion is that this metatheory has not resulted in a unification or conceptual integration of different scientific areas. This may be a natural consequence of having a successful theory that leads to the generation of novel hypotheses, which in turn leads to new fields of investigation, rather than an integration of fields. Another possibility is that the absence of unification is the result of the scope of the metatheory of evolutionary psychology. The scope of evolutionary psychology is inclusive fitness theory, and this scope may be too narrow to function as a metatheory for the social sciences. So the third conclusion is that if evolutionary psychology is the desired metatheory for the social sciences, then it may be necessary to broaden its scope in order to reach unification of different fields. These preliminary conclusions lead to a last approach to evolutionary psychology as a metatheory: evolutionary psychology is a metatheory for the social sciences if it cannot only generate new hypothesis, but it should also be able to address the main theories, or metaissues in the field, for example, the nature-nurture debate.

Evolutionary Psychology as a Metatheory that Addresses the Major Issues in the Social Sciences

Another approach to evolutionary psychology as a metatheory is that it should contribute to the major issues in the field (Ploeger, van der Maas, & Rajmakers, 2008). With regard to psychology, the major issues can be formulated as:

- Is the human mind mostly modular, or is the mind domain-general?
- What is the influence of nature and nurture on the human mind?
- Does development proceed in stages or gradually?
- How do individual differences arise?

My colleagues and I have argued that the contribution of the current metatheory of evolutionary psychology, that is, inclusive fitness theory, to these major question is too limited. With regard to the first question, evolutionary psychologists have argued that the mind is most likely to be modular, because modularity is a more efficient way to solve problems than a domain-general problem-solver (e.g., Cosmides & Tooby, 1994). However, this argument leaves unexplained the existence of several domain-general abilities (for an overview, see Ploeger et al., 2008).
With respect to the nature-nurture debate, evolutionary psychologists have explained why it is likely that the mind consists of many evolved psychological mechanisms, but they have so far not developed models that can account for the interaction or transaction between the genome and the environment. Evolutionary psychologists have not discussed the question whether development proceeds in stages or gradually, and from inclusive fitness theory alone it is not straightforward how the present metatheory of evolutionary psychology can contribute to this issue. With regard to the question about individual differences, evolutionary psychology so far has focused on discovering human universals, leaving the question about individual differences unanswered (e.g., Tooby & Cosmides, 1990), although there have been some evolutionary psychologists who have tried to address this issue (e.g., Buss, 2009; Wilson, 1994).

My colleagues and I have argued that evolutionary psychology should broaden its scope in order to become a fruitful metatheory that can address all the basic issues (Ploeger et al., 2008). We argued that theories and empirical findings from evolutionary developmental biology should be included in the metatheory, and we showed that this inclusion leads to new insights that contribute to the major debates in psychology. Evolutionary developmental biology is an approach that forges a synthesis of processes operating during individual development with those operating between generations (Carroll, 2005; Hall & Olson, 2003). This approach has led to a wealth of theories and empirical findings that are highly relevant to psychology, but have yet to be integrated. For example, with regard to the question whether the human mind is modular, there has been a lively debate among evolutionary developmental biologists about the role of modularity in evolution. Recent findings have shown that under some specific conditions modularity is more likely to evolve, while under other conditions there will be less modularity (Griswold, 2006). These findings can be used to explain the co-existence of modular and more domain-general structures in the human mind.

With respect to the nature-nurture debate, models that include both genetic and environmental factors have been studied extensively in the field of evolutionary developmental biology. These models can result in new insights for psychology, for example that there must exist a third source of variance, besides genes and environment, that consists of self-organized processes (Molenaar, Boomsma & Dolan, 1993). Research has shown that there is still considerable variation in body weight of mice, although their genetic makeup and their food intake are kept constant (Gaertner, 1990). This points in the direction of a third source of variance, for which models in evolutionary developmental biology provide an explanation (e.g., Kauffman, 1993). In addition, there has been ample research from an evolutionary developmental perspective on stages or phase transitions and their importance for development and evolution (e.g., Stadler, Stadler, Wagner, & Fontana, 2001). Also research on individual differences is abundant in evolutionary developmental biology (e.g., Zhang & Hill, 2005).

Thus, by broadening the scope of evolutionary psychology, it is possible to give a unique view on the major issues in psychology, by integrating psychology and insights from evolutionary developmental biology.
Discussion

It has been argued that evolutionary psychology could be a metatheory for the social sciences (e.g., Buss, 1995). In this paper, an overview of different arguments has been given, and the value of these arguments has been evaluated. Buss (1995) argued that evolutionary psychology could unify the different subdisciplines of psychology that so far have worked in isolation. The metatheory that could establish this unification was inclusive fitness theory (Hamilton, 1964). However, so far evolutionary psychologists have not been able to bridge the gap between different research areas.

First of all, it could be argued that we should not desire to build a metatheory that connects all areas in psychology and the social sciences. It may be impossible to have such as overarching theory, because the different areas in psychology and the social sciences are too specialized and address too many different questions. In addition, mini-theories and individual empirical findings have their own merit, and should not be disregarded.

Second, if we believe that a metatheory is desirable, it could be argued that unification of different disciplines should not be the main aim of a metatheory. Instead, it could be argued that the main aim of a metatheory is to evaluate different theories within a field. For evolutionary psychology, this would imply that its framework can be used to evaluate theories such as Skinner's learning theory, Piaget's developmental theory and Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance. These theories should be consistent with the principles of evolutionary theory. This idea is closely related to the proposal of Cosmides, Tooby and Barkow (1992), who have argued that evolutionary psychology can provide conceptual integration, that is, it can make the social sciences more consistent with each other and the natural sciences. However, a problem with this view is that evolutionary biology does not provide laws, like physics and chemistry do, and that it is not clear whether evolutionary biology is united itself, so it cannot provide conceptual integration (Looren de Jong & van der Steen, 1998).

Evolutionary psychology has met other criticisms. For example, it has been argued that evolutionary psychologists cannot provide empirical evidence for the theory that the mind consists of many evolved psychological mechanisms, or adaptations (Lewontin, 1998). However, it is possible to provide this evidence by means of nomological networks of evidence (Schmitt & Pilcher, 2004). But this may lead to the argument that a nomological network of evidence does not provide a metatheory, but that such a network can be used to evaluate hypotheses that are related to the metatheory. In terms of Lakatosian philosophy of science, the nomological network of evidence is the protective belt of the metatheory, not the metatheory itself.

It has been proposed that evolutionary psychology should be perceived from the perspective of Lakatosian philosophy of science (Ketelaar & Ellis, 2000). A metatheory from this perspective is defined as a set of consensually held assumptions that lead to the generation of new theories and hypotheses. For evolutionary psychology, these consensually held assumptions are the basic tenets of evolutionary theory, or more specifically, inclusive fitness theory. Because inclusive fitness theory has been confirmed thousands of times by evolutionary biologists, it can be assumed that this theory is correct. Evolutionary psychology has been a fruitful approach to generating new hypotheses (Buss & Reeve, 2003), so in the Lakatosian sense, evolutionary
psychology is a true metatheory. The hard core, that is, inclusive fitness theory, is protected by the protective belt of confirmed hypotheses. However, the hard core of evolutionary psychology has not led to the unification of different fields. It may be that the generation of novel hypotheses leads to the creation of more different areas of investigation, and thus to more fragmentation, instead of unification.

A last approach to evolutionary psychology as a metatheory is based on the idea that a metatheory should contribute to the major issues in a field. Ploeger, van der Maas and Raijmakers (2008) have argued that inclusive fitness theory alone cannot provide a satisfying contribution to the major issues in psychology, but that evolutionary psychology needs to broaden its scope. Possibilities are the inclusion of dynamical systems theory (e.g., Kenrick, 2001), evolutionary game theory (Nowak, 2006), evolutionary cognitive neuroscience (e.g., Platek, Keenan, & Shackelford, 2007), and evolutionary developmental biology (e.g., Ploeger et al., 2008). We have focused on the last approach, and we have shown that if evolutionary psychology is willing to include theories and empirical findings from evolutionary developmental biology, it can give a unique view on the major issues. If evolutionary psychology can give answers to the questions that have occupied the minds of psychologists for so long, it may truly become a unifying framework for the social sciences.

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Toward a Metatheoretical Integration of Developmental Paradigms

Mark W. Antley

Abstract: This paper shows how a partial consilience might be achieved in the field of human development by means of principles from general systems theory. The author concurs with Sameroff (1989) that it is possible to interpret the mechanistic, organismic, and contextualist paradigms/worldviews (Goldhaber, 2000; Pepper, 1970) in terms of general systems theory. The author selects a major developmentalist from each paradigm and interprets that scholar’s work in terms of systems principles. The following developmentalists were selected: Arnold Sameroff (contextualism), Erik Erickson (organicism), and Albert Bandura (mechanism). The systems principles employed are wholeness and order, self-stabilization, self-reorganization, hierarchical interaction, and dialectical contradiction (Sameroff, 1989). The author addresses the conflicting presuppositions of the major paradigms in order to provide for their theoretical subsuming under systems theory. Finally, the author notes areas of inconsistency that will need to be resolved in the future and calls for further scholarship to translate developmental theory in terms of general systems theory for the benefit of students, scholars, consultants and other practitioners familiar with systems theory.

Keywords: Contextualism, developmental systems, general systems theory, mechanism, organismism.

Interpreting Human Development In Terms of Systems Theory

The field of inquiry that studies and theorizes about human development is fragmented. There is no “Big Bang” theory of human development to form the basis of a general consensus nor is there a universally accepted paradigm to guide research. In an effort to integrate the diverse approaches to developmentalist scholarship, Goldhaber (2000) turned to Pepper’s (1970) metatheoretical paradigms of mechanism, organicism, and contextualism. (See the appendix for more information on these paradigms). Subsuming a century of developmental research and scholarship under just three paradigms was a major achievement, but still, “this is not a very satisfying state of affairs” (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 10), since theories from one paradigm cannot be directly compared with theories from another paradigm because of conflicting assumptions underlying the various paradigms. Nonetheless, Goldhaber (2000) believed “a broad enough conceptualization” (p. 11) could unite the three paradigms into one.

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Perhaps such a conception exists, if only in embryo. As Laszlo (1996) has noted, “systems thinking gives us a holistic perspective for viewing the world around us, and seeing ourselves in the world. It is a way of organizing, or perhaps reorganizing [italics added], our knowledge in terms of systems, systemic properties, and inter-system relationships” (p. 16). In a similar vein, Sameroff (1989) writes:

General systems theory may provide a framework for the combination of [mechanistic, organismic, and contextualist] models. . . . Within such a more general view, interpretations can be made as to why a system appears to function mechanistically from one perspective, organismically from a second perspective, [and] contextually from a third. (pp. 231-232)

Significant scholarship in each of the three major developmentalist paradigms is already based on systems theory, or can readily be interpreted in light of systems concepts. I wish to demonstrate that, in principle, contextualist, organismic, and mechanistic theories can be interpreted using systems principles. Achieving this would be a step in the direction of concilience and allow students, scholars and practitioners steeped in systems theory and systems perspectives to more readily apply the fruits of developmental scholarship to their research and praxis. To demonstrate this conclusively would require an exhaustive analysis and reinterpretation of developmental literature in each of the major developmental paradigms. The goal of this paper is more modest, to take the first tentative steps toward concilience in developmental theory. Using systems principles, I will present and/or interpret the work of one scholar from each of the major developmentalist paradigms, following Goldhaber’s (2000) grouping of major developmental scholars into Pepper’s (1970) metatheoretical paradigms of contextualism, mechanism, and organismism. If this attempt is successful, future scholarship may expand on the approach taken here. We shall begin by examining systems thinking in contextualist research following Goldhaber (2000).

**Contextualist Systems Thinking**

According to Goldhaber:

All developmental [paradigms] look at persons in context. Mechanists do so in a reductionist way that allows them to disentangle independent variables. Organicists do so in a holistic way that allows them to make universal claims about sequence. For contextualists, however, the phrase *person in context* has a somewhat distinct meaning. Specifically, the person and the context are not two discrete entities interacting in some fashion; instead they form one interdependent but ultimately temporary entity…. For contextualists this interdependence means that [human] development is best studied from a systems perspective. (p. 52)

One of the most straight-forward contextualist system thinkers that Goldhaber (2000) identifies is Arnold Sameroff. Being a systems advocate himself, it will not be necessary to reinterpret Sameroff’s work in terms of systems concepts as he has done so already.
Table 1. Theoretical Principles of Development (Note. Adapted from Sameroff, 1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Systems</th>
<th>Developmental Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wholeness &amp; order</td>
<td>Continuity &amp; identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-stabilization</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reorganization</td>
<td>Evolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical interaction</td>
<td>Discontinuity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialectical contradiction</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sameroff (1989) applies general systems theory directly to human development. “Although there are a large number of . . . systems theories” writes Sameroff, “I have settled on five principles the capture the core issues in such perspectives [a] wholeness and order, [b] self-stabilization, [c] self-re-organization, [d] hierarchic interaction, and [e] dialectical contradiction” (pp. 220-221). He relates each of the selected general systems principles to an analogous developmental principle (see Table 1 above). We will look at each of these in turn beginning with wholeness and order.

**Wholeness and order.** “The reason that wholes are more than the sum of their parts,” explains Sameroff (1989), “is that relationships are added that can never be assigned to single elements” (p. 221). He goes on to elaborate that wholes and parts form a nexus wherein the parts constrain and define the whole even as the whole constrains and defines the parts.

Sameroff (1989) suggests “the developmental analog of wholeness and order is continuity and identity;” and “as in the organismic metaphor of the cell, continuity is in the relationship of the parts rather than in their specificity (p. 221).” Even more radically, he asserts that “a family is defined independently of the specific actors, although this definition is itself in flux with the evolution of serial parenting in multimarriage families” (Sameroff, 1989, p. 222). Let us now examine Sameroff’s treatment of self-stabilization.

**Self-stabilization.** In the open system of a living organism, self-stabilization is an ongoing process that involves both homeostasis and homerothesis (Waddington, 1962; Sameroff, 1989). Homerothesis, the process of stabilizing around a moving point, constitutes development inasmuch as new forms of organization are required to enable the system to function at higher levels that are not necessary inherent in the organism, but a functional synthesis of organism and environmental conditions. According to Sameroff (1989):
perturbations that also serve to organize and regulate development. I have labeled the regulatory systems for experience the environotype. The environotype includes a developmental agenda for raising children in which graded changes in the child trigger changes in the environment [as controlled by parents, care-givers, and educators]. (p. 222)

Having seen how Sameroff has used the principle of self-stabilization, let us see how he employs the principle of self-reorganization.

**Self-reorganization.** The process of self-reorganization of an organism in response to environmental change is evolution (Sameroff, 1989). Sameroff cautions that evolutionary changes should not be interpreted to mean that the organism is becoming “better,” but rather more adapted to its environment.

Consider the case of Andy Dufresne in Stephen King’s 1994 motion picture, *The Shawshank Redemption*. Andy never committed a crime until after he was falsely convicted of his wife’s murder. Once behind bars, he uses his knowledge of commerce and finance to create a false identity and bank accounts to launder the proceeds of graft and corruption, eventually embezzling the funds and escaping from the prison.

While we don’t know for sure whether he would have eventually turned to crime, the natural interpretation is that he was driven to these uncharacteristic behaviors by his environment. Superficially, this may appear as a mere change in behavior, but surely there must be underlying psychological and personality changes as well. The principle of self-reorganization seems to be related to the principle of hierarchical interaction to be examined next.

**Hierarchical interaction.** Sameroff appeals to the general systems principle of hierarchical interaction to explain developmental discontinuities. Such discontinuities are a result of alternative descriptions of organic subsystems (Patee, 1973). Sameroff explains:

Each part of a system has a number of properties that can place it in relation to other parts. . . . In a hierarchy, superordinate levels . . . only utilize some properties (i.e., alternate descriptions) of the subordinate level. . . . At the behavioral level society is composed of institutional [systems] composed of individual subsystems. [Individuals] are only valued if they fulfill some defined . . . role in the organization. Whether the individual is male or female, white or black, young or old, physically handicapped or retarded, may be relevant or irrelevant for certain role [descriptions]. Discontinuity is found when alternative descriptions are important in different social contexts or . . . developmental periods. (Sameroff, 1989, p. 225)

In some cases the discontinuities found as a result of hierarchical interaction might lead to dialectical contradictions.

**Dialectical contradiction.** Dialectical contradiction is the “motivational force” in behavioral change (Sameroff, 1989, p. 226) and psychological development (Piaget, 1971). Such contradictions arise naturally as a result of unintended, adverse consequences of actions.
Contradictions may also arise as a result of immature and/or incorrect understandings of objects in the environment of the organism.

Equilibration is the result of an individual’s efforts to overcome contradictions between the subject’s cognitive organization and the object. Each assimilation requires some accommodation to occur because no two experiences are ever identical: and each new accommodation means that the next experience will be assimilated somewhat differently because the subject will have been changed. (Sameroff, 1989, pp. 226-227)

Sameroff is a thoroughgoing systems thinker who presents his theories in terms of systems concepts. Next we will look at a developmentalist from the organismic paradigm who does not claim to be a systems thinker, but who can be readily interpreted in those terms.

An Organismic Theory of Lifelong Development

I asserted earlier that significant work in each paradigm either employs systems thinking or can be interpreted from a systems perspective. In the last section we considered the former; in this one we shall attempt the latter, interpreting an organismic theory using the concepts of systems thinking. We will be looking at the work of one of the great psychodynamic theorists of organismism identified by Goldhaber (2000), Erik Erikson.

Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development

One of the appealing things about Erikson’s work is that he considers human development to be a lifelong process. Trained as a psychoanalyst, Erikson articulated an original developmental theory based on epigenetic, psychodynamic, and sociological principles (Goldhaber, 2000).

Table 2. Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development (Note. Adapted from Erickson, 1997)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Psychosocial crisis</th>
<th>Significant relations</th>
<th>Basic strengths</th>
<th>Core pathologies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Infant</td>
<td>Trust vs. mistrust</td>
<td>Maternal person</td>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Toddler</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. shame, Doubt</td>
<td>Paternal persons</td>
<td>Will</td>
<td>Compulsion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Preschool</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Nuclear family</td>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>Inhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV School age</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>School, neighborhood</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Inertia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal identity vs. role confusion</td>
<td>Peer groups, out groups, role models</td>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>Repudiation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
His theory has eight stages (see Table 2) beginning with infancy with its focus on the maternal person and ending with old age with its greatly expanded focus on humanity (Erikson, 1997). Each stage has its central crisis. If the crisis is resolved positively, the individual will acquire the basic strength of that stage; a negative resolution engenders the core pathology of that stage. Each stage must be resolved, whether positively or negatively, before the next is entered. However, no resolution is final, both in that regression is possible, and that subsequent life events can lead to the revision of the resolution of a previous stage. Also each strength acquired at a prior stage must find a new expression in the current stage. For instance, the hope engendered in infancy should mature into faith in the older adult (Erikson, 1997).

Now let’s examine Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development from a systems perspective.

A Systems Interpretation of Erickson’s Theory

We will interpret Erickson’s theory of psychosocial development using the systems concepts discussed above in the section on Sameroff, namely (a) wholeness and order/continuity and identity, (b) self-stabilization/development, (c) self-reorganization/evolution, (d) hierarchical interaction, and (e) dialectical contradiction. We begin with wholeness and order.

Wholeness and order/continuity and identity. Physically, the system has a continuous discrete identity from birth to death of the organism. Psychologically, continuity is a function of memory and to some extent, imagination—both in the sense in which a child can imagine life as an adult and in the sense that an adult must psychically grapple with the impending existential discontinuity of death.

Psychologically, identity is more complex. Temporal succession notwithstanding, the different stages of one’s life and the different roles one must play (lover, scholar, mother) are distinct; therefore a cohesive sense of personal identity is a construct that either coheres or crumbles depending as much on one’s psychic fortitude as on the social storms and communal anchors one encounters in life. Now let us see how the principle of self-stabilization can be found in Erikson.

Self-stabilization/development. Each of Erikson’s stages has two opposing attractors (an attractor being a point that draws the system to it): a positive one and a negative one. As the system first enters a stage it is unstable and of indeterminate valence (at least with respect to the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Friends, sexual partners</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Exclusivity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Young adult</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. isolation</td>
<td>Coworkers, colleagues, members of household</td>
<td>Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Mature adult</td>
<td>Generativity vs. stagnation</td>
<td>Humanity (or ethnic group)</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>Older adult</td>
<td>Integrity vs. despair</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
current stage) because it is out of equilibrium, having not yet settled on either of the attractors. Development is the movement from an indeterminate state to a determinate equilibrium. If the system moves to a point of equilibrium around the positive attractor, the system can be said to have a positive valence; that is, the individual has a positive outlook and is psychologically healthy for the stage of life she is in.

So, if a toddler who left infancy well nurtured, hopeful, and trusting of her mother is subsequently orphaned and placed with authoritarian foster parents, she may resolve her next stage of development in a state of doubt with compulsive tendencies. This is a psychological development albeit a negative one. Having found the principle self-stabilization in Erikson, let us see how the principle of self-reorganization might be understood.

Self-reorganization/evolution. Over time the system loses its equilibrium, becoming unstable once more due to either endogenous or exogenous changes to the system. The attractor that previously held the system in equilibrium is no longer sufficient so the system reorganizes itself and must seek a new “higher” equilibrium. This change in state is what is meant by evolution.

Imagine a construction worker in his fifties who is in stage VII, middle adulthood. Now suppose he develops arthritis and other age-related physical conditions that force him to retire. Due to endogenous changes in his bodily subsystems he is compelled to evolve into stage VIII, older adult. Perhaps an engineer works for the same company who is also in her fifties. Due to an organizational restructuring, she is offered an early retirement package which she chooses to accept. In her case it was exogenous changes that lead to her evolving to stage VIII, but from a systems perspective it is irrelevant whether the evolution is caused by endogenous or exogenous changes. Let us now consider the systems principle of hierarchical interaction.

Hierarchical interaction. Erikson’s own words sound very much like a systems theorist at this point:

[We] begin with the assumption that a human being’s existence at every moment [depends] on three processes of organization that must complement each other. There is…the biological process of the hierarchic organization of the organ systems constituting a body (soma); there is the psychic process organizing individual experience by ego synthesis (psyche); and there is the communal process of the cultural organization of the interdependence of persons (ethos). (pp. 25-26)

One may infer that the psyche mediates between the levels of soma and ethos, the hierarchical levels directly below and above it; the individual experiences input from both his body (e.g. in the form of hunger or sexual arousal) and from the culture (e.g. in the person of a parent, or priest) which must then be synthesized in some manner (e.g. I can eat after father says grace—or—I can discretely have sex with this partner, but I cannot marry her because she is not of my people.) Finally let’s look at dialectical contradiction.

Dialectical contradiction. Although he used different terminology, Erikson (1997) recognized the principle of dialectical contradiction at work in the process of sublimation, as this excerpt shows:
At present, sexual frustration is recognized as pathogenic, while generative frustration, resulting from the dominant technological ethos of birth control, is apt to remain unrecognized. Yet, sublimation, or a wider application, is the best use of frustrated drive energies. Thus...a new generative ethos may call for a more universal care concerned with...the lives of all children. (p. 68)

In this example the biological generative urge is dialectically contradicted by the technological ethos of birth control which leads to the (at least potential) synthesis of a universal care for the lives of all children. We turn now from one of the great organicists that Goldhaber (2000) classified to perhaps greatest mechanist he selected, Albert Bandura (It may be worth noting that Bandura’s work may be regarded as either expanding or transcending the mechanist paradigm).

**A System’s Interpretation of Bandura’s Mechanistic Social Learning Theory**

Bandura has significant elements of systems thinking in his Social Learning Theory, perhaps most notably his concept of reciprocal determinism (see Figure 1). Reciprocal determinism means that both the person and the environment influence behavior, and vice-versa; the environment shapes the person, and the person shapes the environment (Bandura, 1977).

**Bandura’s Social Learning Theory**

Reciprocal determinism and observational learning form the core of Bandura’s (1977) Social Learning Theory. Simply put, observational learning occurs when persons respond with matching performances to events modeled in their environment. Observational learning has four sub-processes: **attentional, retention, motor (re)production, and motivational processes**.

*Attentional processes* are a function of the modeling stimuli and observer characteristics (Bandura, 1977). Modeling stimuli are characterized by distinctiveness, affective valence, complexity, prevalence, and functional value. Observer characteristics include sensory capabilities, arousal level, perceptual set, and past reinforcement.

*Retention processes.* Retention of the modeled events by the individual is accomplished by **symbolic coding, cognitive organization, symbolic rehearsal, and motor rehearsal** (Bandura, 1977). The first three of these are cognitive processes; the last is a psychomotor process.

Motor (Re)production Processes. Motor (re)production is dependant on the individual’s physical capabilities, availability of component resources, self-observation of reproduction, and accuracy of feedback (Bandura, 1977).

*Motivational Processes* include **external reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, and self-reinforcement**. External reinforcement is traditional Skinnerian conditioning. The discovery of vicarious reinforcement was Bandura’s major breakthrough. Self-reinforcement, whereby an individual internalizes standards of praiseworthiness, is also a significant motivational process, especially as the individual develops her own moral standards (Bandura, 1977).
Figure 1. Reciprocal Determinism (Note. Adapted from Bandura, 1977)

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A System’s Interpretation of Bandura’s Theory

We will interpret Bandura’s Social Learning Theory using the same systems concepts employed above, namely wholeness and order, self-stabilization, self-reorganization, hierarchical interaction, and dialectical contradiction.

**Wholeness and order.** Bandura (1977) sees the environment, the organism, and its behavior as codetermining each other. From a systems perspective the person, behaviors, and environmental prompts/responses form a single system—an organized whole—with each of the components mutually influencing the others.

A cycle may begin with an infant forming a facial expression (perhaps she has gas). The grandparents observing the infant interpret the expression as a “smile” and then smile back and hug and kiss her, reinforcing the behavior, and leading to more smiling in the future.

However, it’s not merely a case of the environment reinforcing behavior; the infant also influences the environment—she “smiled” first! When she gets older she will learn to smile deliberately to be cute or seductive. Having considered wholeness and order, let’s see how the principle of self-stabilization/development can be found in Bandura.

**Self-stabilization/development.** Development is a matter of patterns activity in the system stabilizing over time. Recall that in the systems interpretation the individual is just a part of the system. It is not possible to isolate the influence of different components of the system. Bandura (1997) writes:

Even when new responses are formed entirely on the basis of learning experiences, physiological factors serve as contributing influences. While the organization of behavioral components into new patterns results from experience, the rudimentary elements are present as part of the natural endowment. (p. 16)

Along similar lines he notes that, “complex behaviors . . . are formed through [the] integration of many constituent activities of differing origins. For this reason . . . it is [inappropriate] to categorize behaviors as learned or innate or to try to apportion relative weights to these factors” (Bandura, 1997, p. 17).

The development of speech is a good example of this. Speech is modeled in the environment, and the infant responds. But the infant is just as likely to begin babbling and the mother to respond. The child also wants to express certain things—like a desire to have a cookie—so spontaneous and modeled/reinforced behaviors, along with the volitional effort of the child, all coalesce resulting in the development of speech. Over time the child learns to express/respond to increasingly complex language and may even learn to read and write or to speak other languages. We have seen the principle of self-stabilization/development illustrated in the acquisition of language, now let’s move onto self-reorganization/evolution.

**Self-reorganization/evolution.** Bandura (1977) does not emphasize psychological reorganization/evolution. Perhaps the closest he comes is with his concept of the cognitive
organization process, whereby social inputs are symbolically organized in the mind of the learner. However, a systems interpretation in which the social environment is part of the system under analysis (refer to Figure 1 above) lends itself to interpretation in terms of self-reorganization/evolution. The “self” in this context is the system. It might be helpful to conceive of this “self/system” from a phenomenological perspective. For instance, Heidegger (1962), makes no distinction between an individual and the environment in which she lives, but rather uses the concept of “being-in-the-world.”

Bandura (1986) observes that “through their actions people create [and recreate] their environments” (p. 31). Although the immediate context of this quote emphasizes continuity rather than evolution, interpreting it to support evolution does no violence to Bandura’s thought. After all, he note that, “by [re]arranging environmental inducements, generating cognitive supports, and producing consequences for their own actions, people are able to exercise some measure of control over their own [evolution] (Bandura, 1986, p. 31). The selection of new environments with its concomitant reorganization of one's personal life allows an individual to, for instance, enter graduate school and evolve into a Ph.D. The next systems principle to consider is hierarchical interaction.

Hierarchical interaction. Human learning has a biological component, a psychological component, and a sociological component (Bandura, 1977). The psychological component has cognitive, conative, and affective subcomponents. The sociological component consists of persons in the environment (including symbolic actors in the media) modeling certain behaviors. Whether the behavior is emulated is a function of psychological processes (attention, retention and self-motivation), psychosocial processes (external and vicarious reinforcement), and biological processes (physical capabilities and motor reproduction processes) (Bandura, 1977). Bandura doesn’t explicitly express the interaction of these processes as hierarchical, but such an interpretation arises naturally. We move on now to the final principle of dialectical contradiction.

Dialectical contradiction. Interestingly, Bandura’s social learning theory considers not only the behavior and development of individuals, but also the behavior and development of groups. When writing on groups the principle of dialectical contradiction is apparent where he observes, “when self-determination is restricted by prejudice, those who are affected attempt to remove inequities by altering practices that compromise . . . the professed equality of values of society” (Bandura, 1977, p. 202). He is seems to be thinking of the US civil rights movement of the 1960s and in particular of Dr. Martin Luther King’s I Have a Dream speech. This concludes my analysis of Bandura; we move now to the broader objective of this paper.

Towards a Systems Synthesis of Contextualism, Organicism, and Mechanism

In the preceding sections of this paper I have shown how the work of developmentalists in each of the major paradigms, following Goldhaber (2000), can be interpreted in terms of the general systems principles of wholeness and order, self-stabilization, self-reorganization, hierarchical interaction, and dialectical contradiction identified by Sameroff (1989). Having done this demonstrates that, at least in principle, the systems paradigm can subsume the
contextualist, organismic, and mechanistic paradigms. The constraints of time and space (not to mention my limited expertise) prevented me from undertaking a comprehensive interpretation of all relevant scholars in each paradigm.

However, Jerry Snow (2006, private communication) has pointed out that for the systems paradigm to properly subsume the contextualist, organismic, and mechanistic, paradigms it must “transcend but include” the presuppositions of each. Granted, but it doesn’t have to include all of their presuppositions, just the compatible ones. To facilitate the analysis, I have adapted Goldhaber’s (2000) table comparing the three paradigms/worldviews (see below).

### Table 3. Comparison of Pepper’s Three World Views (Note. Adapted from Goldhaber, 2000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World View</th>
<th>Mechanism</th>
<th>Organicism</th>
<th>Contextualism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalizability</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td>Situation-specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Acceptable Causes</td>
<td>Efficient, material</td>
<td>Efficient, material, formal, final</td>
<td>Efficient, material, formal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Analysis</td>
<td>Reductionist</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Studying the table, we find that both mechanism and organicism hold with universal laws; contextualism sees each situation as unique. Let us also hold with universal laws while recognizing that their manifestation in some contexts will be situation-specific. Mechanism recognizes efficient and material causes. Contextualism recognizes these as well as formal causes. Organicism recognizes all of the above in addition to final causes. Let us recognize that each of these conceptions of causality has explanatory value. Furthermore, let us include the notion of circular causality, what Bandura would call reciprocal determinism. Finally, mechanism employs reductionist analysis, whereas organicism, and contextualism employ holistic analysis. Let us favor holistic analysis while recognizing the contribution of reductionist analysis.

Moving beyond the table, Goldhaber (2000) has related that only organicism asserts that human development has a single ideal unidirectional trajectory; mechanism and contextualism observe multiple trajectories and even the possibility of regression. Let us dispense with the simplistic notion of a single, ideal developmental trajectory and embrace the rich complexity of the phenomenon of human development.

### Implications for Scholarship and Praxis

This paper has demonstrated the viability of translating the different paradigms of developmentalism into the language of systems theory, with an eye toward consilience. Of course, total consilience is an ideal that can be at best partially approximated. Nevertheless, if a broader effort were made to translate the work of developmentalists using systems concepts, scholars working in disparate paradigms might more readily comprehend and incorporate research from other developmental paradigms. Students could more easily grasp developmental theory if they didn’t need to learn multiple dialects of technical jargon. Finally, consultants,
coaches, and other practitioners already steeped in systems thinking, could more readily utilize research findings in their praxis.

In this paper five systems principles were used consistently within each section, but not across sections. The smallest set of consistent developmental systems principles needs to be advanced by further scholarship. If consilience is a worthwhile goal in the field of human development, perhaps others will contribute their own translations of key developmental scholarship into systems theory. Ultimately a metatheoretical integration of developmental paradigms may emerge.

References

Appendix

A Synopsis of Mechanism, Organicism, and Contextualism

As mentioned earlier, the terms mechanism, organicism, and contextualism were coined by Pepper (1970). Goldhaber (2000) made use of them in his text, Theories of Human Development: Integrative Perspectives. (Pepper also discussed a fourth paradigm, formism; however Goldhaber didn’t make use of it.) Given the thrust of this paper, I have used Pepper’s terms as modified and given specific content by Goldhaber. Let us begin with mechanism.

Mechanism

Each of the worldviews Pepper (1970) analyzed has a certain root metaphor. In the case of mechanism, it is the machine. As Goldhaber (2000) observes:

Although any machine could be used to illustrate the concept of development as a mechanistic process, two specific machines—the telephone switchboard and the computer—are... most frequently used. The telephone switch board is a simple mechanism.... When someone dials a phone number, a signal is sent to the switchboard... and the phone rings at the other end. This is essentially a process of linking stimuli with responses—and much of the research in the mechanistic tradition involves the linking of stimuli with responses. The introduction of the computer has added another dimension to the mechanistic accounts of [development]. Unlike the switchboard, which simply makes connections, the computer takes input (stimuli) and does something to it; that is, it processes information. What the computer does depends as much on the nature of the program that is processing the input as on the nature of the input itself. (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 18)

While not specifically a member of the information processing school of developmental mechanicism, Bandura’s (1977, 1986) social learning and cognition theories seem to be relying on a computer-like model of human beings, albeit a highly sophisticated model. We turn next to organicism.

Organicism

The following excerpts give a sense of Goldhaber’s (2000) conception of organicism.

Pepper’s root metaphor for the organismic perspective is the living organism. [The] key element of the organismic view is the process through which elements are integrated to form a synergistic whole. In a synergistic whole, the integrated system, unlike the machine, is more than the sum of its parts.

[The] most significant difference between [organicism and mechanicism] concerns how change occurs. For mechanists, change comes about when an external force ... acts upon an object that is inherently at rest. For organicists, behavioral change is inherent in the living organism itself. ... Change is therefore one of the defining characteristics of living
organisms... This distinction concerning the reason [organisms] change prompts organicists to view development as a unique form of change, ... development is directional....

Although the developmental process in organicism is directional, its outcome... is not preordained. [There] is no guarantee that any individual will ever reach his or her developmental end point. (Goldhaber, 2000, pp. 32-34)

For Ericson, as we saw above, that endpoint was wisdom. Now let’s take a look at contextualism.

**Contextualism**

Finally, here are some excerpts from Goldhaber (2000) on contextualism.

Pepper chooses the historical act as the root metaphor for contextualism. This choice is not meant to imply that contextualism is a world view rooted in the past but rather the meaning of any behavioral event is dependent on the context in which it occurs. (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 47)

It is the character of the quality and texture of an event or historical act, as viewed by the participant, that defines his or her context. And it is the interdependence between the event and the individual, each defining and at the same time being defined by the other that is the focus for the contextualist. (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 50)

One of the ways in which contextualism differs most from the other two world view concerns the issue of direction in development. [Organicists] argue that it is possible to identify a... sequence of developmental stages. ... Contextualists make no such claim... arguing that not one but many developmental trajectories are possible. (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 53)

[The] contextualist perspective on the study of human development directs our attention to the social, political, moral, and economic institutions that sustain and are supported by current assumptions about human activity. (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 55)

Perhaps because of their emphasis on context, contextualists tend to be especially sensitive to the intentional and/or unintentional political and socioeconomic ramifications of developmental theories. This sensitivity is reflected in both their concern for the sociohistorical origin of the hypotheses tested by developmentalists and in their belief the proper purpose of research is in fostering equality and social justice. (Goldhaber, 2000, p. 62)

Given the dispersive character of contextualism, one should not expect any particular contextualist developmentalist to incorporate all or even most of its tenants. Sameroff’s (1989) concept of envirotype reflects his awareness of the significance of context on development. Other contextualist notions are less prominent.
Advaita (Non-dualism) as Metatheory: A Constellation of Ontology, Epistemology, and Praxis

Latha Poonamallee¹

Abstract: Integrating contradictory and mutually exclusive positions is a challenge in building a metatheory. In this paper, I examine how advaita (non-dualism) philosophy is a metatheory. Based on a holistic, non-dualistic ontology, discovery based epistemology, and personal accountability-action-reflection oriented praxis, it provides a useful metatheory for embracing, learning from, and transcending the paradoxes of social life. I use the example of Gandhi as a practitioner of this approach to action and knowledge.

Keywords: Epistemology, metatheory, ontology, paradox, praxis.

Introduction

Metatheories have continued to draw the attention of scholars in different fields (Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Carter & Jackson, 1987; Ritzer, 1988; Tsoukas, 1994). However, the discourse around nature, use and legitimacy of metatheory is a highly contested one. For example, Ritzer (1988, p. 188) while making a useful distinction between metatheory that seeks to lay down the prerequisites for doing theory, and metatheories that take developed theories as their subject matter, also bestows legitimacy on the latter approach as more useful and argues that the former approach prevents us from getting on with theorizing. Another school of thought (Abrams & Hogg, 2004; Furfey, 1965; Carter & Jackson, 1987) takes the position that examining metatheory as a constellation of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions (Carter & Jackson, 1987) is a useful one.

This paper is more aligned with the latter view that an examination of the underlying assumptions about theorizing can increase “theoretical consciousness” (Ritzer, 1988) and provide an alternate framework for inquiry (Abrams & Hogg, 2004). Metatheory defines the boundaries of a phenomenon, its audience, and the level of analysis to study a particular phenomenon (Abrams & Hogg, 2004). Furthermore, each theory depends on a metatheory for its legitimacy (Carter & Jackson, 1987). If a metatheory is defined as a constellation of ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, one of the biggest challenges that it faces is how to integrate the conflicting and paradoxical nature of these assumptions that permeate most social science research. Van de Ven and Poole (1988) define paradox as the simultaneous presence of two mutually exclusive assumptions or statements; taken singly, each is

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incontestably true, but taken together they are inconsistent. This translates into metatheoretical – ontology, epistemology, method/praxis – polarities (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Metatheoretical Polarities in Organizational Studies

In this paper, I advance the advaita (non-dualism) philosophy as a metatheory which contains and transcends the paradox. I describe the advaitic ontology, epistemology, and praxis which together offer a metatheory. To describe this philosophy, I have drawn on the foundational work done by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a renowned Indian philosopher and statesman, Swami Vivekananda, a well-known nineteenth century Indian spiritual and social leader who has provided a series of translations and interpretations of major Hindu texts, and Gandhi, whose life itself was an experiment in the advaitic way of life (Saravanamuthu, 2006).

Advaitic Ontology

Most of the discussion about ontology in social sciences is derived from western philosophical tradition, which is imbued with a style of thinking based on dichotomy and binary opposition (Carr & Zanetti, 1999) and this has translated into a model of incommensurable paradigms. Embedded in this fundamental style of thinking, however, are not only oppositions, but also a hierarchy, in that one or the other polarity is more or less privileged (Carr & Zanetti, 1999). For example, the nature of reality can be either subjective or objective and these views are thought to be irreconcilable (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). However, a small but growing discourse of researchers has begun to address alternative conceptions (Alvesson & Skodberg, 2001; Benefiel, 2005; Bhaskar, 1970; Saravanamuthu, 2006; Tsoukas, 1994; Willmott, 1990). However, these attempts still remain marginal in our field and problematize research endeavors that aim to bridge this conceptual gap. I join this discourse by offering an alternative paradigm that has the capacity to embrace the paradox without having to resolve it through allegiance to one or other position.

*Advaita* philosophy rests on assumptions of non-dualism. The Advaitic’s fundamental tenet is that that all forms of matters are interconnected by an all pervasive energy (Saravanamuthu, 2006). The central texts of this school are Samkara’s commentaries on the principal Upanishads,
the Bhagavadgita and the Vedanta Sutra. This philosophy can be summed up in a single dictum, “Tatsvam Asi,” meaning “You are that,” that meaning the other. Another gem of this philosophy is “Aham Brahman,” “I am Brahman,” and therefore, it is not separate from me. Vivekananda (1992a, p. 359) writes, “All matter throughout the universe is the outcome of one primal matter called Akasha; and all force, whether gravitational, attraction or repulsion, or life, is the outcome of one primal force called Prana.”

This approach does not separate the spiritual from the mundane because they are all parts of the same ultimate reality. Radhakrishnan (2000, p. 32) writes, “It is the soul’s experience of the essential unity with the whole of being that is brought out in the words, “Thou in me and I in thee.”

This philosophy is concerned with understanding human existence as an integral part of a larger and interconnected whole (Saravanamuthu, 2006). This is a socio-ecological relational approach to reality – one that does not separate nature from other living creatures (Poonamallee, in press). All sentient beings are interrelated and part of the same ultimate reality. Saravanamuthu (2006) writes about advaitic philosophy as an appropriate model for sustainable development. It is predicated on the relationship that binds, people, animals, vegetation, and all forms of matter together and the personal responsibility of human beings to honor this relationship through Ahimsa (non-violence). Ahimsa was the concept Gandhi drew from Advaita philosophy to develop and deploy his non-violence strategies, which is addressed in more detail in a later section.

For the advaitis, the objective world exists. It is not an illusion. There are different orders of reality, Brahman being the Ultimate Reality and therefore the mental world or the world of consciousness is as much objective or unreal as the material. Vivekananda (1992b) writes,

Maya is not a theory for the explanation of the world: it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction, that everywhere we have to move through this tremendous contradiction that wherever there is good, there must also evil. (p. 60)

The Ultimate is beyond paradoxes because it contains all the paradoxes. It is at once nirguna (devoid of qualities), saguna (possessing qualities) and is unconditioned and yet conditioned, determinate and non-determinate. In this framework, objective and existential realities are not to be set against each other as metaphysical contraries (Radhakrishnan, 2000). Nor do they finally diverge. In fact, in his exposition on the theory of maya (illusion), Sankara, one of the key exponents of the non-dualistic advaitic philosophy categorically lays out that the objective world or the empirical being (vyavaharika satta) is quite different from illusory experience (pratibhasika satta) and both co-exist. Advaita is cognizant of the contradiction between materialism and spiritual development and it asserts that spiritual-moral development is unlikely to occur until fundamental needs are satisfied (Saravanamuthu, 2006). However, both objective and subject realities are manifestations of the ultimate reality but are not of the same kind or order. Both subjective and objective realities are valid expressions of the Ultimate. But they are different kinds of reality and one cannot be reduced to the other.
Advaitic Epistemology

Ontological assumptions undergird epistemological positions about whether the nature of knowledge is hard, real and capable of being transmitted in a tangible form, or whether “knowledge” is a softer, more subjective, spiritual, or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of unique and essentially personal nature. The fundamental tenet of advaitic epistemology is satchitananda (Existence-Knowledge-Realization/Bliss). It is the process of experiential transformation (Gandhi, 1935) and is inseparable from developing greater sensitivity to the spiritual interconnectedness with the other (Saravanamuthu, 2006). Advaita is governed by non-cognition of duality (davaitasyagrahanam) because the ultimate reality is non-dual and the world of duality is the world of maya (Radhakrishnan, 2000). Freedom is the realization of the Brahman in the individual soul. Unchangeable reality expresses itself in the changing universe without forfeiting its nature. In the Vedantaparibhasa, it is said that all knowledge whether perceptual or conceptual, attempts to reveal reality or the ultimate spirit: “pratyakasaparma catra caitanyam eva” To know or to realize this is the ultimate goal of an advaiti. In this state, vidya (knowledge) and ananda (bliss) come together.

In the advaitic non-dualistic approach, knowledge is not just limited to codified, objectified knowledge but integrates multiple ways of knowing, action, experience, contemplation, and sense-making, all through witnessing of the self, because self is a microcosm of the universe. The assumption here is that everyone has the capacity to witness both empirical realities and subjective experiences and ultimately be free of both of them through knowing. All human development is about moving adhyasa (mistaken notions) and avidya (non-knowledge) to vidya (knowledge). Advaita values anubhava (experience) because the goal of advaiti is to discover the immanent principle within experience and not in a world beyond it. For example, Vivekananda (1992) characterizes experience as a key source of knowledge. In fact, God, in this framework can be considered a metaphor for the dynamics of the unknown: it refers to the workings of an interconnected ecosphere that creates, sustains and destroys in the process of regenerating life (Saravanamuthu, 2006b).

Critical inquiry is considered to be an essential path to examine that which is supplied to us by scripture or the evidence of the senses. Three sources of knowledge are perception, inference, and scriptural testimony. However, memory or tradition is not considered right knowledge because it has no novelty. Nature (swabhava) is the underlying object of a subject – the underlying principle of things. We need one to experience and understand the other. While realization of nature (object) of a phenomenon (subject) is a fact, a theory of reality is an inference (Radhakrishnan, 2000). While perception is the fruit of experience, inference is the fruit of analysis and sense-making through the intellect (Buddhi). Based on one’s stance, the internal processing organ could be manas (feelings), chitta (concentration), buddhi (thinking), or ahamakara (consciousnessness). This philosophy also distinguishes between paravidya (higher knowledge) pertaining to the ultimate reality and the apara vidya (lower knowledge) pertaining to the subjective and objective realities. However, in the state of Caitanyam (pure awareness) there is no differentiation between the knower and the known – ultimately the result of the interaction between the subject and the object.
Law of Karma (Cause and Effect) is a key element of *advaitic* philosophy. This law asserts that every action has a consequence (Saravanamuthu, 2006a) and demands personal accountability. For example, Gandhi (2001) writes about the means and ends using this theory, “They say, ‘means are after all means.’ I would say, ‘means are after all everything.’ As the means so the end. There is no wall of separation between the means is the end” (p. 65).

While deeply anchored in the law of karma, this philosophy paradoxically also recognizes that causal explanation can never be complete. Every finite thing presents the contradiction that it is not only finite but also relative in sense that it hangs on another (Radhakrishnan, 2000). Such is the nature of an interrelated universe. Therefore, truth is constantly discovered through a personal process of discovery. As Krishnamurthy (1969) writes, “Truth has no path, and that is the beauty of truth, it is a living concept.”

**Advaitic Praxis**

Advaitic knowledge is a lived reality – knowledge through praxis. Advaitic praxis is all about the interplay between the contradictions that naturally co-exist in every person (Vivekananda, 1992). He writes,

> We must do our part, because that is the only way of getting out of this life of contradiction. Both the forces of good and evil will keep the universe alive for us, until we awake from our dreams and give up this building of mudpies. That lesson we shall have to learn, and it will take a long, long time to learn it. (p. 63)

Saravanamuthu (2006a) writes that Gandhi’s concept of Swaraj (Home Rule) refers both freedom from internal contradictions as well as structural ones. Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda’s mentor writes,

> Man is born with two tendencies, Vidya guna and Avidya guna – the noble and the base – dormant in him. The former leads him Godward and the latter makes him earth-bound. In babyhood both the tendencies are in equilibrium . . . if he grows in the life in senses, the scale of worldliness goes down with that base weight . . . but if he emerges in spirituality, the scale in him of Godliness goes down toward Iswara (the whole) with that holy weight. (Chidhkhavananda, 1991, p. 650)

However, this type of praxis is not merely about ritualistic religious practice. It is about accepting personal accountability for spiritual development. For example, Gandhi, a man full of godliness writes, “I recognize no God except the God that is found in the hearts of the dumb millions . . . and I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions” (Gandhi, quoted in Tendulkar, 1960, p.58).

Advaita offers four avenues for spiritual development through praxis. They are: Jnana yoga or the knowledge path (Vivekananda, 1992), Raja or mastery of inner spirit (Vivekananda, 1990), Karma or service to other (Vivekananda, 1984), and Bhakti yoga or worship (Vivekananda, 1991). The term yoga refers to the means of transcending private interests. “Yoga means the process, as well as the result, of balancing the different sides of our nature, body, mind, and
spirit, the objective, and the subjective, the individual and the social, the finite and the infinite” (Radhakrishnan, 2003, p. 36). What is important to note here is that out of the four approaches, only one takes the religious route. Gandhi is considered to be one of the exemplars of advaitic practitioners in modern times and one who attained mastery of most of these forms of spiritual development, especially Raja and Karma Yoga (Sarvanamuthu, 2006b). His entire life was an experiment with truth and knowledge (Gandhi, 1993) through action and reflection.

Advaitic philosophy values the intellectual, ethical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. It describes the fourfold object of life (Purusartha). They are desire and enjoyment (kama), interest and wealth (artha), ethical living (dharma), and spiritual freedom (moksa). Kama caters to the emotional and instinctual needs of human life. Artha caters to the material, Dharma to the intellectual, and moksa the spiritual. Advaitic praxis is all about the struggle to know. However, without the action of knowing, knowing is not possible.

For this knowing process, reflexivity that emanates from spiritual consciousness is an important element. For example, Gandhi’s reflexive-spiritual development manifests as his refusal to adhere to imperialist norms and values (Saravanamuthu (2006a). It is an ethic of personal responsibility for action combined with reflexivity. For example, Gandhi (1984, p. 67) himself writes, “Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering. It does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the putting of one’s whole self against the will of the tyrant.”

Operating on the non-dualistic spiritual interconnectedness ontology demands personal responsibility for the other, and in the process transforming oneself and transforming the society. Parameshwar (2006) writes about how eleven renowned social leaders (including Gandhi) drew on their own suffering to transform the world for the multitudes. Gandhi’s strategy for practicing this was the Satyagraha (active fight for truth). Satyagraha is not passive resistance. Gandhi (1993) himself clarifies that passive resistance is not really resistance but a policy of communal suffering. On the contrary, satyagraha is about centralizing discipline for engendering change by bringing together the oppressed and oppressors in action, reflection, and dialogue (Sarvanamuthu, 2006).

Discussion

In this section, I use Ritzer’s (1988) exposition on metatheory to discuss how advaita can be a metatheory and its implications for research. The first one is to increase the “theoretical self-consciousness” because greater self-consciousness can lead to greater understanding of one’s own theory as well as of competing theories (Ritzer, 1988, p. 195). Advaita philosophy serves this function by providing a comprehensive constellation of ontology, epistemology and praxis and can be used to examine a theory developed using this methodology. In this paper, I have described how the philosophy of non-dualism can be a metatheory encompassing the paradoxes of social life. Ritzer (1988) also highlights that the objective-subjective continuum needs more exploration. Advaita philosophy as a metatheory throws new light on this topic. The holistic ontology which contains both the subjective and objective realities provides a socio-ecological relational framework for the interconnectedness of all matter in the world. Because of its holism,
it can accept the subjective and objective realities without having to privilege one over the other. This has epistemological implications for how we study human organizations.

Knowledge according to advaita philosophy is a personal search for the truth and integrates multiple ways and sources of knowing. It includes the sensory perception of a subjective actor, intellectual detachment of reason and logic, all nested within a spiritual consciousness cognizant of the spiritual interconnectedness. This knowledge values both ideal and material realities. Conventional dualistic approach that guides most research today operates under the assumption that material and ideal realities are irreconcilable and a researcher has to pick one or the other as the ultimate truth. Ideal or subjective reality contains entities like consciousness, discursive acts like conversations, stories, and metaphors. Entities that belong to the material realm are hard and tangible. In the model proposed by Burrell and Morgan (1979), interpretive and radical humanist paradigms operate under the assumption of subjective ontology. The functionalist and radical structuralist approaches belong to the objective ontology. However, advaitic holistic ontology allows co-existence of both subjective and objective realities because both of them are expressions of the ultimate reality of oneness. They exist simultaneously and influence each other. To an advaitic practitioner, both material and ideal realities exist and both are manifestations of the ultimate reality. To the uninitiated, these two positions may seem contrary but the advaiti acknowledges the contradiction and embraces it.

For example, Vivekananda (1893a), in his address to the Parliament of Religions, said, “It is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats... It is an insult to starving people to offer them religion. It is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics.”

In the same speech (Vivekananda, 1893b) he also said,

Here I stand and if I shut my eyes, and try to conceive my existence, “I,” “I,” “I,” what is the idea before me? The idea of a body. Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances? The Vedas declare, “No.” I am a spirit living in a body. I am not the body. The body will die, but I shall not die. Here am I in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created, for creation means a combination which means a certain future dissolution. If then the soul was created, it must die.

Similarly, much of Gandhi’s practical philosophy focused on economic self-reliance for the rural poor of India. The chakra (low-tech spinning wheel) became a symbol of a movement. At the same time, Gandhi galvanized the millions of oppressed Indians and inspired the oppressors through his spiritual, moral and political strategies. He uses the term “god” in a reformist sense (Saravanamuthu, 2006). Gandhi (1995, 9-10) writes,

To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above all of these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reasons. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves (pp. 9-10).
The second area that metatheory can contribute to is the linkage between cognitive and communal aspects of a paradigm (Ritzer, 1988). Advaita philosophy is based on the assumption that it can transcend the communal dimensions. Gandhi as an advaitic practitioner has influenced multiple other communities and their transformation. Saravanamuthu (2006) argues that Gandhian-Vedic approach has universal relevance. The history of civil rights movement in the U.S (led by Martin Luther King), anti-apartheid movement in South Africa (led by Nelson Mandela) and a multitude of communal experiments toward social transformation show that these principles are transferable to other cultural contexts outside of India.

The third line of inquiry that Ritzer (1988) raises is the development, refinement, expansion, and application of metatheoretical tools like levels of analysis and micro-macro linkage. Advaita as a metatheory, especially its focus on praxis of dealing with personal and social contradictions offers a new way to look at the micro-macro linkage. Saravanamuthu (2006) provides an excellent example of the micro-macro linkage using Gandhi’s advaitic practice. She writes that Gandhian-Vedic notion of freedom refers to emancipation from the circular dialectic of social contradictions, which arises when an individual engages with the structure. She cites Gandhi’s life as an example of how structural contradictions and personal contradictions get engaged in the deepest way possible through spiritual development and service, thus resulting transformation of self and society.

Finally, this metatheory has the potential to shape and offer new tools for researchers in the action-research arena. In another paper, I have provided an example of how I developed a particular theory in an action-research context, grounded in the advaitic paradigm (Poonamallee, 2009). Advaita philosophy encourages reason, logic, and reflection. Traditions like phenomenology and action research offer frameworks for such self-reflexive process too. Marshall (2001) offers a useful model of “inquiring through inner and outer arcs of attention.” Advaitic epistemology is based on the belief that a subject can view itself as an object. Recent cognition and consciousness researchers advance a similar argument. Grush (2000) writes that a first person perspective allows a system to conceive of itself as part of an independent, objective order, while at the same time being anchored in it and act as a subject. The conventional subjective-objective polarized notion of ontology denies a subject the capacity for objective reflection. From this point of view, most qualitative and especially naturalistic inquiry appears to be subject to subjectivity simply owing to its stance on a researcher’s phenomenological presence. Advaitic philosophy and Gandhi’s extensive reflection on his own spiritual development and struggle of wrestling with the personal and social contradictions offer promise.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented the tenets of advaita philosophy and practice and have argued that this framework fits the requirements to be a metatheory. I have described the ontological, epistemological and practical implications of advaitic philosophy. Advaita ontology is predicated upon the belief that all life in the universe is interconnected and hence life is non-dualistic. Advaita epistemology is about experientially discovering this truth of interconnectedness through praxis. Finally, I have presented the contributions that this framework can offer to theory building in general.
However, there are three challenges in adopting advaita as metatheory. The first one is that assumptions underlying this approach are very alien to the mainstream western philosophies of science that still legitimize or delegitimize new ideas and discoveries. Further systematic research needs to be undertaken to find boundary objects, ideas, and practices that can help in communicating this seemingly esoteric but very practical framework to the mainstream scholars. The second challenge is that because advaitic philosophy privileges ontological complexity, paradox and multiple ways of knowing, it is not amenable to the more commonly understood notions of parsimony in theory building. New and deliberate methodological innovations need to be made to integrate and represent the complexities inherent in this approach. Finally, unlike most mainstream approaches to research, advaitic philosophy offers no off-the-shelf prescriptions. While there are general guidelines, there is no formulaic answer to research problems. Therefore, a scholar who wishes to adopt advaitic philosophy as metatheory needs also be willing to undertake a personal journey of truth through advaitic praxis. However, all these challenges are paradoxically rich and fertile grounds for further research.

References


Evolutionary Psychology, Developmental Systems Theory and Advaita Philosophy as Metatheories: Are the Three Compatible?

Annemie Ploeger

In this special issue different metatheories are proposed, including evolutionary psychology (Ploeger, 2010), developmental systems theory (Antley, 2010), and advaita philosophy (Poonamallee, 2010). Evolutionary psychology is psychology that is informed by theory and research of evolutionary biology, with the idea that knowledge about the evolutionary background of psychological phenomena will contribute to the understanding of these phenomena (Cosmides, Tooby, & Barkow, 1992). Systems theory can be defined as a holistic theory about complex systems in nature. When applied to development, this theory is often called dynamic systems theory, which states that developmental outcomes are the result of the spontaneous emergence of higher-order forms, which are the result of interactions among lower-level components. This process is called self-organization (Lewis, 2000). Advaita philosophy is another holistic theory that presumes non-dualism, i.e., the reality of an individual is identical to that of the world and cosmos. The basic tenet is that all forms of matter are interconnected by an all pervasive energy. Human existence can be placed in an integrated, interconnected whole (Saravanamuthu, 2006).

Different questions can be addressed concerning these three metatheories. One question concerns the correctness of these metatheories: is one of these metatheories the correct one, or is it possible to have different co-existing metatheories, addressing different areas of inquiry? Is it desirable to have one ultimate metatheory, or would this metatheory be too general to be of practical value for the daily work for scientists? Another question that can be raised is whether the different metatheories have the same purpose: is it a metatheory that provides a framework for creating new theories and evaluating existing theories (e.g., advaita philosophy), or is it a metatheory that unifies different subdisciplines (e.g., developmental systems theory, evolutionary psychology)? Another question is whether it is possible to integrate these different metatheories into one overarching view. Are there similarities or are these metatheories in opposite of each other? In this essay, this last question will be addressed.

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2 In this essay, I will use the terms developmental systems theory and dynamic systems theory interchangeably.
On a first view, these three proposed metatheories appear to be very different from each other. Evolutionary psychology is based on theories and empirical findings in evolutionary theory, and focuses on phylogeny (changes over generations), rather than ontogeny (changes in an individual lifetime). Developmental systems theory, on the other hand, has its main focus on ontogeny. Advaita philosophy is based on Hindu spiritualism and has not been embraced by many Western researchers yet. So on the first sight these three different metatheories seem hard to be reconciled. However, some recent debates in the literature have shown that we need to embrace and reconcile different perspectives in order to reach progress in science. Particularly, there have been debates on the value of evolutionary psychology, and the relation between evolutionary thinking and developmental science (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003a; Spencer et al., 2009). In this essay I will briefly summarize this debate, and I will elaborate on the role that advaita philosophy may play in this debate.

**Evolutionary Psychology and Developmental Systems Theory**

Evolutionary psychologists have proposed that we possess many different evolved psychological mechanisms to deal with problems related to survival or reproduction (e.g., Buss, 1995; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). An example is our ability to rapidly learn a fear of snakes, an evolutionary significant stimulus related to survival, opposed to our inability to learn a fear of flowers, or even a fear of guns or cars (stimuli irrelevant from an evolutionary point of few; these stimuli are either not dangerous or were non-existent in our evolutionary past).

This view on evolved psychological mechanisms has been questioned by developmental system theorists (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003a). These theorists argued that evolutionary psychologists focus too much on evolved mechanisms, and that evolutionary psychologists ignore the role of development in the unfolding of behavior and cognition. According to Lickliter and Honeycutt, evolutionary psychologists implicitly assume that these evolved mechanisms are preprogrammed in the genes, and that phenotypic traits are prespecified. They state that:

what offspring inherit from parents is not simply genes, but a structured developmental system. This developmental system provides sources of both stability and variability, and the structure and interactions among components of an organism's developmental system are as causally informative to the development and transmission of phenotypic traits as are the strands of DNA contained within this system. (p. 828)

Because Lickliter and Honeycutt (2003a) wrote their proposal as a frontal attack of evolutionary psychology, it was understandably not well-received by evolutionary psychologists (Buss & Reeve, 2003; Tooby, Cosmides, & Barrett, 2003). Buss and Reeve called developmental or dynamic systems theory obscure and vague, and in a recent paper they claimed that theories that invoke self-organization or dynamical systems have not led to a single new specific prediction or empirical finding (Duntley & Buss, 2008). In an earlier book, evolutionary psychologist Pinker (1997) wrote that:

any explanation of how the mind works that alludes hopefully to some single master force or mind-bestowing elixir like 'culture,' 'learning,' or 'self-organization' begins to sound...
hollow, just not up to the demands of the pitiless universe we negotiate so successfully. (p. 19)

In short, there is great disagreement between evolutionary psychologists and developmental theorists on the issue of evolved psychological mechanisms, and how much impact individual development has on the unfolding of phenotypic traits. In my point of view, there are three ways that open up the debate in a more fruitful way.

First, some evolutionary psychologists have embraced dynamic systems theory and try to incorporate the principles derived from this theory in their work (Kenrick, 2001; Kenrick, Li, & Butner, 2003; van Vugt, 2009). Kenrick (2001) argued that the two frameworks of evolutionary psychology and dynamic systems theory may in tandem provide the foundation for psychology's long-awaited metatheory. He illustrated his proposal with research that is relevant for evolutionary psychology: how does a community of people decide to adopt an aggressive or a peaceful strategy to deal with a particular problem? Initially random interactions between individual members of the community, with compounding reciprocal effects on one another, finally result in stabilizing patterns. These self-organized patterns emerge in all kinds of networks, including those involved in genes, neurons, and groups of people.

Second, some developmental psychologists have tried to develop a new framework that incorporates both ideas from evolutionary psychology and developmental systems theory (Bjorklund, Ellis, & Rosenberg, 2007). These researchers argued that evolved psychological mechanisms could be perceived as evolved probabilistic mechanisms: mechanisms that have been naturally selected, but that are still plastic and their outcomes can be adjusted to environmental input. For example, children with a genetic predisposition to become aggressive and antisocial, will only develop this way when raised in harsh environments. When raised in a normal environment, they will not become aggressive and antisocial (Belsky et al., 2009; Caspi et al., 2002).

Third, I have argued that evolutionary psychology needs to embrace the framework of evolutionary developmental biology in order to broaden its scope (Ploeger, van der Maas, & Raijmakers, 2008). I included dynamic systems theory in this framework. Dynamic systems theory, with its major concept of self-organization, can be applied to individual development, but also to evolutionary processes. Self-organization is not a vague or hollow concept, as evolutionary psychologists Duntley and Buss (2008) and Pinker (1997) have argued. There is a large body of literature in evolutionary biology on the role of self-organization in evolution (e.g., Camazine et al., 2001; Pulselli, Simoncini, & Tiezzi, 2009; Solé & Goodwin, 2000). For example, according to Kauffman (1993), self-organization is a necessary concept in any theory that tries to explain order in nature. On the other hand, I do not believe that dynamic systems theory should replace evolutionary psychology, as some authors seem to suggest (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003a). As Buss and Reeve (2003) have stressed, evolutionary psychologists have made quite a long list of discoveries that would not have been revealed without an evolutionary framework. These discoveries are important scientific contributions. True progress will be made only if the two approaches start working together.
Evolutionary Psychology, Developmental Systems Theory and Advaita Philosophy

The connections and disagreements between evolutionary psychologists and developmental systems theorists have become apparent in the literature. The connections between these two approaches and advaita philosophy are less clear. By searching Web of Science on "advaita and evolution," or "advaita and development," not much literature can be found. So we need to develop a completely new scientific framework to integrate these different views. Let me elaborate on two parallels between evolutionary theory and advaita philosophy, and another parallel between developmental systems theory and advaita philosophy. By considering these parallels, we may be able to integrate these different metatheories, or at least formulate some similarities that serve a common ground.

To start with the parallel between evolutionary theory and advaita philosophy; advaita philosophy tries to understand human existence as an integral part of a larger and interconnected whole. This idea can be compared to the Darwinian idea that the human species is connected with all other species in a tree of life - all species on earth share a common ancestor, a prokaryote that arose around 3.5 billion years ago. This prokaryote arose in some way from the interaction of molecules that were available at that time, so in this way all species including human beings are connected to the world and the cosmos. Whether this connectedness is the same as the all pervasive energy as proposed by advaita philosophy, is an open question.

Another parallel between evolutionary psychology and advaita philosophy is that they call for unification. Advaita philosophy calls for the unification of the self and the rest of the world and the cosmos; evolutionary psychology calls for a unification of different fields in psychology or science in general. These seem to be quite different calls, but it can be seen as a parallel between the way individuals behave in relation to the world, and the way individual scientists behave in relation to the scientific world. Both metatheories call for an opening of the mind, to stop focusing on one's own small world and see the connectedness with other parts of the world.

A parallel between developmental systems theory and advaita philosophy is their focus on holism. The advaita philosophy stresses a non-dualistic view: the division between the self and the world is an illusion; both are part of a larger "system," to borrow a metaphor from developmental systems theory. The objective and the subjective come together when we realize that there is no boundary between the self and the rest of the world. Developmental systems theorists have proposed that:

development is a self-organizing, probabilistic process in which pattern and order emerge and change as a result of transactions among developmentally relevant resources both internal and external to the organism (and not from some set of prespecified instructions). Development is not the result of the interaction of genetic and environmental factors, as neither operate as independent causes; rather, development results from bi-directional and dynamic transaction of genes, cells, tissues, organs, and organisms during the course of individual ontogeny. (Lickliter & Honeycutt, 2003b, p. 869)
Thus, developmental systems theorists view development as a holistic process that involves different components at different levels. This view can be seen as non-dualistic: there is no clear division between genes on the one hand, and the rest of the developmental system on the other hand. In this way we can draw a parallel between developmental systems theory and advaitic philosophy.

Obviously it will be very hard to integrate the three different metatheories of evolutionary psychology, developmental systems theory, and advaita philosophy. Advaita philosophy is a metatheory that provides a framework for creating new theories and evaluating existing theories, whereas evolutionary psychology and developmental systems theory are metatheories that unify different subdisciplines. However, in this essay it was argued that there are some common grounds, that may lead to an overarching view that unites the different proposals.

References


