Metatheories and Organizational Theory:
A Pragmatic Response to Metatheoretical Uncertainty

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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

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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) sub-domain 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 *meta*theory and as such should be acknowledged as skepticism of a higher order than that applied

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[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 *meta*theories as unanswerable metaphysical *meta*questions. Or, as (the later) Wittgenstein could put it (utilizing early Wittgenstein's semantic vocabulary) they are *higher-order non*sense.

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[4]. Again, consider the concept of "God." While the claim that "God exists" is unquestionably untrue within 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 *meta*theory 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 extra-discursive 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 *meta*dilemma 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 *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.

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 *practically* to accept or reject the concept of the unconscious.

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.[5] 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.
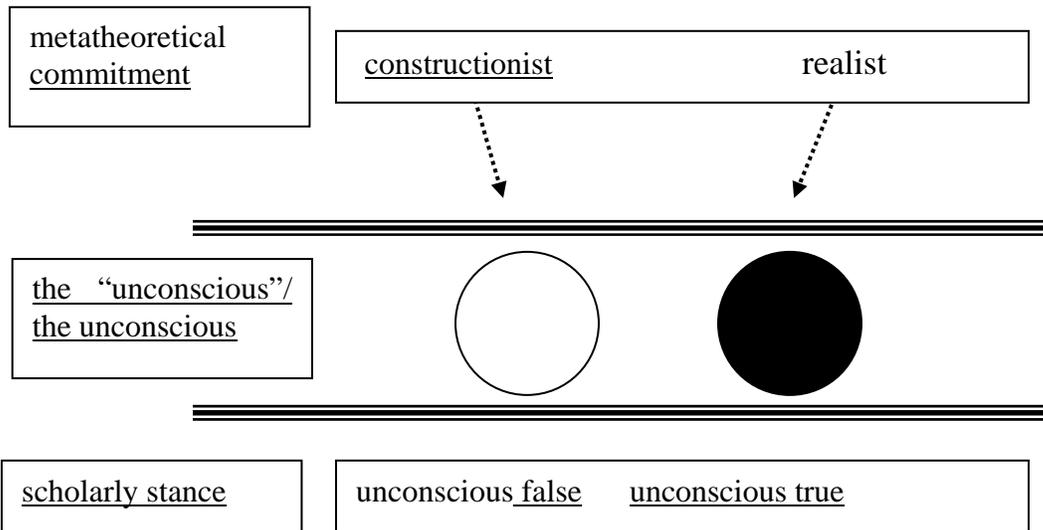
Figure 1. Dealing with the Unconscious - Conventionally
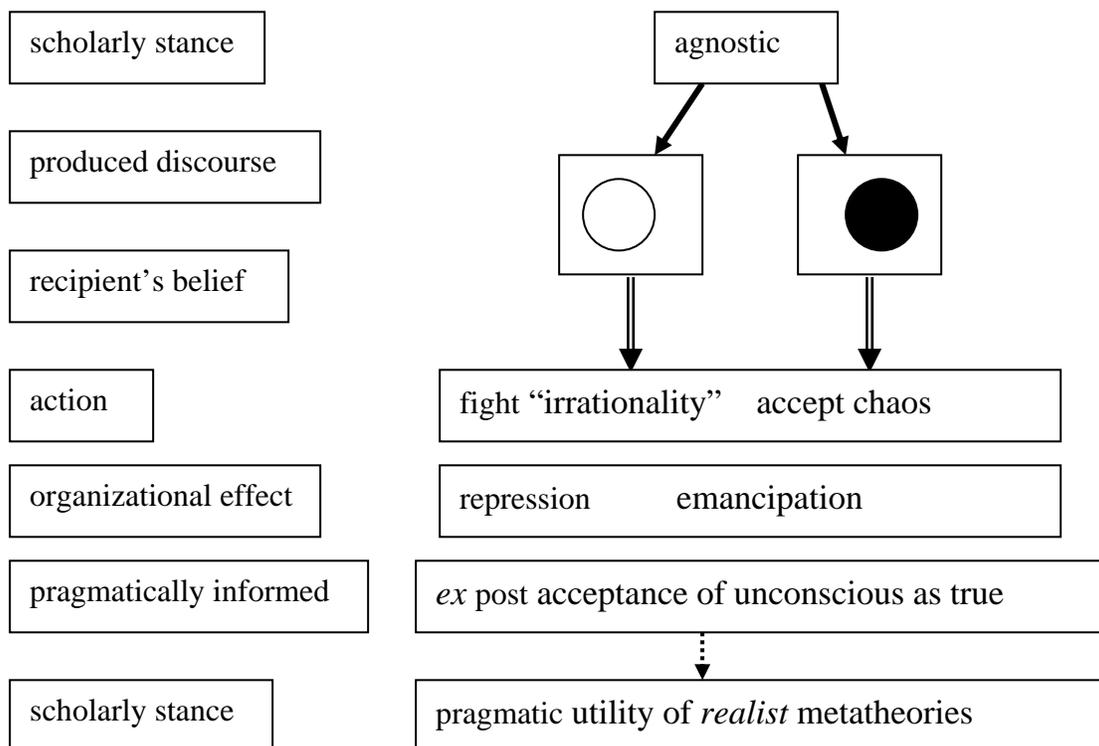
Figure 2. Dealing with the Unconscious - Pragmatist treatment

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 *un*true, 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 *un*desirable. 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 scientist 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.

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