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# Re-envisioning Theoretical Psychology

Diverging Ideas and Practices

Edited by  
**Thomas Teo**

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Editor

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## Preface

This book is based on presentations that were delivered in March 2017 during the midwinter meeting of the *Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* (Division 24 of the American Psychological Association) in Richmond, Virginia. The presidential forum that I conducted at this meeting was entitled, *Re-envisioning theoretical psychology: Rebels with (out) a cause?*, emphasizing not only the need for future-oriented reflexivity, but also the possibility for engaging in contexts of restricted agency. Thus, rather than providing a systematic, coherent overview of theoretical psychology, this book expresses individual visions and ideas for theoretical psychology for the present and future, rooted in the research traditions and biographies of its authors, who have been leaders in the field. I believe that such a re-envisioning is necessary based on the notion that theoretical and philosophical psychologies have “biographies” (as do persons, objects, events, concepts, etc.) and have reached middle-age. The division was founded more than fifty years ago, and since the institutionalization of theoretical psychology as a separate sub-discipline within psychology, decades of reflection have passed, and psychology has “matured.” It seems timely to rethink and re-envision the activities, responsibilities, and hopes of theoretical psychology.

The age of the subdiscipline is only one factor in the call for re-envisioning. Another is the increasing gap between alternative approaches (including theoretical psychology) and the mainstream, as reflected in

changes in society, culture, technology, and the discipline and profession of psychology. Processes of internationalization, an increasing naturalization of the psychological, and demands for applicability, with important intellectual innovations in other disciplines relevant to theoretical psychology have taken place. Do these changes afford possibilities for a new orientation in theoretical psychology? What would a re-envisioned theoretical psychology look like? What new alliances would it make? What should it retain from the past and what should it let fall by the wayside? These questions engender the necessity to rethink theoretical psychology.

On a personal level, having followed theoretical psychology for some time, and having experienced *déjà vu* with certain questions and answers in (theoretical) psychology, it seems that neither rebellious deconstruction nor detail-oriented reconstruction, which may include further rounds of interpretations of classical texts within the subdiscipline, are sufficient. I am looking forward to advances in theory, and to the ways in which theoretical psychology has moved from deconstruction and reconstruction to “construction,” which includes the development of original theoretical-psychological ideas that could inspire the whole of psychology. Is it possible for theoretical psychology to articulate and understand mental life and subjectivity in the conduct of life more adequately? Such a constructive task does not mean abandoning critique and reconstruction, which will remain important tasks of theoretical psychology, as chapters in the book indicate.

Re-envisioning theoretical psychology is a form of rebellion. Rebellious theorizing is an ethos that begins not with an affirmation of the status quo, but with its challenge. It is not only descriptive but also normative. If theory does not work in practice, as the German idealist philosophers would say, then it is not *too bad* for theory, but for practice. Of course, the theory-practice relationship is more complex, but there is a sense in the theoretical community that theory has a value beyond practice. One could argue that whoever has chosen theorizing to be part of their work is already a rebel given the methodologism of psychology and the outsider status, the opportunities, and the prospects that theoretical and philosophical psychology have within the discipline.

One needs to ask what kind of rebellion theoretical psychology is, when theorizing has become a Sisyphean task, and theoretical psychologists

seem to be repeating themselves over the decades about the need for ontological reflection, a better epistemology, or more thoughtful ethics in psychology, with minimal impact on the discipline and practice of psychology. Legitimate concerns are ignored and perhaps this is the punishment for doing theoretical psychology sometimes with grandiosity or with a tunnel vision, which makes us not different from the rest of the discipline. Camus' *Rebel* offers more hope than *Sisyphus* when the rebel not only says *no*, but also *yes*. A theoretical psychologist may say *no* to the scope of traditional work, to ignorance, to injustice, or to the ugliness that sometimes exists in the research and practice of psychology. Yet, theoretical psychology says *yes* to legitimate knowledge, to the dialectics of justice, to informed action, and to the possibilities of artful research and practice. Having said that, one should not forget the dialectics between rebellion and the status quo, between falling in love with one's own convictions and foreclosing on post-rebellious alternatives.

The rebel begins with a feeling that something is wrong and somehow, even if one cannot completely articulate it at the beginning, one knows that something better is possible. This feeling leads to an attempt to pursue psychology in other ways, which do justice to psychological topics and to human beings, not as activities of monologue, but as activities that work best when done collectively and in solidarity. Historically, scientific psychology was a form of rebellion against myth. Yet, the exclusionary and narrow definition of science has become mythological itself as Horkheimer and Adorno have argued. The most fascinating features of science (for me) are not normal science but scientific revolutions, not established notions, but the transformation of ideas. In enacting such transformations, we should neither trust the old emperor, nor the new emperor, but hope that we can do without emperors in psychology as well as in theoretical psychology. Theoretical psychology need not remain subservient to the natural sciences and can expand its boundaries to the full breadth of reflection inside and outside of academia.

In Richmond the presentations were organized around the Chinese three *friends* of winter [Pine (松), II. Bamboo (竹), and III. Plum (梅)], trees that not only can withstand but even flourish in that season, under adverse conditions. The book does not follow the original sequence of presentations because written texts allow for more complexities than



spoken ones. The chapters about re-envisioning involve ontological, epistemological, ethical, and aesthetic reflections, metatheory, as well as reflections on social justice that have become more important in the subdiscipline and in the division. The chapters concern theoretical and practical issues, but they do not reflect a unified theme. They express ideas about theoretical psychology that will find their limits when entering social realities, including academic ones. Although I am intellectually closer to some chapters than to others, I do not see it as my task to censor, assess, or even summarize these chapters through my own horizon.

The chapters demonstrate that the future of theoretical psychology will become more diverse than it stands today. The stream of arguments extends the boundaries of the subdiscipline, combines critique with positive ideas, and draws on the humanities, arts, feminism and even social work, while emphasizing the importance of historical thinking and historiography for theoretical psychology, and thus expanding the concept of theoretical psychology. The chapters also call for a recognition of tradition in theoretical psychology when they emphasize gaining insights from the philosophy of the traditional sciences, combined with empirical studies in the philosophy of science; or when authors argue for an analysis of the metaphysical basis and the ontological basis of the psychological; or when they identify the uniqueness of the psyche. It is left to the reader to assess the degree to which leaders in the field of theoretical and philosophical psychology and in Division 24 have demonstrated the case for re-envisioning theoretical psychology and for the continued importance of theorizing in the discipline and practice of psychology.

Toronto, ON, Canada

Thomas Teo

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# Toward a Poetics of the Other: New Directions in Post-scientific Psychology

Mark Freeman

During the course of the past two decades, calls have been made for establishing what is herein called a “poetics of the Other” (e.g., Freeman, 2000, 2014). In this perspective, the idea of the Other comes to assume a measure of priority over the self in understanding human experience. Moreover, poetics comes to assume priority over theoretics, at least as the latter is traditionally understood. This project need not lead beyond the purview of theoretical psychology. But it does point in the direction of a quite different sense of what theoretical psychology—and theory itself—might mean. In efforts to keep within the basic framework of contemporary academic psychology, this project has generally been framed as a potential contributor to the re-imagining of psychological science (e.g., Freeman, 2011, 2015). This stands to reason; to frame what one does as something other than science, one runs the risk not only of alienating one’s colleagues (whether for one’s putative hostility to science or one’s inability to move beyond binary thinking, here manifested in the form of the science/non-science divide) but also of effectively banishing oneself

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from the discipline proper. It is this idea of the discipline proper, however, that most warrants interrogation. It may be time now to carve a suitable space for thinking more radically about what psychology is and must be. For present purposes, this space may be deemed “post-scientific”—which is to say, it seeks to explore that region of experience which remains after science has done its work. The good news is, it is a large one indeed and well worth the attention of those seeking to “think Otherwise” (Freeman, 2012) about both psychology and the human condition.

## Introduction: “Theory Beyond Theory,” Revisited

The takeoff point for the present chapter is an article written back in 2000 titled “Theory beyond theory” (Freeman, 2000). Drawing on Stephen Toulmin’s important book *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (1990), I sought in that very preliminary piece of work to provide a sketch of a quite different kind of psychology than the one we had been bequeathed. As Toulmin suggested, the “received view” of Modernity, which he traces largely to Descartes and Galileo, brought with it a fourfold transformation: from the oral to the written, from the particular to the universal, from the local to the general, and from the timely to the timeless. Toulmin also noted that this transformation entailed a movement from the *practical* to the *theoretical*, with “theoretical” essentially referring to that sort of conceptual structuring which seeks to contain and encapsulate some feature of reality. It is exactly this movement that gives us the contours of modern science, in psychology and beyond. Now, it might be argued that we, in theoretical and philosophical psychology circles, have resisted subscribing to this “entrapping” (Heidegger, 1977) version of the theoretical owing to its patent scientism. Have we? More to the point: Is it possible that, on some level, we ourselves have remained entrapped within this very entrapping project? I do not wish to speak for others. But looking back at the evolution of my own work over the years, I have come to wonder whether, appearances aside,

some of that work had fallen prey to the very scientism—or, better still, *theoreticism*—it had sought to transcend. More on this in due time.

Returning to Toulmin (1990), the problem with the aforementioned “received view” is not only that it has been employed to support a highly abstract, decontextualized, rationalistic perspective on inquiry but that it has eclipsed and thereby nullified other possible perspectives.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, one of the main aims of the book was to call attention to the fact that, alongside the Cartesian/Galilean worldview, grounded in natural philosophy, was a quite different one, grounded in Renaissance humanism, most notably in the figure of Montaigne. So it is that Toulmin came to speak of “the dual trajectory of Modernity,” his aim being nothing less than to resurrect this buried history and to thereby “reappropriate the reasonable and tolerant (but neglected) legacy of humanism” and “to find ways of moving on from the received view of Modernity—which set the exact sciences and the humanities apart—to a reformed version, which redeems philosophy and science, by reconnecting them to the humanist half of Modernity” (p. 180).

I am not sure whether to fully follow Toulmin in this move. Am I interested in “redeeming” philosophy and science in this way? Do I want to restore to “science” this eclipsed humanist legacy so as to humanize it? For some time, that did in fact appear to be the goal. Hence my recourse to such ostensibly paradoxical ideas as “poetic science” (Freeman, 2011). It was in that work, among others, that I sought to take to task contemporary psychology for not being scientific enough, my (seemingly clever) argument being that, owing to its very scientism and theoreticism, it had violated the demand to be faithful to the object of its inquiry (i.e., us) and had thus stopped irreparably short of being *authentically* scientific. How, then, might it become so? Precisely by being more *art-ful* in its work. I even came up with a paradoxical slogan of sorts to usher in this putatively new endeavor: *the more art, the more science*. I remain attracted to this idea, which essentially calls for a much more open and capacious conception of what science is and does. For political reasons especially—

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<sup>1</sup> Brent Slife’s work on “strong relationality” and the problem of “abstractionism” (e.g., Slife, 2004; Slife & Ghelfi, 2019) is certainly relevant in this context as are Fowers’ (e.g., 2005) and Richardson’s (e.g., 2012) reflections on the relevance of virtue ethics for psychological theory and practice.

i.e., the fact that, like it or not, science still remains the name of the game in the discipline of psychology—it stands to reason that we would continue to play the game, however subversively, by re-imagining and reworking the boundaries at hand. At the same time, and as I “confessed” in some recent work (Freeman, 2015), I have come to feel, at times, that this humanizing project is somewhat disingenuous. “This is science too!” I in effect cry. “This deserves as much of a place in the hallowed halls of the discipline as what you do!” (“Let us in!”) Do we really *want* in? Do we really need to play this game?

I am not interested in engaging in science-bashing. Generally speaking, it’s foolish and pointless. Nor, however, do I feel the need to kowtow to the scientific project by forcing all the things we more humanistically-inclined types do under the umbrella of science. But what else is there? What else might psychology be? Toulmin had provided some helpful clues through his proposed reappropriation of the humanist legacy, which, in effect, sought to reverse the fourfold transformation introduced earlier by turning more in the direction of the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely. This reappropriation, I had said at the time, seemed to characterize a number of trends in theoretical and philosophical psychology.

In returning to the dimension of the oral, with its corollary emphases on communication, rhetoric and discourse, we can see the contours of pursuits such as discourse analysis and discursive psychology. In returning to the particular, there come to mind efforts in narrative psychology and ethnography. Returning to the local is generally consistent with ideas embraced by cultural psychologists and sociolinguists; while referring to the timely ... would seem consistent with efforts on the part of social constructionists and critical psychologists, among others. (Freeman, 2000, pp. 72–73)

As I went on to state, “Judging by appearances, then, many recent trends in theoretical psychology are largely in keeping with the new cosmopolis identified by Toulmin” (Freeman, 2000, p. 73).

Having offered this upbeat rendition of things, I quickly went on to undermine it. For, “What we tend to find in a good portion of theoretical psychology ... is a sort of hybrid enterprise: committed, on the one hand,

to many of the ideals found in Toulmin's fourfold return but, on the other still wedded to the rationalistic abstractness of the Cartesian worldview and still committed to the separation of the sciences from the humanities" (Freeman, 2000, p. 73). Much of theoretical psychology, I added, thus remains in

a liminal state, mid-way between the old cosmopolis and the new: despite the desire on the part of many to humanize their inquiries, indeed to bring them closer to the concerns of the humanities, there remains a kind of gravitational pull backward, toward the rational, the scientific, the theorizable. What is to be done? More specifically, what would it take for theoretical psychology to move beyond this liminality and to follow through on the humanizing process? (p. 74)

It was at that juncture that I offered the conviction "that there exists the need for at least a portion of theoretical psychology to move beyond theory—as ordinarily conceived—altogether," that it "simply abandon its commitment to theoretical scientificity and that it become more closely tied to the humanities." The main reason: exploring the concrete details of practical experience, in the way Toulmin and others (e.g., Nussbaum, 1990) had proposed, pointed in the direction of a very different enterprise, one closer to "poetics" than to "theoretics" (p. 75). It was also at that juncture that I made one of my first forays into the idea of the "Other," especially as addressed by Emmanuel Levinas (1996, 1999). Why turn toward the Other? One reason was Levinas's (1996) insistence on the particularity and irreducibility of the other person. "Concrete reality," he had written, "is man [and woman] always already in relation with the world. These relations cannot be reduced to theoretical representation. The latter would only confirm the autonomy of the thinking subject, ... the subject closed in on itself" (p. 19). Another reason was his insistence on the primacy of the ethical dimension, the idea that, before there is category, concept, *theory*, there is the magnetic pull of the Other, calling me out of myself, beyond myself. A third, and related, reason had to do with Levinas's still broader aim of "thinking Otherwise" (Freeman, 2012) about the human condition, which highlights the importance of psychology moving from its fundamentally ego-centric perspective to

what I have come to call an “ex-centric” perspective, predicated as it is on the magnetic, centrifugal pull of the Other, both human and non-human.

By way of summing up the 2000 article, I wrote the following:

(T)he project of theory, which “entraps the real and secures it in its objectness” (Heidegger, 1977, p. 168), is correlative with the primacy of the sovereign subject, the Cartesian *cogito*, seeking to represent the world qua object, thing, *It*. The displacement of emphasis, from the *cogito* to the Other, in turn, requires the movement beyond theory, toward the poetic, where truth becomes less a matter of adequacy to the object than fidelity—phenomenological *and* ethical—to others, particularly those in need, who call forth our responsiveness and care. Hence the idea of a “poetics of the Other”. (p. 76)

The idea of the Other, I clarified, was not to be restricted to the human other but “may usefully be extended to those non-human regions of ‘otherness’ encountered, for instance, in aesthetic and religious experience as well. These too entail the displacement of the *cogito* and, arguably, require different modes of thinking and writing than those ordinarily associated with theoretical reflection” (p. 76).

As for where “theory” fit into this view, I pulled another putatively paradoxical maneuver by underscoring the importance of “theorizing the untheorizable.” But what could this possibly mean? It meant (re)turning to a different rendering of the very idea. As George Steiner (1989) had argued, “The word ‘theory’ has lost its birthright. At the source, it draws on meanings both secular and ritual” and “tells of concentrated insight, of an act of contemplation focused patiently on its object” (p. 69). This would change in the sixteenth century, “with the inward shift and displacement of understanding into the ego,” with the result that the term came to be seen as “a subjective speculative impulse” to be “tested and proved by corresponding facts, by the mirroring evidence of empirical reality” (p. 70). This suggests that, alongside the need for reappropriating the legacy of humanism, is the need for reappropriating the idea of theory itself. Along the lines being drawn here, I might have titled the 2000 piece “Theory *before* theory” rather than “Theory *beyond* theory”—not just for the sake of harking back to an older version of the idea but for the

sake of highlighting the *priority* of that sort of patient, Other-directed contemplation which precedes the kind of speculative formulating that has come to characterize the theoretical enterprise.

## The Power of *Poiesis*

So: a poetics of the Other, infused by a new/old version of “theory” that would appear to fit well with the project. The article I have been referring to was, in the end, a kind of promissory note—a prolegomenon, as it were, to the larger, more comprehensive work that was to follow it. There have been follow-ups here and there, most visibly in *The Priority of the Other* (Freeman, 2014). But the poetic dimension remained muted in that work. Moreover, I continued to issue the call in that text for “poetic science,” my still-remaining assumption being that some measure of scientificity, broadly conceived, was a requirement. As already noted, I have begun to question that assumption, radically. Others—for instance, Thomas Teo, in his recent (2017) work on the “psychological humanities”—have begun to do so too. I realize that it is no easy task to simply declare that (a portion of) psychology be “post-scientific.” Whether one likes it or not, the argument may go, science is what the discipline has come to be, or at least aspire to; and we hardly need theoretical and philosophical psychology interlopers declaring the extant rules null and void. Can psychology become truly *other* than what it currently is?

In order to begin to make the case, it is only fitting that I turn briefly to Toulmin once more—this time, to another important work, titled *Return to Reason* (2001). As Toulmin reminds us once again, “Not until 1600 A.D. was there any widespread tendency to insist on the superiority of theoretical abstraction and logical deduction, at the expense of directly human modes of analysis” (p. 29). There is no questioning the advantages that accrued from this tendency. But the fact is,

Problems begin when people forget what limits they accepted in mastering the systematic procedures of their disciplines. Once forgetfulness sets in, the ground is prepared for misunderstandings and cross-purposes: the selective attention called for in a disciplined activity is elevated to the status



of being “the one and only right way” of performing the tasks in question, and the possibility of approaching them from a different standpoint, or with different priorities, is ignored or, we may say, “bracketed off.” (p. 42)

Such bracketing off need not be harmful “if it leaves open the possibility of other, alternative procedures: selective attention is one thing, blinders are another” (p. 42). Indeed. Following Toulmin, we would surely do well in psychology to be more pluralistic and welcoming, not only of alternative “procedures” but alternative modes of exploration and inquiry. But the problems at hand go deeper, and the reason, I suggest, is that much of psychology has simply been *misconceived* as science—especially a science of the sort it has aspired to become.

For years, I told my students that I had no problem at all with what psychology does. The problem was what it *didn't* do. This was by of saying that I respect my colleagues (which I generally do), am perfectly fine with what they do, and am merely issuing a call for the more pluralistic enterprise that Toulmin is pointing toward. This has also been the rallying cry of the Society for Qualitative Inquiry in Psychology (Gergen, Josselson, and Freeman, 2015), now housed in the Division of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods. As former President of the Society, suffice it to say that I have supported it strongly and continue to do so. But the truth of the matter is, I am not entirely fine with what the discipline is doing, I question much of what my colleagues do, and I am ambivalent about the institutionalized “marriage” of quantitative and qualitative methods. Indeed, I am, at times, ambivalent about the ascendancy of qualitative inquiry itself, much of which remains problematically tethered, in my view, to the project of psychological science, now enlarged. We are in the club. The club is growing. Why not just celebrate? It's possible, I suppose, that the very success of the mission is a letdown. The fight to get our foot in the door of the discipline “proper” had been energizing. Now that it's over (sort of), that energy has diminished. And, of course, there's the fact that the discipline remains largely intact and that much of it is utterly wrongheaded. Psychology is now a STEM discipline, we are told. *Really?! Who decreed that?*

According to Toulmin (2001), perhaps the surest inroad into the kind of practical knowledge being advanced comes in the form of narratives.

When considering medicine and certain areas of psychology, such narratives frequently emerge as case histories geared toward addressing specific concerns. “But, when a clinician’s attention widens to embrace things about a patient that go beyond these concerns, and faces human experience as a patient lives it, the resulting narratives are more like those we look for in the writings of biographers and even novelists” (p. 125). This kind of attention need not be restricted to clinicians, of course. As evidenced by the evolution of narrative psychology, among other subfields of psychology, there has emerged significant interest on the part of many to adopt a similar approach in their own work (e.g., Bruner, 1990; Freeman, 1993; McAdams, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988). This in turn suggests that movement in the direction of the psychological humanities has already begun. What would it take for this movement to more fully realize itself? What might be its “rallying cry” and most compelling rationales?

One such rationale is the idea that *poiesis* entails disclosure, revelation, the “unconcealment” (Heidegger, 1971) of meanings that had theretofore been dormant or inchoate. Through poetry, Jay Parini (2008) has written, “A whole world becomes available to readers that was not there before” (p. 25). Octavio Paz (1967) speaks to this as well in his consideration of the “strangeness” that may emerge when the familiar has been poetically defamiliarized: “Strangeness,” he writes, “is wonder at a commonplace reality that is suddenly revealed as that which has never been seen before” (p. 112). And yet, even amidst this never-having-been-seen, there can remain a measure of familiarity, recognition. William James (1982 [1902]) addresses this phenomenon in his discussion of mystical experience. “The simplest rudiment of mystical experience,” he writes, “would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one. ‘I’ve heard that said all my life,’ we exclaim, ‘but I never realized its full meaning until now’” (p. 382). Such recognition, Gadamer (1986) adds, means “knowing something as that with which we are already acquainted,” and it “always implies that we have come to know something more authentically than we were able to do when caught up in our first encounter with it” (p. 47). The situation being described here is a curious, even paradoxical, one. Even amidst the aforementioned process of *defamiliarization* there is a kind of *refamiliarization*—i.e., a process of seeing anew.

As for why this dual process we are considering is so important, Marilynne Robinson (2012) puts the matter well: “We live on a little island of the articulable, which we tend to mistake for reality itself” (p. 21). Interestingly enough, Robinson, in a later (2015) work, refers to another kind of island too, one that brings us still closer to present concerns. Here, she refers to that

vivid sense of mine that everything is much more than itself, as commonly reckoned, and that this imaginary island is the haunt of real souls, sacred as they will ever be, though now we hardly know what this means. Paul says we make take the created order as a revelation of God’s nature. We now know that there is another reality, beyond the grasp of our comprehension yet wholly immanent in all of Being, powerful in every sense of the word, invisible to our sight, silent to our hearing, foolish to our wisdom, yet somehow steadfast, allowing us our days and years. This is more than metaphor. It is a clear-eyed look at our circumstance. (p. 224)

And insofar as we can access such circumstance—which is, arguably, one of the central functions and purposes of *poiesis*—we will be that much more likely to find in it a true home (Freeman, 2014, 2018).

Given some of what is being said here, it may seem that the perspective being advanced is too wedded to what is good and redemptive and is thus insufficiently cognizant of our profound limitations and vulnerabilities.<sup>2</sup> But making the world visible is not restricted in this way. As Rebecca Solnit has noted in *The Faraway Nearby* (2014),

Many of the great humanitarian and environmental campaigns of our time have been to make the unknown real, the invisible visible, to bring the faraway near, so that the suffering of sweatshop workers, torture victims, beaten children, even the destruction of other species and remote places, impinges on the imagination and perhaps prompts you to act. It’s also a narrative art of explaining the connections between your food or your clothing or your government and this suffering far from sight in which you nonetheless play a role. (p. 53)

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<sup>2</sup> See especially Fowers, Richardson, and Slife’s recent (2017) *Frailty, suffering, and vice: Flourishing in the face of human limitations*. See also Miller (2004) for related reflections.

As for the suffering that sometimes comes to visit ourselves, “in your own home or bed or life,” it “can be harder to see,” and so too for “the self who is implicated” (p. 53). Whether faraway or nearby, the challenge and the task remain much the same: to make the unseen seen, the unfelt felt, the unknown known.

“What do writers do when they seriously notice the world?” James Woods asks in *The Nearest Thing to Life* (2015):

Perhaps they do nothing less than rescue the life of things from their death—from two deaths, one small and one large: from the “death” that literary form always threatens to impose on life, and from actual death. I mean, by the latter, the fading reality that besets details as they recede from us—the memories of our childhood, the almost-forgotten pungency of flavors, smells, textures: the slow death that we deal to the world by the sleep of our attention. By congested habit, or through laziness, lack of curiosity, thin haste, we stop looking at things. (p. 58).

The task, in short: “to rescue this adventure from this slow retreat” (p. 59).

At the heart of all of these poetic projects is what Woods (2015), among many others, simply refers to as “noticing”: “To notice is to rescue, to redeem, to save life from itself” (p. 63). We might also bring the somewhat more formal term “attention” into the picture here, seeing it as a counterweight, of sorts, to the “ordinary oblivion” that is, arguably, the default condition of our lives (Freeman, 2014). But of course our task, as psychologists, is not only to attend to the world; as writers—and, in some cases, as artists working in other mediums than the written word—it is, as above, to make it seen, felt, and known by the work we do. This is the “poetics” part of the project of crafting a “poetics of the Other.” It is time now to turn more directly to the idea of the “Other” itself.

## In Service of the Other

I almost titled the previous section “The Primacy of *Poiesis*.” It wouldn’t have been entirely unfounded. But it would have been misleading. This is because before *poiesis* there is the *world*, calling it forth. As Mary Oliver

tells us, in her most recent book, *Upstream* (2016), her biggest sources of inspiration as a writer were the natural world and the world of literature. “And this is what I learned: that the world’s *otherness* is antidote to confusion, that standing *within* this otherness—the beauty and mystery of the world, out in the fields or deep inside books—can re-dignify the worst-stung heart” (pp. 14–15). None of this nullified the griefs that would, inevitably, come her way. “But there is, also, the summoning world, the admirable energies of the world, better than anger, better than bitterness and, because more interesting, more alleviating” (p. 20). Oliver’s conclusion, therefore: “So, it comes first: the world. Then, literature. And then, what one pencil moving over a thousand miles of paper can (perhaps, sometimes) do” (p. 21).

It can be enthralling, indeed. On the occasion of presenting his inaugural address to the Collège de France (in December, 1981), the poet and critic Yves Bonnefoy recollects his initial attraction with the “excess in words” highlighted in surrealist writing.

What a call, as if from an unknown heaven, in these clusters of lawless tropes! What energy, it seemed, in this unpredictable bubbling up from the depths of language! But once the initial fascination was over, I took no joy in these words which I was told were free. I had before my eyes another kind of evidence, nourished by other poets, the evidence of running water, of a fire burning peacefully in our daily existence, and of time and chance of which these realities are made, and it seemed to me fairly soon that the transgressions of automatic writing were less the desired surreality, existing beyond the too superficial realisms of controlled thought whose signifieds remain fixed, than a reluctance to raise the question of the self, whose richest potentiality is perhaps in the life that one takes on day after day, without illusions, in the midst of what is simple. What are all the subtleties of language, after all, even turned upside down in a thousand different ways, next to the perception one can have, directly, mysteriously, of the movement of the leaves against the sky, or of the noise fruit makes when it falls into the grass? And always throughout this whole time I kept in mind, as an encouragement and even as a proof, the moment when the young reader opens passionately a great book and finds words, of course, but also things and people, and the horizon, and the sky: in short, a whole world given all at once to his thirst. (1989, p. 162).

Notice what is being said here: Somehow the world—the movement of leaves, the noise of falling fruit—can find its way into words, such that another world emerges. And “this world which cuts itself off from the world seems to the person who creates it not only more satisfying than the first but also more real.” The consequence is that we, as readers, may experience the “impression of a reality at last fully incarnate” (p. 164). Something has been realized, made real; and in this making, the world without may be re-found.

Robinson (2018) cites a quote from the composer Robert Schumann that goes roughly as follows: “to compose music one need only remember a song no one has ever heard before.” Robinson herself goes on to speak of “the sense of answering to what is unconsciously and intimately known, perhaps known more deeply because it is still very widely potential, the song we could not know we yearned to hear” (pp. 110–111). What a strange idea! “Does art call up a response that is essentially the recognition of a new thing?” (p. 111). I suppose we can set aside this brain-teaser. One thing seems clear in any case: “Experience demands a richer vocabulary than theory can give it” (p. 112). It also demands unwavering attention to and respect for what is *other*, both human and non-. This is what is primary; this is what has priority. And before it, in its inexhaustible abundance, one must turn to the poetic, broadly conceived.

Why “must” one do so, though? Were I to have simply issued a call to the poetic—as in, “Here’s another way of going about exploring things”—there wouldn’t be much to contest. But my claim is in fact a stronger one, the call in question being nothing short of a necessity. And the reason it’s a necessity is that the living presence of the reality we call “human” actively resists theoretical enclosure and thereby requires a mode of exploration suited to its nature. As Heidegger (1977) has argued, there is something “concealed” in the view of science understood as the theory of the real. “Theory identifies the real ... and fixes it into one object-area.” For this reason, “Scientific representation is never able to encompass the coming to presence of nature; for the objectness of nature is, antecedently, only one way in which nature exhibits itself” (p. 174). Heidegger is discussing physics here, and his point would seem to be a relatively straightforward one: Physics does not, and cannot, deal with the “whole” of nature but only a portion of it. “Nature thus remains for the science of

physics that which cannot be gotten around” (p. 174). When it comes to human reality, we can surmise, this situation would seem that much more unassailable. It too is that which cannot be gotten around. It exceeds whatever theoretical enclosure we might wish to provide in order to contain it. This is not necessarily a fault of science. Science itself is, arguably, predicated upon such enclosure; we ought not fault it for what it is patently unprepared to do. And it is patently unprepared to address the living presence of human reality.

Gabriel Marcel’s (1950) distinction between “presence” and “object” may be helpful in this context. As he explains,

As always in the higher reaches of thought, we must be on our guard against the snares of language; when I distinguish the notion of a presence from that of an object, I run the risk, of course, of turning a presence for some of my listeners, into a sort of vaporized object that contrasts rather unfavourably with the tangible, solid, resistant objects that we are used to in what we call real life. But, in fact, when we say that a presence must not be thought of as an object, we mean that the very act by which we incline ourselves towards a presence is essentially different from that through which we grasp at any object; in the case of a presence, the very possibility of grasping at, of seizing, is excluded in principle. (p. 255)

Furthermore, “In so far as a presence, as such, lies beyond the grasp of any possible prehension, one might say that it also in some sense lies beyond the grasp of any possible comprehension” (p. 256). What kind of act is it by which we incline ourselves toward a presence? Grasping, one can say, is something *I* do; I will it and control it. A presence, on the other hand, “is something which can only be gathered to oneself or shut out from oneself, be welcomed or rebuffed” (p. 255). That is to say, it comes *before* the I; its otherness is *prior* to my will, my control.

Jean-Luc Marion’s (2008) consideration of “the saturated phenomenon” is relevant here as well. The saturated phenomenon is that which “refuses to let itself be looked at as an object, precisely because it appears with a multiple and indescribable excess that suspends any effort at constitution.” This doesn’t mean that it cannot be addressed and explored. “To define the saturated phenomenon as a non-objective or, more exactly,

nonobjectivizable phenomenon in no way indicates a refuge in the irrational or the arbitrary.” On the contrary, “this definition refers to one of its distinctive properties: although exemplarily visible, it nevertheless cannot be looked at”—if, by “looked,” we mean “under the control of the one who is seeing” (p. 43). The constituting *I* is thus displaced from this perspective, dethroned. Indeed, “Far from being able to constitute this phenomenon, the *I* experiences itself as constituted by it.” This is “because it no longer has at its disposal any dominant point of view over the intuition that overwhelms it.” As such, “it becomes a *me* rather than an *I*” (p. 44). As Marion goes on to note, we ought not to consider the saturated phenomenon a “limit case, an exceptional, vaguely irrational, in short, a ‘mystical’ case of phenomenality” (p. 45). On the contrary, we find the saturated phenomenon whenever we encounter those phenomena that, by virtue of what they patently *are*, resist the dominating efforts of the imperial *I*. “(W)hen and why must one resort to the hypothesis of the saturated phenomenon?” The answer is basic enough: “One must do so each time one admits that it is impossible to subsume an intuition in an adequate concept...—in other words, each time one must renounce thinking a phenomenon as an object if one wants to think it as it shows itself” (p. 127). The flesh and blood human, standing before me, visible yet utterly unassimilable to my grasp, my comprehension, would appear to be a notable one.

Thus far, it has been suggested that human reality, understood as presence or phenomenon rather than object, eludes the kind of conceptual—and theoretical—containment science generally seeks. We had no reason to fault science for this; it is what it is. We can, however, fault science—or at least some of those who aspire to be scientists—to the degree that it seeks to colonize that which would appear to be “out of bounds,” as it were, owing to the unobjectivizable phenomenality of its presence. Heidegger’s (1977) language of entrapment is thus particularly, and problematically, apt in this context. In much of contemporary psychology, the human animal, wild and unruly in its way, is caged and domesticated, subjected to this experiment or that inventory, all in the hope that the resultant data will allow us to piece back together a portrait of who and what we might be. Unfortunately, it is, inevitably, too late.



It's not just that human reality, as living presence, eludes such entrapment, however. Following Levinas (1999), especially, it's that certain features of human reality—most notably, “the face of the Other”—hold us in thrall: “there arises, awakened before the face of the other, a responsibility for the other to whom I was committed before any committing, *before* being present to myself or coming back to self” (1999, pp. 30–31). This responsibility, therefore, “is not reducible to a thought going back to an idea given in the past to the ‘I think’ and rediscovered by it” (p. 32). Rather, it issues *from the Other*. Indeed, “It is because there is a vigilance before the awakening that the *cogito* is possible, so that ethics is before ontology” (p. 98). Levinas goes on in this text to address the problem of representation, not only in the context of the beholding of the Other, but in other contexts as well, and is particularly interested in questioning “the exclusive privilege that Western culture has conferred on consciousness” (p. 125). On this account, there is “a meaningfulness prior to representation, in which transcendental philosophy situated the origin of thought” (p. 130), and this meaningfulness, immanent in the face of the Other, among other phenomena, calls for something *other* than science-style theorization. Indeed, and again, if we are to speak of theory at all, it is that form of it which *precedes* such theorization and which entails what Heidegger (1977) has referred to as “the reverent paying heed to the unconcealment of what presences” (p. 164)—in effect, a kind of mindful beholding of and surrendering to the Other.

As Levinas (1985) has stated elsewhere, echoing some of the ideas advanced by Marcel and Marion, “Knowledge has always been interpreted as assimilation. Even the most surprising discoveries end by being absorbed, comprehended, with all that there is of ‘prehending’ in ‘comprehending.’” The problem, however, is that “the most audacious and remote knowledge does not put us in communion with the truly other; it does not take the place of sociality; it is still and always a solitude” (p. 60)—that is, an act of the putatively sovereign *I*, having its way, one might say, with the objectifiable world. To sum up:

The statement that others do not appear to me as objects does not just mean that I do not take the other person as a thing under my power, a “something.” It also asserts that the very relation originally established

between myself and others, between myself and someone, cannot properly be said to reside in an act of knowledge that, as such, is seizure and comprehension, the besiegement of objects. (Levinas, 1994, p. 40)

For Levinas, in short, it is imperative that we think Otherwise about these matters. I concur (Freeman, 2012). Also imperative is that we, as theoretical and philosophical psychologists, carry out work that is in keeping with such thinking in a portion of what we do. This work is what I have herein been calling a “poetics,” and it is nothing more, and nothing less, than the language required in the face of the Other’s ungraspable, untheorizable priority.

## Post-scientific Psychology

One could continue to consider this project a “scientific” one, essentially in the tradition of the *Geisteswissenschaften* rather than the *Naturwissenschaften*. If that is seen as an important thing to do, given the politics involved in appearing to “jump ship,” so be it; the politics are real. Speaking for myself, I am inclined to call the project “post-scientific,” which translates roughly as the exploration of that region of experience which remains after science has done its work. Framed this way, it may seem as if all we will have before us are mere “crumbs,” leftovers. But that is not the case at all, for the region being referred to here is actually quite large. What’s more, it is primary; it is the very ground of science itself and is thus what allows its work to be done. Here lies the gist of the problem: Much of psychological science has eliminated from view some of those very features of human reality that render it human. In doing so, it has therefore dehumanized the human, all the while imagining that its objectness is coextensive with its realness. Again, therefore, the problem isn’t only that the discipline hasn’t been sufficiently pluralistic, in the sense of welcoming new and different approaches to inquiry. It’s that much of what we have been left with presents a crude and false image of who and what we are.

As Robinson has suggested in her most recent book, *What Are We Doing Here?* (2018), “It is as if we can only be granted a place in the

universe if we are made vastly less extraordinary than we clearly are” (p. 264). And if she is right, psychology is partly to blame.

The science of the mind, as it is practiced now and as it has been practiced for generations, has no place for human inwardness, the reflective settling into oneself that somehow finds and yields structure and meaning, not all at once but as a kind of unwilling constellating of thoughts and things to which some part of one’s attention may have drifted any number of times. It is in the nature of the mind to distill, to do its strange work over time. No snapshots, no series of images, could capture its life. (p. 265)

“Unless it is to distinguish itself very sharply from theistic tradition,” Robinson continues, “I have no idea why the various psychologies are alike in disallowing the more ingratiating human traits” (p. 269). Sympathetic though I am to much of what Robinson has to say, I have no particular interest in this chapter to tout what is most extraordinary and ingratiating in us. That is part of the story to be told, to be sure, but only a part; it goes without saying that there is much in us that is mean and base too. I don’t know that we have done very well with this latter part either. Generally speaking, the image of the human we have been bequeathed is beyond good and evil alike, reduced to those dimensions that render such ethical and moral descriptors all but irrelevant.

This brings us back to the question of theory. “If a theoretical account of the order of things does not describe what reason or intuition propose to the understanding, then the factor that would correct for its deficiencies should be looked to, pondered” (Robinson, 2018, p. 271). This is what I have been trying to do in these pages. If Robinson is right, “We have in ourselves grounds for supposing that Being is vaster, more luminous, more consequential than we have allowed ourselves to imagine for many generations” (p. 271). In the end, it all comes down to the question of whether she is in fact right. Speaking for myself, Robinson’s rendition of things sometimes strikes me as a bit too grand, a bit too taken with our beautiful depths. I am taken with these too, to be sure. But I am also taken aback by other depths, the ones that lead to small-mindedness and hatred and violence. She of course well knows these are part of the human picture too, but occasionally her hymns of praise for

the miracle that is us feel excessive. (Perhaps the current political climate is making these sorts of claims seem impertinent.) Having offered this modest qualification, I find myself fully on board with her resistance to theoreticism—or at least the kind of entrapping theoreticism often seen in psychology. Whether we are as extraordinary as Robinson suggests is a secondary matter. What's primary is the uncontainability of Being itself. It is this, above all else, that calls for a poetics of the Other.

Some of what I have been discussing in these pages may sound like aestheticism, like the inverted image of the scientism it seeks to displace. It may also sound like the more art-ful project being proposed blunts the kind of critical edge that is often sought in theoretical and philosophical psychology quarters. Bearing this possibility in mind, let me take the opportunity to suggest how, and why, this critical edge remains very much in the picture. In Herbert Marcuse's *The Aesthetic Dimension* (1978), he tries to identify some of the shortcomings of Marxist aesthetics by focusing on the liberating moment of the aesthetic itself. "Under the law of aesthetic form," he writes, "the given reality is necessarily *sublimated*: the immediate content is stylized, the 'data' are reshaped and reordered in accordance with the demands of the art form... . Aesthetic sublimation," Marcuse continues, "makes for the affirmative, reconciling component of art, though it is at the same time a vehicle for the critical, negating function of art." This critical function "resides in the aesthetic form.... The work of art thus re-presents reality while accusing it" (pp. 7–8). As such, "The truth of art lies in its power to break the monopoly of established reality (i.e., of those who established it) to *define* what is *real*" (p. 9).

This process of de-monopolizing the definition of what is real is particularly urgent within the discipline of psychology, as currently constituted. This is because the view of psychology-as-science that has been promulgated has indeed sought to monopolize the discipline, not only on the plane of method and theory but on the plane of reality itself. It has thus built an edifice based on its own insisted-upon definitions and conceptions of reality. This edifice is a monolith; and even if it has been "softened" to some degree by the emergence of qualitative methods and related pursuits, it remains no less a monolith for all that. Its basic credo: We are to inquire into that which can be objectified, measured, parsed—that is,

into that which seemingly *can* be gotten around; only then, the story goes, will we be building the science so desired. This credo has its place. But it need not, and should not, monopolize the discipline. For, in promoting its own definitions of what is real and mistaking these definitions for reality itself, it has shrunken, quite violently, the very space of thinking about and exploring the human condition.

I am not proposing to *re*-define reality via a poetics of the Other. That would be to substitute one form of monopoly for another. Rather, I am proposing to *de*-define reality, and to do so not in the name of some version of subjectivism but, on some level, just the opposite: By de-defining reality—that is, by stepping back from the kinds of entrapping methodological procedures and theoretical structures most often employed in the discipline—we may be able to move closer to reality itself, the reality that precedes our definitions and categories, the reality that can't be gotten around, the reality that, in its surplus, insists on our recognition of, and respect for, its irreducible otherness. In view of this perspective, one might plausibly ask: Is this perspective *post*-scientific? Or is it *pre*-scientific? Or is it a re-visioning of science itself? For present purposes, I am going to go with the first of these. It is too late to be pre-scientific and I have no particular interest in indulging in nostalgic harking-back. And while I suppose one could frame this project as a re-visioning of science (which is basically what I had been doing through the idea of poetic science), it's not clear what is gained by doing so—except, of course, the kind of legitimacy and currency that science tends to carry in the discipline of psychology. I don't know that we need to serve that master anymore. Or, a bit less severely: I don't know that we *all* need to serve that master. Let us free ourselves from the tyranny of the monopoly and the claustrophobia of the monolith.

I have no set of discrete guidelines for what we might do instead. Nor do I seek to establish any; it would run counter to the spirit of the project. It is time instead, for some of us at any rate, to think Otherwise about what the discipline is and might be. If there is any limit at all, it is reality itself, holding back, resisting our advances. Beyond that, there is our own imagination, free, within this singular limit, to create entirely new forms of inquiry and expression. And these, I suggest, will, of necessity, be poetic in nature and will seek to disclose those features of reality that

surpass our entrapping schemes and insist that we be more attentive, respectful, and humble in our efforts to explore the human condition.

What might a poetics of the Other actually look like? Here, it may be helpful briefly to return to Toulmin (2001), whose penultimate chapter in *Return to Reason* is titled “The World of Where and When.” For Toulmin, this world could be found in full bloom in the work of Virginia Woolf, who

did her best to pin down on paper the experiences of a person, a place, or a moment as exactly as pen and ink could record. She did this with an eye to colors, to the produce on fruit and vegetable stalls, to the scent and dust of the seasons, as well as to the expressions on the faces of people she passed in the streets, the irritations evinced in these encounters, and the anxieties they arouse. (p. 202)

These anxieties were aroused in the form of her “perfectly rounded character, Clarissa Dalloway” (from her 1927 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* [1990]). As Toulmin notes, the experiences she is documenting bear significantly on the psychology of perception. But “unlike the theoretical analysis of perception by academics,” which “lacks all emotional overtones, ... Woolf’s writing is always tinged with feelings of joy and anger.” This mode of writing may also be found in the middle section of *To the Lighthouse* (1989 [1925]), “Time Passes,” when Woolf describes a vacant seaside house. “Only one thing happens in the house during this period of emptiness to mark the passage of time: at one point a scarf falls. In this very moment, the temporal character of our daily experience leaps out from the page” (p. 202). Indeed it does. I can remember the first time I read this section, how moving it was in its starkness and how real. Here was a world made present—an actual world, of where and when, a world filled with exactly those “emotional overtones” Toulmin is referring to. How much more adequate to experience it was than academic psychology, and how much more valuable, for our understanding and our feeling, than most of it.

Toulmin (2001) also makes brief mention of the poet Wallace Stevens (1997), who, too, was concerned with “these minutiae of feeling” and who addresses “what separates an academic obsession with formal

rationality from everyday life and all its experiences, which ... are charged with all its passions” (p. 203). Other writers—and artists working in different mediums—might have been mentioned in this context as well. Can there be a psychology as attuned to the texture of experience as Woolf’s fiction or Stevens’s poetry? I believe there can be. And I will do what I can, going forward, to help bring it to life.

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# An Historical Turn for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology

Jeff Sugarman

Theoretical and philosophical psychologists have made tremendous strides in bringing philosophy and critique to bear on psychological understanding. Much of this critique has targeted problematic assumptions or “isms” pervasive in disciplinary psychology, such as individualism, reductionism, abstractionism, universalism, essentialism, foundationalism, positivism, empiricism, presentism, instrumentalism, methodologism, brainism, racism, liberalism, and neoliberalism. However, frequently such critique has suffered its own form of abstractionism, has been rendered abstruse in ways impenetrable by the uninitiated, and/or has failed to connect with the concrete theoretical, methodological, and professional practices of psychologists. In aid of helping theoretical and philosophical psychologists make their work more salient, accessible, and compelling, this chapter draws attention to a vein of scholarship that enriches philosophical and critical analyses by using history to reveal how historical particularities in which the

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assumptions, conceptions, aspirations, and strategies of psychologists, take shape and become problematic or productive.

Theory and philosophy have value to the extent that ideas can touch life. But there is a historicity to ideas. History travels through and conducts us as much as we travel through and conduct it, and so it is with the ideas and practices history carries. Moreover, history transforms everything it touches, including the ideas and practices of psychologists. For this reason, integral to any adequate psychological understanding is appreciation of the particularities of historical contexts within which features of persons become objects of psychological theory, investigation, and intervention, as well as how history has configured the modes of inquiry psychologists have adopted in pursuit of psychological knowledge. History supplies a necessary context for interpreting critically what psychology is, how it functions, and the psychological objects it produces.

The historical turn I am advocating departs dramatically from standard “Whiggish” approaches to charting psychology’s history as a march of progressive successes toward psychological truth. Instead, it aims to elucidate how historical particularities provide conditions of possibility for conceptions of psychological phenomena and modes of inquiry, and how such conceptions can be or become productive or problematic. With an orientation to history, contingency, and particularity, the kinds of questions and topics of concern to theoretical and philosophical psychologists shift notably. While the broad questions and general philosophical speculations that traditionally have occupied theoretical and philosophical psychologists have been engaging and are likely to endure (e.g., how it might be possible to understand other minds, does free will exist, can psychology be a form of natural science, is psychological objectivity attainable), attention to history prompts a more focused approach directed to revealing how specific psychological phenomena and modes of inquiry are made possible. By redirecting the attention of theoretical and philosophical psychologists from grand theorizing to more modest study of the history of the concrete practices of psychologists, together with critical examination of the assumptions that accompany their use, such practices and the understandings they generate can be made visible with respect to the meanings, effects, and implications they bear.

In this chapter, I will illustrate the value of orienting theoretical and philosophical accounts with history by addressing a particular assumption or “style of reasoning” that has set the agenda for what are considered psychological phenomena and how they are to be investigated and understood. What I term “psychologism,” is a central assumption or “style of reasoning” that has dominated psychology for over a century, not only setting the terms of psychological inquiry, but also providing conditions of possibility for the constitution of many of the psychological phenomena inquirers have sought to comprehend.

I begin by describing the kind of historical investigation I am advocating which amends the approach favored by Rose (1996). I then turn to a theoretical and philosophical analysis of styles of reasoning and their characteristics, after which I defend the view that psychologism can be considered a style of reasoning and explain its assumptions and particularities of its procedure. Subsequently, an historical treatment of attitudes will be provided that evidences psychologism in psychology and bolsters my theoretical and philosophical analysis and critique in ways that, hopefully, readers will find enhances its force.

## What Kind of History?

Rose (1996) distinguishes among three variants of historiography that can be applied to psychology. “Recurrent” histories have two forms, both of which interpret the present as the culmination of past progress achieved by a continuous disciplinary tradition of inquirers pursuing knowledge of the objects comprising its subject matter. Recurrent histories chronicle progress either in terms of “sanctioned” or “lapsed” contributions. The events charted by sanctioned history are those judged to be accomplishments and innovations because they are consistent with the present self-image of the discipline. By contrast, events traced by lapsed history are errors and confusions that needed to be overcome and, perforce, conflict with the discipline’s current self-image. However, common to both forms of recurrent history is the ontological assumption that the objects of psychological study are ahistorical. It is assumed that psychologists in the past were studying and describing the same kinds of things we do today,

only less precisely. In other words, psychological phenomena under investigation have always preexisted our attempts to understand them and do not change as a function of the conceptions and investigations of psychologists. The assumption that psychological objects remain static warrants belief that continuous progress is being made in developing increasingly veridical accounts of them. Further, by constructing the past as continuous incremental advance toward the truth, recurrent histories legitimate their epistemology with the assumption that their “correctness” validates the present as the best standpoint from which to portray the truth of history. This is why they recur. As Rose observes, the presupposed correctness of the present serves as a criterion for inclusion and exclusion by which the standpoint of the present and boundaries of recurrent histories can be protected.

A second form of historiography is “critique.” Critique endeavors to expose the past as oppressive by uncovering ideological, political, and institutional systems of power that produce domination of the many by concentrating authority and control in the hands of the few. Historical critique of psychology is intended to dispute and rewrite the narratives of progress, enlightenment, science, objectivity, and neutrality. Such narratives, it is argued, serve not to represent the truth of the past, but rather, to authorize the present; a present devised to perpetuate systems of power and control. Thus, history as critique has exposed economic and ideological connections between psychology and the growth of capitalism, the creation of a compliant labor force, diverting individuals from political unrest and organized resistance, enforcing class divisions and the authority of the wealthy and powerful, the decline of religious, communal, and civic virtues and values, and colonialism. The aim of critique is emancipation. By making us aware of the ways in which we are oppressed by inequitable and/or coercive systems of power and control, we are better positioned to challenge, resist, and change them.

The third form of historiography Rose identifies, the one he endorses, is “critical history.” In contrast to recurrent history or critique, critical history does not assume a march of progress or coercive regime of systematic oppression. Critical history refrains from judgments of the truth or morality of the past and present. Following in the Foucauldian tradition, critical history attempts to uncover the conditions of possibility within

which ideas have become productive and validated as accepted means and methods of understanding. As Rose describes, in this way, critical history is unconcerned with questions of what is ultimately, or even contingently, true or just and sets out more modestly to describe the circumstances that have given rise to conceptions and practices by which knowledge and understanding are created. In Rose's (1998) words, critical history:

set[s] about the more modest task of describing, historically and contemporarily, the little processes and practices, the cognitive and technical skills, the presuppositions and assumptions, the empirical investigations and experiments, the errors and rectifications, the ethos of inquiry and correction, by means of which truthfulness in life, and elsewhere, has been put together and made to work. (p. 167)

Critical history has much to recommend it, particularly in conceiving of conceptions and practices as productive and not simply progressive or coercive. However, psychology cannot avoid being normative. It not only is descriptive, but also prescriptive. Psychological descriptions, and the theoretical frameworks in which they are embedded, are necessarily normative and explicitly or implicitly endorse certain conceptions of well being. Psychology is unavoidably a moral enterprise (Sugarman, 2005). For this reason, psychological descriptions and practices need to be adjudicated with respect to the extent that their instantiation in individual and collective life enhances or diminishes opportunities for human flourishing. In view of its inextricably moral features, a critical history of psychology insinuates not only that conceptions and practices be appreciated for their productive consequences, but also that such consequences be assessed critically in light of their impact on human life.

Further, the purpose of critical history is to trace the history of the present—the historical trajectory by which things have come to be as they are. While this remains a purpose of the kind of historical analysis I seek to employ, there is the added aim of instantiating, by way of illustration, the assumptions and ideas that have steered this trajectory. While it is important to reveal these assumptions and ideas (Slife & Williams, 1995), it is my claim that their interpretation and critical analysis are

made all that more compelling by detailing and examining the concrete contextual particulars in which they have arisen and been instantiated.

## Styles of Reasoning

The term “styles of thinking” was coined by the historian of science, Alistair Crombie. In his monumental treatise, *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition*, Crombie (1994) traces the development of scientific thought from Greek antiquity to its flourishing in the nineteenth century. Amidst a wealth of historical detail, Crombie detects five distinct styles of thinking that ascended as forms of argument by which science is conducted: (1) mathematical postulation, (2) experimentation, (3) hypothetical-analogical modeling, (4) taxonomy (5) probabilistic and statistical analysis, and (6) historical derivation. According to Crombie, styles of thinking are frameworks by which we establish regularities in the experience of phenomena, conceptualize them, stipulate the kinds of questions that can be asked about them, and circumscribe the forms that answers can take.<sup>1</sup>

Elaborating Crombie’s thesis, Hacking (2002, 2012) replaces the terminology of “styles of thinking” with “styles of reasoning.” In Hacking’s view, thinking puts science “too much in the head” (2002, p. 182). The conduct of science is public, not just private. It entails not only thinking, but also, demonstrating, experimenting, arguing, and achieving consensus. Further, Hacking observes that styles of reasoning are not limited to their epistemological and methodological consequences. By providing conditions for how phenomena “show up” for inquirers, styles of reasoning also can generate possibilities for the appearance of new kinds of phenomena. For example, the advent of probability theory and statistical analysis in the seventeenth century gave rise to the possibility of a new form of evidence (i.e., data collected and recorded by public and private institutions), concepts of population and normal distribution, equations for variance and standard deviation, laws such as the central theorem

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<sup>1</sup> Crombie (1994) was not the first to propose the idea of styles of scientific thinking. It already had been introduced in studies of the sociology of science by Mannheim and Fleck (Wessely, 1991).

limit and, eventually, statistical software. The impact of probability theory on everyday life is profound, shaping our understanding of phenomena from physics and weather to health and politics, as well as making possible a steady stream of new material innovations.

Importantly, styles of reasoning are not objective. They are the prerequisites for what we mean by objectivity. Styles of reasoning evince a number of other common and interrelated features, six of which I mention for the purposes of my analysis. First, styles of reasoning are *conditions of possibility*, not causes (Elwick, 2012). Claiming that A is a necessary condition for B is not the same as claiming A causes B. As Elwick explains, experimental embryology was made possible by modeling and experimental styles of reasoning. But it would be greatly misleading, Elwick cautions, to suggest modeling and experimentation were what caused Wilhelm Roux in 1866 to poke hot needles into frog embryos. Distinguishing between possibility and cause leaves room for contingency and agentive action.

Second, styles of reasoning are *self-authenticating*. They entail their own criteria for objectivity and validity and this makes them effectively self-contained. Styles of reasoning are justified by reasons internal to the logic and techniques that comprise them, and this makes them resistant to forms of criticism external to them. This circularity between establishing internal criteria and permitting only those claims fitted to the criteria gives them *stability*, a third common feature. Allegiance to and use of prescribed techniques also adds stability. Fourth, stability also is reinforced by the *reciprocal relation* between the techniques of a style of reasoning and the phenomena to which they are applied, which also is another way in which styles of reasoning are self-authenticating—a point that will be elaborated later in discussing the self-authenticating character of psychologism. Fifth, styles of reasoning are *autonomous*. Styles of reasoning originate in specific historical circumstances. However, as a consequence of their general applicability, they can be severed from their origins such that they can persist even through major social and scientific shifts in thought. Styles of reasoning also are autonomous in that they are not affiliated with particular theories, but rather, are a precondition of theory construction. It is only once a class of phenomena has been identified and defined within a style of reasoning that theories can be conjectured



to account for it. Sixth, styles of reasoning are *combinatorial*. For instance, Hacking (2002) has posed the “laboratory style” as an amalgam of the modeling and experimental styles. Additional styles also have been suggested. For instance, Forrester (1996) has argued for “thinking in cases” as a distinctive style of reasoning and Davidson (2001) has defined a “psychiatric style of reasoning.”

In light of the foregoing analysis, I propose “psychologism” as denoting a distinctive style of reasoning that has dictated most of the course of psychological theorizing and research over the past century. However, before describing psychologism, it first is important to explain one of the central assumptions regarding the class of phenomena to which it is directed: possessive individualism.

## Possessive Individualism

The founding of modern psychology on the premise that persons are radically autonomous, self-contained individuals has been noted for at least four decades. As remarked by Sampson (1977), the psychologically self-contained person, “is one who does not require or desire others for his or her completion or life; self-contained persons are or hope to be entire unto themselves. Self-containment is the extreme of independence: needing or wanting no one” (p. 770). However, it is not just radical autonomy and self-containment, but also the possessive quality ascribed to individuals as a function of their self-containment that undergirds psychologism.

“Possessive individualism” was used by C.B. Macpherson (1962, 1973) to characterize the kind of personhood conceived by a variety of seventeenth century British thinkers who initiated the Anglo-American liberal tradition. Early liberal theorists from Hobbes to Bentham depicted the individual person as “essentially a consumer of utilities” and “a bundle of appetites demanding satisfaction” (Macpherson, 1973, p. 4). In liberal societies, the variety of goods produced by market competition and unlimited right of property ownership were seen to maximize individual satisfaction by furnishing individuals with the greatest freedom of choice. Freedom was the purchase of ownership and choice. Later liberals, like John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hill Green, recast the liberal individual not just as a con-

sumer of utilities and bundle of appetites, but as “a doer, a creator, an enjoyer of his human attributes” (Macpherson, 1973, p. 4). For later liberals, persons were possessed of uniquely human characteristics the cultivation and expression of which constituted ends and satisfaction in themselves.

Liberal theorists portrayed the person as an autonomous and possessive individual actor and society as the coordination of such actors whose naturally inherent motives sustained the market relations of capitalist liberal societies. As Macpherson (1962) describes:

[The] possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them. The individual was seen neither as a moral whole, nor as part of a larger social whole, but as owner of himself. The relations of ownership, having become for more and more men the critically important relation determining their actual freedom and actual prospect of realizing their full potentialities, was read back in to the nature of the individual. The individual, it was thought, is free inasmuch as he is proprietor of his person and capacities ... and freedom is a function of possession. (p. 3)

According to Macpherson’s analysis, seventeenth century liberals could not help but notice the explosion of capitalism going on around them and assumed that what they were witnessing was the effect of a human nature that was at its core individual and possessive. It was the individualism and possessiveness of persons that explained their actions and relations in the context of unbridled capitalism. For possessive individuals, personhood entails relations of ownership, not just to material possessions, but also, to one’s capacities and skills. It is what you possess that makes you what you are and is measure of your worth. This image of the person drives psychologism.

## Psychologism as a Style of Reasoning

The term “psychologism” was introduced to philosophical discussion in the mid-nineteenth century and has since acquired a variety of formulations (Kusch, 1995). However, across its variations is the assertion that all

thought and knowledge are effects reducible to internal psychological features. In drawing attention to psychologism in psychology, my adoption of the term follows Martin and McLellan (2013), who define it as “the attribution of the primary causes of the perceptions, experiences, knowledge, and actions of individuals to structures, processes, and/or operations internal to their mental lives” (p. 158). Psychologism as a style of reasoning, rests on the assertion that explanation of the causes of human thought, action, and experience are to be sought in inner mental structures and processes further speculated to be the products of neurophysiology. In other words, psychological phenomena and the mechanisms by which they are produced, are possessed by individuals as private property of their mental and biophysical interiors. Psychologism instantiates possessive individualism. With the exception of behaviorism, which renounced it, psychologism has proven robust over the past century and has been the backbone of psychological explanation whether it is depth psychology, Gestalt psychology, humanistic psychology, cognitive psychology, or neuroscience.

Similarly to other styles of reasoning, psychologism entails its own specific procedures (Sugarman, 2017). It is initiated by observations of persons’ everyday actions and experiences. A putative feature of their observed actions or reported experience is identified and isolated. It then is assumed that the origin of this feature is a distinctive inner psychological structure or process possessed by individuals. The structure or process is named and causal force is attributed to it such that it is taken to be determining of the action or experience. Thus, for example, the individual’s planning and monitoring of her activity is caused by self-regulation, her positive assessment of herself is caused by self-esteem, her conception of herself is caused by self-concept, her degree of confidence is caused by self-efficacy, her apprehensiveness to attempt tasks is caused by fear of failure or her efforts at persisting in them is caused by intrinsic motivation, and so forth. It should be noted that a logical error occurs here in that something cannot be a cause of itself.

Nevertheless, once anatomized and conceptualized in this way, typically an instrument is devised the purpose of which is to access and measure the assumed inner psychological structure or process. It also should be noted that use of the term “measure” here is at least loose, if not

entirely erroneous. Martin and McLellan (2013) remark that it is questionable whether psychological instruments thusly conceived perform measurement in any legitimate scientific sense of the term. Scientific measurement relies on standard units or metrics that stand independent of the thing being measured. This is also the case with most of the metrics employed in daily life whether cooking, carpentry, or reading the weather. Not only do the metrics of size, speed, distance, temperature, and so forth, stand independent of the particular things being measured, but so too are the instruments by which the measurements are indicated. However, psychologists possess no such standard units or devices for the measurement of psychological phenomena and, consequently, they perform only a kind of “pseduomeasurement.”

As Martin and McLellan (2013) point out, counting is not measuring. We might be able to count frequencies of ideas. However, we are unable to measure ideas with standard units in the same way we are able to measure length in centimeters or electrical current in amperes. Human thought, action, and experience do not come in discrete independent units. Individuals’ ratings of questionnaire items or reactions to stimuli are susceptible to the wide variability of idiosyncratic impressions and subjective judgments; individuals’ capacities to observe, identify, and report on their experiences accurately; their moods and the particularities of their circumstances; and their manner of responding, all of which are contextually constituted and interrelated. All of this undermines the possibility of discrete standardized units of psychological measurement. While it might be argued that indications of blood flow in the brain provide an instance of bona fide measurement (i.e., employing metrics that stand independent of the object being measured), establishing a clear relationship between specific psychological states and neurophysiological activation is notoriously problematic and the use of physiological metrics of this kind comprise a minority of psychological studies.

Typically, psychological instruments require individuals to introspect and self-report on the particular thoughts, actions, or experiences believed to reflect the psychological property under investigation. However, whether the instrument involves introspection or behavioral observation, whether it is the Rorschach Technique, Wechsler Intelligence Scales, The

Self-Esteem Inventory, or brain imagining techniques (which also depend on subjects' introspection to determine correlations between psychological phenomena and the neurophysiological structures to produce them) the data generated are admitted as evidence of the existence of the hypothesized psychological phenomenon. Such evidence is deemed sufficiently valid that it has spawned a prodigious array of phenomena and programs of research. In fact, it could be argued that the productive success of psychologism was key to providing psychology with its own distinctive subject matter and attaining status as a *sui generis* academic discipline.

In light of the foregoing, psychologism functions as a style of reasoning. First, it provides conditions of possibility for the production of new phenomena: intelligence, creativity, motivation, personality traits, attitudes, "self" characteristics, and psychological disabilities and psychopathologies, are just a few examples. However, importantly, psychologism sidesteps the question of whether the phenomena conceived through its assumptions and procedures actually exist. The issue here is not simply whether the phenomena already are there waiting to be discovered or if they are artifacts manufactured by the assumptions and procedures of psychologism. The matter is more complicated. Psychological terminology, description, and classification interact with their objects creating what Hacking (1995) has called a "looping effect."

The looping effect designates the ontological implications of a dynamic interaction between our practices of naming and the things named (see Sugarman, 2009, 2015). More specifically, in describing ourselves psychologically, persons are uniquely capable of reacting to the ways we are described such that we can constitute or reconstitute how we understand ourselves. We come to define and act toward ourselves under psychological descriptions and, in the process, form and alter the kinds of persons we are. The looping effect begins with a psychological description or classification that prompts changes to an individual's self-understanding. This change in self-understanding enables new interpretations, intentions, actions, and experiences. New interpretations, intentions, actions, and experiences, in turn, can lead to revised descriptions and classifications or the invention of new

ones. These fresh descriptions and classifications are then appropriated, sparking new self-understandings, interpretations, intentions, actions, and experiences, and so on, looping recursively. It is in creating a relation with ourselves through psychological descriptions—defining ourselves in the terms they provide—that we make ourselves intelligible. However, when the looping effect occurs and persons change the ways they describe and understand themselves, they are no longer quite the same persons they were before. By providing conditions of possibility for new forms of psychological descriptions and self-understandings to emerge, psychologism can have ontologically productive consequences.

Second, psychologism is self-authenticating. The existence of a psychological property is accepted if individuals are able to give self-reports of it or exhibit behaviors believed caused by it. In this way, there is circularity between the objectivity and validity of claims and methods on the basis of which claims are derived. What justification is there that a psychological property exists? Because people can report on it or we can observe its behavioral manifestation. Why are people able to make self-reports of it or behave accordingly? Because it must exist. Third, this circularity between the methodologies of self-report, behavioral observation, and brain imaging, and the phenomena they supposedly reveal, also gives psychologism much of its stability. The credibility of the methods relies on the assumption of an inner psychological realm that can be detected by them and, reciprocally, the assumption of an inner psychological realm lends the methods their legitimacy. Fourth, not only has psychologism been resistant to criticism from outside its boundaries, it also has been autonomous in traveling far past its origins and finding application across a wide variety of psychological schools of thought. It is not allied with any specific psychological theory but, nevertheless, has served instrumentally in producing an entire class of phenomena on which these schools of thought and their theories have been founded. Fifth, psychologism, while a distinct style of reasoning, is combinatorial having incorporated elements of experimental, modeling, statistical, taxonomic, and historical styles of reasoning.

## The Psychological Study of Attitudes: An Historical Illustration of Psychologism

A vivid illustration of psychologism is shown in how attitudes became conceived as psychological phenomena. Attitudes were vital to establishing the disciplinary legitimacy of social psychology (Bohner & Dickel, 2011). They were integral to promoting the practical value of the discipline and, as a result, its successful rise. Attitudes have remained a core topic that comprises much, if not most, of social psychological research. However, the meaning of attitudes and how they are understood have been transformed significantly over the course of history, particularly through the involvement of psychologists.

The term “attitude” derives from the Latin *apto*, meaning aptitude or fitness, and *acto*, meaning postures of the body. It entered English vernacular in or about 1710 (Fleming, 1967). Danziger (1997) has traced how over time the concept of attitude came to denote what are taken to be discrete, interior psychological phenomena, a dramatic shift from how the term was first applied. “Attitude” originally was used in art and literature to describe both the physical disposition and expressive function of a figure. According to Danziger, in its initial use, the meaning of the term did not entail any insinuation of an inner psychological realm that was causally responsible for the manner of outward presentation. What was meant by the attitude of a figure was an expressive unity of its thoughts, feelings, and physical posture. As Harré (2002) punctuates the point, “Expression was not causation” (p. 177). The attitude was evident in the display. By 1725, attitude conveyed the sense of superficiality in the ways actors feign characteristics (Fleming). However, there still was no explicit or implied relation between that which is outer as being caused by something inner.

In the nineteenth century, Darwin and Sherrington interpreted attitudes as purely physical characteristics. Darwin thought attitudes were stereotypic patterns of motor activity expressing intermittent emotional distress. Sherrington, who also used “attitude” to refer to motoric responses, understood them as continuous indications of a functioning organism. Despite their differences, Darwin and Sherrington

shared the belief that attitudes are a physical function of an organism's biological composition.

A marked change in the use of the term occurred in 1909. As Danziger (1997) explains, Titchener introduced "conscious attitudes" to distinguish a specific psychological state from other ideational and introspective mental phenomena. Conscious attitudes were not fixed, but rather, could vary as mental positions assumed under differing conditions, and they were thought to be evidenced by subjects correctly identifying a relation or meaning in the absence of a clear image of the object of thought. Titchener initiated the application of psychologism to attitudes. But most early American psychologists continued to consider attitudes physical dispositions produced by stimulus-response associations and they sought to avoid consciousness in psychological theorizing and explanation. Consequently, there was little investigation of attitudes as mental phenomena up to and including most of the 1920s.

By the 1930s, however, "attitude" no longer carried the descriptors "motor" or "conscious" and was being used interchangeably with a broad array of terms such as trait, opinion, wish, interest, disposition, desire, bias, preference, prejudice, sentiment, and motive, among others. According to Danziger (1997), what connected these various terms was a behavioral interpretation that rendered them all drives of some sort. It appears that by the 1930s, "attitudes" had been divested of any conceptual distinctiveness and empirical referents, and they no longer were seen as overt expressions. As psychologism took root, and the distinction between inner and outer was emphasized, attitudes were cast as internal mental causes of observable behavior.

But there was also an epistemological and methodological transformation that contributed to the psychologizing of attitudes. Wundt and other introspectionists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries assumed that the ability of subjects to generate responses to experimental tasks could only be explained by the mediation of inner mental processes interposed between tasks and responses. Given the hypothesized inner psychological targets of investigation, introspection seemed a suitable methodology. Introspection met the scientific demand for observable evidence of mental processes. But American psychologists had little faith in the method. In dismissing introspection, they also



dispensed with the requirement that mental processes needed to be observed in establishing that they were the causal mechanism mediating between task and response. Inner psychological causes were simply assumed as a logical necessity. As Danziger elaborates:

It now became acceptable simply to hypothesize the existence of such processes located within the individual. No longer did one rely on experimental subjects to identify these processes; instead it was up to the experimenter to stipulate what they were....Only one unwritten rule was universally respected: whatever this thing [i.e., attitude] was, it was real and lurked somewhere within the individual. Breaking this rule would have meant abandoning the common understanding of what psychological investigation was all about. (p. 139)

There are two other historical developments in the psychology of attitudes of surpassing importance for the purposes of this illustration. One is the contributions of Floyd and Gordon Allport who introduced the concept of “social attitudes.” What was particularly significant about this terminology was that it gave psychologists license to extend their theorizing and investigations to phenomena that previously had been considered the domain of sociology. Sociologists had studied attitudes since the early years of the twentieth century. However, their understanding of attitudes was not just as mental states. For example, Thomas and Zaniecki (1918) defined attitude as “a process of individual consciousness which determines real or possible activity of the individual in the social world” (p. 22) and as “the individual counterpart of the social value” (p. 22). From their perspective, attitudes always were directed toward some social object and served to bridge the social and the personal. In other words, attitudes only could be comprehended in terms of the social and cultural contexts of which they were part, in which they gained meaning and value, and not as isolated psychological entities. “By its reference to activity and thereby to the social world the attitude is distinguished from the physical state” (Thomas & Zaniecki, p. 22). But Floyd Allport had a very different conception of attitudes. As Danziger (1997) explains, Allport believed that society was reducible as the aggregate of actions of autonomous individuals. Human reality consisted

of individuals, attitudes were the intrapersonal property of individuals, and, consequently, a psychology built on methodological individualism was the logical disciplinary approach. Allport's perspective was well aligned with the strongly individualistic values promoted by American society and, in no small part, was the reason his view prevailed.

A second historical development of major significance is the invention of a technology of attitude measurement by Thurstone and Likert. Danziger (1997) reveals two assumptions that made the Likert scale a viable methodology and account for its popularity. One assumption is that opinions were the observable overt expression of attitudes, the latter being inaccessible internal psychological attributes. A second assumption that follows from the first is that attitudes were accurately indicated and measured by their verbal expression as opinions. It could easily have been argued that studying actions would have given a more accurate reflection of attitudes. Obviously, there is a big difference between expressing an opinion and acting on it. However, for practical reasons, Thurstone endorsed the study of opinions over actions.

Thurstone's and Likert's instruments consisted of presenting statements to subjects and having them rate their degree of agreement. The method resembled ordinary opinion polling. However, with the added assertion that attitudes were stable, intra-individual mental properties, Thurstone's and Likert's instruments were regarded as accessing real psychological entities and as heralding an important scientific advance. With widespread acceptance of the premise that attitudes were universal, internal, and individual psychological possessions that could be detected with relative ease through attitudinal measurement instruments, the study of attitudes was ignited. The potential objects of investigation appeared unlimited. People could have attitudes about everything, including themselves, an insight that contributed greatly to ushering in an era of psychological research and explanation turned toward the inner workings of individuals.

The psychology of attitudes displays all the relevant features of psychologism. Titchener made the assumption of possessive individualism, it was advanced by the Allports, and has become entrenched both in psychology and ordinary folk psychology. As Augoustinos, Walker, and Donaghue (2014) reflect, "We talk as though people have an attitude in the same way they have a toe or a gene. We confer an ontological status

upon ‘attitude’, denoting implicitly something real and tangible, something that influences the way the *attitude-owner* [italics added] behaves” (p. 109). Psychologists observed that persons appear to have dispositions in their ordinary everyday actions. They identified and isolated this feature of their activities and moved it inward, claiming it determined and explained conduct and experience. However, as Danziger (1997) documents, “attitude” traversed a long and twisted road of meanings and applications in arriving at a conceptualization as inner mental processes, a conceptualization that is neither a logical necessity nor made compelling by the results of psychological inquiry.

The psychological instruments of attitudinal measurement do not address the ontological issue of whether attitudes exist as inner mental entities. This failure is a consequence of psychologism. The data obtained by attitudinal measurement instruments simply are assumed to reflect attitudes as mental entities and do nothing to establish their existence. Krosnick, Judd, and Wittenbrink (2005) admit as much: “Because attitudes, like all psychological constructs, are latent, we cannot observe them directly. So all attitude measurement depends on those attitudes being revealed in overt responses, either verbal or non-verbal” (p. 22). This assumption, resident in a mountain of attitudinal research conducted over the past century, also is at the root of the recent spate of studies attempting to discover the neurophysiological substrates of attitudes (e.g., Amodio, 2014). The goal and promise of these studies is expressed by Stanley, Phelps, and Banaji (2008): “Neuroscientific techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG) have enabled researchers to begin to elucidate the neural systems involved in the expression and regulation of implicit attitudes” (p. 165). Stanley et al. do caution that fMRI studies are not appropriate to establishing causal relations between neurophysiological activities and specific psychological states. However, such admissions have done little to temper their claims and those of others concerning the neurophysiological basis of attitudes and the hope that fMRI research eventually will corroborate proposed models of how attitudes are represented, expressed and regulated.

The study of attitudes also demonstrates psychologism in the self-authentication and stability furnished by the reciprocally reinforcing relation between methods of investigation and phenomena of interest. Attitudinal measures support the assumption that there are internal attitudes to be measured, while the premise that there are internal attitudes bolsters legitimacy of the instruments and their use. There is also a looping effect. An army of psychologists soliciting and measuring opinions on all manner of topics created the idea of an “opinionated person” (Osborne & Rose, 1999). But then, people came to fit the demands of the research. They learned to be the kinds of persons who have attitudes and express them through their opinions.

While there have been productive consequences of the psychological investigation of attitudes, such as the rendering of an image of a rich inner psychological life and instruments presumed to measure it, after a century of research and no persuasive demonstration of the existence of attitudes as inner mental entities, it seems reasonable to ask whether they exist as such or if psychologism has steered us off track. There are alternative possible conceptions of attitudes. They need not be conceived as inner psychological structures, processes, or functions with causal force that somehow are separated from the activity of the persons presumed to possess them. To touch on one such alternative briefly, Martin (2016) defends that psychological features aren't separate from the actions from which they are inferred. In this light, attitudes can be seen as an aspect of the embodied and embedded activity of persons as it unfolds dynamically in the historical, social, cultural, and psychological contexts of daily life. Martin's view is consistent with that of Mead (1938). Attitudes, as Mead interpreted them, always are related to human activity and interactivity in the world (Martin, 2005). For Mead, attitudes arise within, and are sustained by, the various social positions by which interactions are conducted. Attitudes are less something one possesses, than something one occupies. Attitudes or perspectives, as Mead understood them, comprise the positions within which social interactions are conducted, and are formed by and against the roles, rules, and conventions that mediate our activity and interactivity. Thus, according to this account, an attitude is assumed as part of the context of activity and interactivity; it is not an internal psychological cause of that activity and interactivity.

## Conclusion

The illustrative use of critical history demonstrates concretely how the practices and discourse of psychology are involved in the manufacture of both the objects of psychological study and modes of inquiry by which investigation is pursued. It counters the widespread ahistorical assumption that the objects of psychological research correspond to timeless divisions in human nature and true knowledge. It is not simply that the divisions by which psychological phenomena are classified are historically contingent, but so too are the phenomena themselves. As Hacking (2006) describes, they are “moving targets”. They change with the ways in which they are described and studied. Psychological phenomena are not fixed by nature, but rather, assembled with the instruments of historical and sociocultural institutions; notably among them, disciplinary psychology and its style of reasoning. In this regard, the present is not ontologically definitive. The psychology of the present is a point on a trajectory without a foreseeable terminus that has arrived with an ontologically constitutive history.

This critique of ahistoricism not only applies to the psychological mainstream. It also renders suspect grand ontological claims about the constitution of psychological phenomena that transcend the particularity and contingency of history. This is not to divert attention from critical reflection on ontological, epistemological, moral, ethical, and aesthetic assumptions and issues in psychology. However, it is to move such reflection away from general philosophical speculation about perennial broad metaphysical and epistemological questions toward the historical particularities by which more specific psychological questions and issues are formed and investigated. The perspective history supplies facilitates recognition of the constitutive role of concrete historical particulars within which specific assumptions and issues have arisen, and how the constitution of psychological phenomena and conduct of the discipline of psychology take shape.

In adopting an historical perspective and by situating theoretical and philosophical issues in history, it becomes easier to see how disciplinary psychology belongs to the broader history of ways human beings have

developed for interpreting themselves. Psychologism, as a style of reasoning, is part of this history. As argued elsewhere,

Psychology is nothing more or less than an institutionalized set of scientific and professional practices directed to an understanding of persons and the human condition. Consequently, theoretical psychology ... must be understood as directed at interpreting, understanding, and describing those specific conceptions, contexts and practices in which psychologists engage to produce what they regard as findings and insights that warrant their scientific, professional, and broader public activities. (Martin, Sugarman, & Slaney, 2013, p. 12)

Orienting theoretical psychology through an historical lens demonstrates that it too is part of the wider historical endeavor to understand ourselves and our condition as self-interpreting beings. Further, the particularities of psychology's history warrant the Foucauldian (1975) argument that the function of disciplines, such as psychology, is not to ground, but rather, to discipline. A discipline is not founded on an autonomous logic inherent in a given body of knowledge that predicates its substance and methods. It comprises conventions of a perspective that becomes available given the sensibilities of a civilization in a given time and place—in which certain things “show up for us”—setting conditions for truth, objectivity, determining what and how claims can be accepted or affirmed, and in which objects and ideas can find a meaningful location; that is, a style of reasoning. Disciplines are less a reflection of the inherent order of things than they are institutionalized conventions subject to historical change that impose themselves in our investigations and formulations. As Foucault detailed extensively, disciplines organize and subordinate. This recognition shifts the central project of theoretical and philosophical psychology from grand metaphysical theorizing to the more pedestrian endeavor of careful investigation of the concrete particulars of the history of psychologists' practices, together with critical examination of the assumptions that accompany their use, and how the practices and understandings of psychology discipline our individual and collective lives.

Teo (2009) characterizes theoretical and philosophical psychology as contextualized “reflection on the history, status, connection, and devel-

opment of psychological, methods, ideas, and worldviews” (p. 1) and goes on to say that, “it is not sufficient to present and defend a theory by empirical or conceptual means, but rather it is necessary to reflect on the very process of a theory’s discovery, application, and justification on the background of particular sociohistorical developments” (p. 1). In concurring with Teo’s view, theoretical psychology necessitates an historical orientation as well as one steeped in philosophy and theory.

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# An Intersectionality for Theoretical Psychology?

Kathleen L. Slaney

## An Intersectionality for Theoretical Psychology?

The questions of what theoretical psychology is and what role it plays in the discipline at large have been circulating for a number of decades now, at least since 1997 when Slife and Williams appealed for the formal recognition of theoretical psychology as a subdiscipline of psychology; however, questions concerning the meaning and role of theoretical psychology

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go back at least as far as the late 1920s, early 1930s.<sup>1</sup> The umbrella term, “theoretical psychology” encompasses numerous topics and scholarly traditions and forms of scholarship, including (but certainly not limited to) narrative and hermeneutic methods, positioning theory, historical ontology, historiometry, conceptual and discourse analysis, philosophical hermeneutics, philosophical anthropology, phenomenology, empirical philosophy, critical studies, feminist studies, social action theory, science and technology studies, as well as various lenses through which inquiries of specific psychological categories of experience may be viewed (e.g., contemporary psychoanalysis, Aristotelian ethics, existentialism).

Although on the one hand, such pluralism is a hallmark of theoretical psychology, on the other, it can create difficulties in defining its subject matter, and tensions can arise when efforts are made to place boundaries around the sort of work that will count as theoretical psychology, as well as where theoretical psychology fits within the larger discipline (and academe more broadly). Furthermore, it is not altogether clear whether and how different inquires and modes of inquiry can be brought together under a unified agenda, or of whether, in fact, such an agenda is useful, or even desirable.

The contributors to this volume have been asked to explore possibilities for re-envisioning, re-thinking, and re-invigorating theoretical psychology. To this end, I will borrow the concept of “intersectionality,” the origins of which lie in critical race and feminist theory, as a metaphor for exploring whether and, if so, how, the diverse works of theoretical psychologists might be described under a common framework and unified agenda. I will also consider whether a unification of this sort already

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<sup>1</sup>Lindworsky’s (1932) book, *Theoretical Psychology*, is but one example. Mind you, the manner in which he frames the question of what is theoretical psychology and the answer he provides differ considerably from that seen in more current discussions. Lindworsky states: “*The subject matter of theoretical psychology* is identical with that of experimental psychology”, that is, “the observed conscious phenomena and their more or less directly accessible connections” (p. 4; emphasis in original). He goes on to suggest that the task (then) of theoretical psychology is to establish the general laws from which empirically tested hypotheses about “observed conscious phenomena” could be derived and tested. Thus, if we can take Lindworsky’s perspective as representative of the thinking at the time, theoretical psychology was “theoretical” primarily in the sense of developing fundamental axioms for empirical psychology.

exists, or is even desirable or advantageous for theoretical psychology, theoretical psychologists, the discipline, and beyond.

First, I briefly describe the concept of intersectionality and its application in critical race and feminist theory and practice, as well as in other forms of critical scholarship and social action. Second, I attempt to draw from current understandings of intersectionality several core themes, which I then endeavor to map—metaphorically—onto the domain of theoretical psychology. Third, I explore where and where not theoretical psychology seems to currently reflect this metaphorical intersectionality. I will end with a brief examination of critiques of intersectionality in the context of a neoliberal agenda to which it has been tied and, thus, whether the intersectionality metaphor might still have utility—if framed in terms of situatedness, relationality and dialogism, and hermeneutic accounts of identity—for exploring the questions around which this volume was organized.

## Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a term that first appeared in the late 1980s and early 90s within feminist and critical race discourses to describe a theoretical framework that emphasizes the mutually constitutive relations among social identities (Shields, 2008),<sup>2</sup> as well as the social basis of power relations and the social production of norms and categories of difference (Treloar, 2014). It has also been described as an analytical tool and political orientation that “approaches lived identities as interlaced and systems of oppression as enmeshed and mutually reinforcing,” in virtue of the fact that “one aspect of identity and/or form of inequality is not treated as separable or as superordinate” from others (May, 2015, p. 3). Importantly, although intersectionality is most often used as a theoretical framework or analytic tool (or both), it originates in both critical discourse (academic and non-academic) and collective social activism.

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<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that the view that social identities are constitutively related has been contrasted with both alternatives analytic approaches to intersectionality (see Hancock, 2007) and different conceptualizations of intersectionality itself (see Choo & Ferree, 2010; McCall, 2005).

The origins of the term, “intersectionality” have been traced to two early works of feminist legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Crenshaw coined the term in her efforts to address the shortcomings of then feminist and antiracist approaches which tended to each rely on a single axis—either gender or race—to analyze identity, thus obscuring the interdependence of these identity categories as essential to the understanding of Black women’s experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Treloar, 2014). Generally speaking, the early work on intersectionality was aimed at developing an alternative critical framework that acknowledged that forms of racial and gender oppression “intersect” within connected systems and structures of power to form a broader “matrix of domination” (Collins, 2000; Collins & Chepp, 2013).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the clear importance of Crenshaw’s explicit naming of intersectionality as a theoretical and analytic framework, it is generally acknowledged that the intersectionality concept and its application were built upon a long history of efforts to identify the interaction of racism and sexism (“double jeopardy”; Beal, 1970) and other forms of oppression (“multiple jeopardy”; King, 1988), dating far back as the pioneering work of Black American feminist activists such as Sojourner Truth and Anna Julia Cooper in the mid- and late-1800s (Carastathis, 2016; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Lutz, 2014; Treloar, 2014).<sup>4</sup> Today, intersectionality is used more broadly to examine how the “various social locations such as race, class, ability, gender, health status, and other dimensions of identity” intersect and create social, political, and psychological outcomes that are constrained by “the hierarchical power relations that are central to this positioning” (Treloar, 2014, p. 995). However, it should be noted that there is “tremendous heterogeneity” in how people understand and use intersectionality and that intersectionality is itself “constantly under construction” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 2, 31). Intersectionality has been considered everything and anything from a buzzword to a living practice, from a paradigm to a theory, and from a heuristic device to an analytic tool or method (Lutz, 2014) or approach to social activism (Warner & Shields, 2013). Collins and Chepp (2013, p. 59) describe

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<sup>3</sup>Treloar (2014) uses the expression “matrix of oppression.”

<sup>4</sup>Crenshaw (1989) herself acknowledges this ancestry.

intersectionality as “a construct that is so widespread and visible yet simultaneously loosely defined and paradoxical.” As such, recently, there has been greater emphasis on how intersectionality can be *used*, as opposed to on what it *is* (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In this regard, drawing on a feature of one of Crenshaw’s early renderings of the intersectionality concept (i.e., in Crenshaw, 1991), Carastathis (2016, p. 4) describes intersectionality as a “provisional concept...meant to get us to think about *how* we think” rather than a label for a theory of double or multiple oppression.

Intersectionality is, of course, a metaphor. However, it has itself also been described in terms of several notable metaphors, including examples such as a busy traffic intersection (Crenshaw, 2003); the swirls in a marbled cake (Jordan-Zachery, 2007); complex and historically shaped topographies, such as the Grand Canyon (Crenshaw, 2010, as cited in Hankivsky, 2014); the dynamic reflections of a kaleidoscope (Easteal, 2002); among others. For the aims of the current work, I wish to “flip” these metaphors and use the concept of intersectionality—and the core themes that give it shape—as a metaphor itself for envisioning a potential framework for understanding and unifying the multiplicity of (interdependent?) concerns and approaches adopted by theoretical psychologists.

## A Working Definition of Intersectionality

Because intersectionality is characterized in different ways and put to a variety of uses, for the present purposes, there is a certain amount of pragmatic utility in providing a working definition of the concept. In developing such a definition, I have drawn primarily (though, not exclusively) from Crenshaw’s two early aforementioned works (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991), Hankivsky’s (2014) primer on intersectionality, and Collins and Bilge’s recently published text, *Intersectionality* (Collins & Bilge, 2016). On the basis of (mostly) these works, I offer the following definition of intersectionality:

Intersectionality is a multi-axis framework for understanding and analyzing the diverse but mutually influencing events and conditions of social

and political life that give rise to different social locations, identities, and interrelated forms of both power (or disempowerment) and privilege (or disadvantage). Intersectionality consists in a synergy of *critical inquiry*—in challenging the existing hegemony (bodies of knowledge, theories, methodologies, and social practices)—and *critical praxis*—in challenging the status quo with the aim of transforming power relations.

## Seven Core Themes of Intersectionality

In fleshing out this working definition, seven core themes of intersectionality may be highlighted: *social inequality*, *power*, *relationality*, *social context*, *complexity*, *social justice*, and *embracing reflexivity and diversity of knowledges*.<sup>5</sup> Each will be described briefly in turn. First, though, it is important to underscore the synergistic relation between critical inquiry and critical praxis that undergirds intersectionality. Although any given employment of an intersectional framework might focus primarily on one over the other, the scholar-activist divide is generally rejected by advocates of the framework: Critical thinking is not viewed as being confined to the academy, nor is political engagement thought to be restricted to social movements (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Rather, within the intersectionality framework, critical inquiry and critical praxis are viewed as mutually informing and generating of benefits greater than the sum of the benefits of each.

### Social Inequality

Intersectionality as both a form of critical inquiry and critical praxis arose in large part out of recognition that “[t]he events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor” but, rather, “are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and

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<sup>5</sup>As with the definition of intersectionality provided here, these core themes presented here draw heavily from the respective accounts of intersectionality given by Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Hankivsky (2014), and Collins and Bilge (2016), and primarily from the latter. It is important to note, however, that, collectively, the seven themes reflect a very large body of intersectionality scholarship, as well as other areas of critical theory, representing a broad array of disciplines and areas of study. Where relevant, I include explicit references to some of this body of work.

mutually influencing ways” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). More specifically, intersectional frameworks have provided a challenge to earlier single-axis frameworks adopted within race and feminist theory that inequities result from single distinct factors (i.e., race or gender). Instead, social inequality must be understood through the lens of multiple and dynamically interacting social categories (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This implies the need of a multi-axial analysis of effects, both micro and macro, between and across various societal levels (Hankivsky, 2014), as well as of structural, political, and representational forms of intersectionality and the independence among these (Cole, 2008; Crenshaw, 1991; Warner & Shields, 2013).

## Power

Clearly, understanding social inequality requires an analysis of power. Intersectional frameworks highlight the different social dimensions of power, and promote an understanding of power relations through a lens of mutual construction, that is, as mutually constructing and interactive systems of power (Collins & Bilge, 2016). This requires recognition that interactions among social locations occur within a context of connected systems and structures of power (political, economic, etc.) and radical and complex analyses of such systems and structures (Evans, 2015; Hankivsky, 2014). The aim is to examine power not as some monolithic, objective entity, but to understand power *relations* as they exist between and among persons, are enabled or constrained by certain social and political structures and, in turn, how these are shaped and experienced and work together to promote (or challenge) social inequality. Moreover, power relations are analyzed both in terms of their *intersections* (e.g., racism *and* sexism) as well as across different *domains* of power (e.g., structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal) (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

## Relationality

From the above, it is clear that relationality is a core theme underlying intersectionality. The centrality of relationality within intersectional



frameworks is apparent in the rejection of single-axis explanations in favour of explicit recognition of how multiple social identities are mutually constituted, reinforced, and naturalized (Shields, 2008) (e.g., ‘poor Black woman’ or ‘wealthy white woman’ as opposed to a woman who happens to be Black and poor or who happens to be white and wealthy). Thus arises the need for analytic approaches for understanding how gender, race, and class (and other) collectively and integratively shape social inequality. In presuming a relational ontology and embracing a relational epistemology, intersectional frameworks reject the *either/or* binary and promote *both/and* thinking (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

## Social Context

From an intersectional standpoint, power relations (and thus social inequality) are examined in context, or specific time and place that shapes, enables, and constrains thought and action: “It is within these dimensions of time and space that different kinds of knowledge are situated, our understandings of the world are constructed, and the social orders of meaning are made” (Saraga, 1998, as cited in Hankivsky, 2014, p. 10). Because the intersection of systems of racism, sexism, class exploitation, nationalism, heterosexism, etcetera, operates across historical, structural, cultural, disciplinary, and interpersonal domains, attending to social context *grounds* intersectional analysis (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hankivsky, 2014). However, by the same logic, intersectionality itself should not be used as a “free-floating signifier,” but, rather, it must be embedded in the historical, social, cultural contexts in which it is used (Lutz, 2014, p. i).

## Complexity

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing complexity in social, political, and interpersonal worlds. The core themes of social inequality, power, relationality, and social context are intertwined and, as such, introduce a theme of complexity into intersectional analysis (Collins & Bilge, 2016). However, most advocates of intersectionality acknowl-

edge that using intersectionality as a tool of analysis is difficult because intersectionality is itself so complex. As Collins and Bilge (2016, p. 29), note, though the desire to have “a tidy methodology for intersectional research”... “or a crisp introduction manual for applying intersectionality to various fields of practice” are reasonable, such things are not easily developed. In fact, there is no consensus on how intersectional analysis should be conducted and, as such, the intersectional framework implies a plurality of approaches and purposes (Choo & Ferree, 2010; McCall, 2005). Moreover, foreclosing on a rigid set of criteria for engaging in critical inquiry and critical praxis is likely to constrain in undesirable ways. Instead, a broad framework of intersectionality must be developed in an ongoing, collaborative fashion by scholars, practitioners, policy-makers, and activists alike (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

## **Social Justice**

Although social justice as an outcome of intersectional scholarship and social activism seems to flow quite naturally from the other core themes, working for social justice is not necessarily a requirement of intersectionality, nor is it emphasized in all accounts of intersectionality. Yet, many those who use intersectionality as a tool for critical inquiry also consider social justice to be a desideratum of engaging in such forms of inquiry (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hankivsky, 2014; May, 2015). Thus, the inclusion of social justice as a core theme of intersectionality “expands the circle of intersectionality” to include its use as an analytic tool for the explicit purpose of promoting and, ultimately, achieving social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 30). It may be notable, however, that interests in social justice may focus on either macro or micro, or both, levels and processes (Lutz, 2014).

## **Embracing Reflexivity and Diversity of “Knowledges”**

The notions that reflexivity is an essential component of critical inquiry and praxis and that there is a diversity of knowledges that inform and are informed by intersectionality are implicit in many accounts and employ-

ments of the framework, but often do not appear as core themes. With respect to the former, the basic idea is that reflexivity—both personal and epistemic—is a value for scholars, researchers, policy-makers, and activists who use intersectional frameworks. In essence, the user of intersectionality must also analyze his or her own social locations and where they fit within the “matrix of oppression.” Ideally, such reflexivity “should be in place before setting priorities and directions in research, policy work and activism” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 3). However, it is also important to be aware of both the inescapability of reflexivity in social research (Ashmore, 1989; Morawski, 2005, 2014) and the potential risks of adopting uncritical reflexive practices (Gemignani, 2017).

Regarding embracing a diversity of knowledges, because intersectionality is concerned, at least in part, with the relationship between power and knowledge production, it is essential to include and integrate the experiences, perspectives, and worldviews of people who have been marginalized or excluded from the production of knowledge such that the very power relations under scrutiny might be disrupted (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Dhamoon, 2011). I include reflexivity and diversity of knowledges as a core theme here because they have relevance for the metaphorical mapping of intersectionality unto theoretical psychology that is discussed below.

Although the themes highlighted here are presented in a list, no strict ordering among them is implied. They are better conceptualized as themselves “intersectional” in virtue of being a (non-exhaustive) set of interdependent categories and dimensions.

At this point, I believe it is prudent to remind the reader that my objective here is not to propose that theoretical psychology adopt intersectionality as an overriding framework or that theoretical psychologists necessarily hinge their scholarship and practice explicitly to analyses of how social identities and social inequality come about as a result of a complex of interdependent power relations. Of course, for some purposes, such an approach would be valuable and important. Moreover, some psychological scholars do conduct and promote work of this sort (e.g., Burman, 2003; Cole, 2009; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016a, 2016b; Syed, 2010; Warner, 2008) and much of the work of feminist and other critical psychologists is embedded, explicitly or implicitly, in intersec-

tional analytic frameworks and critical praxis (e.g., Cole, 2008, 2009; Rutherford, Sheese, & Ruck, 2015; Teo, 2015; Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2018; Warner & Shields, 2013). Although I believe that theoretical psychology could stand to gain benefits from the incorporation of one or more of the core themes of the framework, my aim is simply to use the *concept* of intersectionality—as defined and elaborated here—as a metaphor for drawing out a number of themes that might potentially help to unite the broad range of scholarship and practice represented in the collective work of theoretical psychologists. It to this objective I now turn.

## Exploring the Metaphor for Theoretical Psychology

### Mapping Elements of the Working Definition of Intersectionality

Above, the following working definition of intersectionality was given:

Intersectionality is a **multi-axis framework** for understanding and analyzing the **diverse but mutually influencing** events and conditions of social and political life that give rise to **different social locations**, identities, and interrelated forms of both power (or disempowerment) and privilege (or disadvantage). Intersectionality consists in a **synergy** of *critical inquiry*—in challenging the existing hegemony (bodies of knowledge, theories, methodologies, and social practices)—and *critical praxis*—in challenging the status quo with the aim of transforming power relations.

This definition is “working” because, as alluded to above, it is antithetical to the spirit of intersectionality to constrain it to a fixed set of criteria or dogmatic principles. However, in order to get the metaphorical mapping of intersectionality onto theoretical psychology off the ground, one must begin somewhere. I will begin, therefore, by presuming that it could be granted that the definition provided here and the core themes drawn out of it are, at least, reasonable. Before attempting to map the seven core themes of intersectionality, I wish to first draw out the metaphor with

respect to several components of the working definition, which are presented in bold font.

First, an intersectional framework for theoretical psychology would integrate multiple and interdependent subject matters and multiple forms of inquiry. This is suggestive of a theoretical psychology marked not only by a plurality of topics, approaches, and purposes (as it currently is), but also by integrative collaborations among individual theoretical psychologists (and, ideally, between theoretical psychologists and psychologists from other areas, as well as scholars and activists working outside of psychology). Now, clearly this does not mean that the individual efforts of every theoretical psychologist must speak directly to some overriding objective, but it does suggest that an individual piece of scholarship that emphasizes a single theoretical issue and/or from a single theoretical/methodological vantage point will be necessarily incomplete, and will require some means of integration into the larger body of work of theoretical psychologists.

Second, within an intersectional framework, theoretical psychologists would be engaged in both critical inquiry *and* critical praxis. Critical inquiry, among other things, requires that theoretical psychologists think “from the margins,” in terms of both the diverse and mutually influencing conditions that have created and maintained hegemonic psychology, and the ontological, epistemological, and axiological stances that it privileges, as well our own social (political, institutional, disciplinary, interpersonal) locations within it. Regarding critical praxis, I believe there are at least three general forms that are relevant to theoretical psychology: disciplinary, extra-disciplinary, and intra-disciplinary. That is, fully embracing critical praxis in theoretical psychology would require identifying concrete implications of our critical inquiries for promoting and fostering change within the discipline, in the world, and within ourselves (both as individuals and as a group), and, where justified, taking action to facilitate such change.

Third, although it is mentioned above, it bears reiterating the centrality of *synergy* of critical inquiry and critical praxis for an intersectional theoretical psychology. Critical scholarship without clear application will leave theoretical psychology impotent to some extent, at least at the level of the broader discipline. And, critical praxis lacking a founding in criti-

cal inquiry will be hamstrung by partial and incomplete understandings of the domains to which they are relevant. If we are to foster understanding of the subject matters of psychology, the relevance and pragmatic utility and application of our critical inquiries must be made explicit. Likewise, our critical inquiries will be in response to current social conditions, both within and beyond the discipline. Whether and the extent to which the implications of the work of theoretical psychologists actually gets taken up is, of course, another matter. This point is briefly addressed below in the sections on power and social action.

Accordingly, for the purposes of mapping the metaphor of intersectionality onto theoretical psychology, I offer the following working (i.e., tentative, partial, insufficient) definition of theoretical psychology:

Theoretical psychology is a domain of critical scholarship and practice that addresses multiple interdependent subject matters and employs multiple modes of inquiry relevant to a broad range of categories of psychological experience and their application within and beyond the broader discipline of psychology.

## Mapping the Core Themes of Intersectionality

### Social Inequality

Of course, theoretical psychologists, like all psychologists, should (and many do) acknowledge social inequality as an important dimension of critical analysis for and practice of psychology. However, in staying true to the metaphorical mapping I am attempting, here social inequality may not require so literal a translation. Rather, I would prefer to focus on the social positioning of theoretical psychologists themselves. First, an intersectional theoretical psychology would acknowledge both privilege<sup>6</sup> and marginalization in relation to the broader discipline of psychology, the

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<sup>6</sup>As it appears in much current critical theory and also mainstream discourse, the term “privilege” has been used in contentious ways which can, for example, perpetuate victimization (Bruni, 2017) and act to silence those deemed to have it, thereby shutting down analysis (Evans, 2015). I use the term in a relatively general sense of recognizing that access and opportunity vary in predictable ways with different social locations.

subdiscipline itself, and the persons and groups of persons who are the focus of our scholarship and practice. Although we can and certainly do get along much of the time with other groups of psychologists, theoretical psychology is marginalized within the discipline at large, at least to the extent that many other psychologists really do not have a very good grasp of what we do, and the views of some are much less charitable. However, theoretical psychologists—as contributing members of elite and powerful organizations and institutions—are, ourselves, socially privileged. In addition, theoretical psychology, like other subdisciplines, has a certain degree of social organization wherein those having certain social locations within the group may experience more or less privilege (e.g., access to opportunities to conduct and share their work) than others. An intersectional theoretical psychology would acknowledge the existence and potential implications of these different features of social organization, including how they might enable and constrain the scholarship and practices of theoretical psychologists.

## Power

As with social inequality, theoretical psychologists ought to (and many do) include at least some analysis of power relations in their inquiries about whichever domain of psychological experience is focal to their work. This is part and parcel with employing an intersectional framework and is an essential feature of the work of critical psychologists (cf. Teo, 2015). However, again, the present aim is primarily to extend the metaphor of intersectionality as a general framework for potentially uniting the work of theoretical psychologists, as opposed to proposing it as an overriding framework for practicing theoretical psychology. An intersectional theoretical psychology would analyze and evaluate the power relations that are at play both between the subdiscipline and the discipline at large, and within the subdiscipline itself. At the disciplinary level, theoretical psychologists have relatively low status and thus little power to promote critical scholarship on a broad scale and influence structural change in the discipline. At the same time, theoretical psychologists are a heterogeneous group wherein power relations may contribute to unequal-

ities within the subdiscipline (e.g., the relative value placed on the work of faculty versus students, or academic scholars versus practitioners, etc.). Moreover, as educated and employed persons, theoretical psychologists will often have relatively more power than many of the persons and groups of persons that are the focus of our scholarship and practice. Thus, although at the group level theoretical psychologists may be united in the fight against the “big man,” we need to acknowledge that at the individual level we face varying institutional (structural, social, political, interpersonal) entryways/barriers that differentially enable/constrain our scholarship and practice. Likewise, we need to acknowledge that the entryways/barriers we face may be substantially more/less than is the case in society at large.

## Relationality

Certainly relationality has been a prominent theme in much of the work of theoretical psychologists. However, as a meta-theoretical concept, relationality implies a theoretical psychology marked by a complex set of research questions, methods, and potential applications of research findings. Such ontological, epistemological, and axiological pluralism is a minimum aspiration; ideally, an intersectional framework for theoretical psychology implies “pluralism plus...” wherein *integration* and *synthesis* of scholarship and *collective action* are key objectives.

## Social Context

Attending to the relations among and between the different social locations of theoretical psychologists requires, of course, a grounding in the analysis of context. Here, again, I emphasize context in terms of theoretical psychology as a whole, and of individual groups or individuals within the group. As with intersectionality more generally, an intersectional framework for theoretical psychology would need to locate the work of theoretical psychologists (individual and collective) within the purview of our history in relation to the present and of the ways in which specific



social and cultural traditions work to “naturalize” within psychology broadly, and within theoretical psychology more narrowly, certain inquires, analytic tools, and knowledge products and not others.

## **Complexity**

As with intersectionality as a framework for critical inquiry and critical praxis, complexity is an essential feature of the scholarship and practices of theoretical psychologists. Not only do theoretical psychologists engage with complex subject matters and issues, theoretical psychology as a whole is embedded in a complex “space” of ontological, epistemological, methodological, ethical, moral, and pragmatic considerations. As noted, this gives rise to a plurality of topics, approaches, and purposes for engaging in critical-theoretical work. However, an intersectional theoretical psychology would reach beyond the goal of mere inclusivity and toward an integrative and collaborative model of scholarship and practice wherein the strengths of the subdiscipline amount to more than the sum of the contributions of individual theoretical psychologists. Importantly, this does not necessarily imply a harmonious and smooth coalescence of the views and practices of theoretical psychologists. It (merely) fosters opportunities for dialogue (or, perhaps better, mutilogue) among theoretical psychologists in the quest for richer understandings of our subject matter.

## **Social Justice**

As noted above, social justice is often but not always a core theme within intersectional scholarship and practice. Likewise, although social justice is a common theme in the work of many theoretical psychologists, it is not explicitly addressed in all theoretical psychological scholarship and practice. However, in drawing out the intersectional metaphor for theoretical psychology, the theme of social justice might emphasize concerns both with the ultimate outcomes of theoretical-critical work (i.e., as an overriding goal of the work itself), but also the outcome of the recognition of our own social locations as theoretical psychologists and the rela-

tive privilege and/or marginalization we (as individual theoretical psychologists or as a group) experience. A socially just theoretical psychology would work toward the promotion and ultimate achievement of social harmony beyond, but also within, the subdiscipline.

### **Embracing Reflexivity and Diversity of Knowledges**

As with the other six themes, there is a literal understanding of how theoretical psychology might (does) embrace reflexivity and diversity of knowledges as part of its epistemological framework. Metaphorically, an intersectionality framework for theoretical psychology would value reflexivity and diversity of knowledges as important guides to examining the social positioning of theoretical psychology in relation to the discipline at large and society as a whole, but also that of individual theoretical psychologists in relation to the broader subdiscipline.

## **Are We Already Using an Intersectional Metatheoretical Framework?**

At this point, it might be reasonable to ask: “Don’t we do this already?” Indeed, as a group, theoretical psychologists do much of what is described above. Many already use an intersectional or a similar such framework in their scholarship and practice, much of which reflects all or a portion of the seven core themes described at the beginning of the paper. Furthermore, theoretical psychology taken as a whole achieves some of the objectives described in the metaphorical mapping of intersectionality onto theoretical psychology. As a group, theoretical psychologists wear many hats and embody multi- versus single-axis approaches to critical inquiry and critical praxis. The combined work of theoretical psychologists addresses multiple, often integrated subject matters, and utilizes multiple forms of inquiry. A plurality of perspectives is indeed represented within theoretical psychology and there is a general spirit of inclusively generated in our interactions with one another. We represent a very strong tradition of critical inquiry. We embrace complexity and relation-

ality as fundamental assumptions and not as sources of nuisance error or pesky confounding variables. Likewise, context is essential to our analyses and actions, and not simply something we merely have to acknowledge and contend with in order to make sense of “the data.” Generally, reflexivity is a valued epistemological tool and ethical principle, and a diversity of knowledges is acknowledged. Drawing out implications of our work for social action is an explicit goal of many individual theoretical psychologists, and is implicit in the work of many others.

Yet, it bears asking if we might still do better, at both the level of individual theoretical psychologists and as a group. Is it possible that we have served the goals of critical inquiry over those of critical praxis? And, have we attended to the *synergy* of these? I believe these are areas we could work on, by tying our scholarship to concrete social actions, collaborating more with each other, but also with the more “unusual suspects”—psychologists working in other domains, scholars from a multitude of other disciplines, and individuals from the social groups our work concerns and without which our analyses and actions would have little meaning. Is it also possible that in our attempts to place value on plurality we have often missed opportunities to *integrate* our analyses, making them richer but also providing further opportunity to reflect on the work and its potential value, but also its potential harm, for the discipline and society at large.

In placing so great a value on outward-focused critical inquiry, have we perhaps failed at times to turn the critical lens inward and examine the social locations and power relations within our own subdiscipline and between the subdiscipline and society more broadly? We acknowledge our marginalization within the broader discipline of psychology, but have attended less to the potential marginalizations that might occur within theoretical psychology, and also to the power differentials between theoretical psychologists and the persons or groups of persons about whom our critical inquiries (and sometimes actions) pertain. We may not always recognize that some voices are privileged over others (and not always for good reasons) and that the individual-level institutional barriers we face vary in both nature and degree. As such, we, too, are capable of participating, unwittingly, in various forms of what Teo (2008, 2010) has referred to as “epistemological violence.” These are potentially issues that

require more consideration than has been given in the past. I believe that intersectionality—in both the literal and metaphorical senses described here—may provide some insight for where we might begin to explore possibilities for how to engage in such self-analysis.

## Is the Intersectionality Metaphor Useful? Is It harmful?

On the face of it, intersectionality is a fairly straightforward and intuitive idea: the structures and forces that enable and constrain social identities and identifications, and our actions in response to these, are multiple and interacting, and are part of a larger social/political configuration and complex system of power relations. However, intersectionality is, in fact, a much more nuanced idea than it might appear, one that in some ways creates more questions than it answers. For example, the questions of how effectively intersectionality can be used to understand and analyze the specific conditions of a given individual or group and whether it can promote change in the conditions that sustain social inequality (and privilege) implies a quite complicated, and contentious, set of issues. As such, intersectionality has not been immune to controversy and debate (see Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Shields, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013). Although a sustained discussion of such work is not possible here and would, at any rate, take the present work off its intended course, a couple of themes from more critical accounts of or reactions to intersectionality bear mentioning. The first concerns the vagueness of the intersectionality concept and the lack of clear implications it holds for what intersectional scholarship and activism should look like in concrete terms (Nash, 2008). Although this flexibility gives intersectionality some of its broad appeal, it also presents the risk that the framework will be used in contexts in which it has been divorced from its origins as a challenge to narrow and oppressive views of race and gender identity.

A second theme concerns how the widespread appropriation of intersectionality might lead to re-marginalizing women of colour (as well as other groups of women who are not well represented within white, third

wave feminism), which is fully at odds with Crenshaw's central argument for *demarginalizing* through incorporation of an intersectional understanding of identity and oppression (Hira, 2016; Lutz, 2014). It could be argued that intersectionality has been used as a mechanism for further entrenching identity politics in feminist theory and other sites in which it has been taken up; it's just that the identity categories are now intersectional ones.

A third theme points to the complex and thorny issue of how intersectionality has been used (explicitly or implicitly) to advance a neoliberal political agenda. The primary concern is that within the current neoliberal milieu the original goal of intersectionality to "undertake a radical and complex analysis" of institutionalized power relations comes with the very real risk that the analysis will remain at the individual instead of collective level. The result, ironically, would be a turn not towards intersectional understandings, but a further entrenchment of an amoral, market-driven individualism in which individual growth, social advancement, and autonomy trump all else (Evans, 2015, p. 39).

Of course, these and other problems challenge the utility of the intersectionality framework. To the extent that these critiques have merit (and, I believe they do), this leaves us with the pressing question of whether the weaknesses of the intersectionality framework seriously challenge the utility of the metaphor, or worse, stimulate a kind of re-envisioning (re-thinking, re-invigorating) of theoretical psychology that would not benefit theoretical psychologists or those who potentially have something to gain from the work of theoretical psychologists.

In providing a brief response to this question, I think it is first important to distinguish between the *framework* of intersectionality and its actual and potential applications and uses. Indeed, as noted, this distinction has motivated some feminist scholars to focus less on what intersectionality *is* and more on what it *does* in stimulating more complex understandings of power relations and advancing a synergy of critical inquiry and critical praxis (Cho, 2013, as cited in Collins & Bilge, 2016; May, 2015). This way of thinking about intersectionality is, I believe, useful in that it encourages as a starting point the explicit identification of the purposes for adopting any specific, or general, interpretation of how different social locations enable and constrain both individuals and

groups. I have found Georgia Warnke's philosophical work on identity to be particularly insightful in this respect (Warnke, 2003, 2007, 2011). Though space constraints permit only a brief elaboration, working within the hermeneutic tradition (especially that of Gadamer), Warnke examines the conditions (historical, contextual, and varying) under which we make intelligible understandings of race and gender identities and identifications. On intersections of race and gender, Warnke (2007) writes:

Ignoring differences in women due to race and class raises the risk of overgeneralizing from the experiences and identity-characteristics of white, middle-class American and European women. In addition, ignoring these differences marginalizes other women and militates against the possibility of acknowledging their potentially very different experiences and concerns. (p. 11)

She goes on to say that the goal of the hermeneutic task of examining these conditions of understanding is not *enumerating* categories of intersecting identities but, rather, *highlighting the variability* of our conceptions gender, race, their intersections with one another, and with other ways in which we come to understand ourselves and others. In line with the hermeneutic tradition she embraces, Warnke (2007) places importance on recognizing that (1) in understanding our own and others identities, we make use of frameworks that are "bequeathed to us by the histories and traditions to which we belong" (p. 103), and (2) any given understanding (interpretation) is only but one possibility for understanding, that we "are ... identities only in their contexts... [and] need to remember the incompleteness, contextuality, and limited duration of our multiple identities" (p. 248).

Moreover, although Warnke (2011) emphasizes the importance of recognizing the intersections of gender, race, class, nationality, colonialism, and a host of other variables in the identities we carry, she also acknowledges that understanding identity in terms of such intersections "complicates the task" (p. 87) of exploring the disadvantages that women (and, presumably, those grouped in terms of other social categories and intersections thereof) suffer and carries the risk of disintegrating the capacity for collective action. As such, it is essential that we understand identity

(and identification) as being more fluid than fixed,<sup>7</sup> and that the different contexts “in which we live and act” (p. 109) will call certain features of our identities into the foreground, leaving others in the background.

It is in the spirit of Warnke’s approach that I believe intersectionality might serve as a useful metaphor for re-envisioning theoretical psychology (not to mention for re-envisioning intersectionality itself). First, as I tried to emphasize above, my intention has not been to advance intersectionality as metatheoretical framework or a fixed set of criteria for praxis for theoretical psychology. Rather, I have used intersectionality in a more inspirational way, in the sense of trying to “think outside of the box” about where theoretical psychology is situated and how theoretical psychologists might understand where their individual and collective works fits within the discipline, and the world at large, and what this work might ultimately achieve. Another theme I take away from Warnke’s work, and the hermeneutic tradition within which her perspectives are embedded, is the importance of dialogue and openness to others’ interpretations and perspectives, that is, understandings of their identities and identifications as theoretical psychologists. A third theme concerns the ongoing construction (reconstitution) of theoretical psychology that necessarily comes about in our continued attempts to make sense of what we do as theoretical psychologists. Such “self-examinations” will, if conducted in a constructive spirit, allow for continual renewal and rejuvenation of theoretical psychology, while also acknowledging that as the conditions of our understandings of the subdiscipline and the work we do change, so too will our identities as theoretical psychologists be fluid, partial, and incomplete.

Let me end by stating that really none of what I have presented here is new; at best, it’s a reframing, or reinterpretation of much of what has already been said by theoretical psychologists about theoretical psychology. That is, theoretical psychology has a long tradition of examining itself. Moreover, much of what I have suggested above is not inconsistent with past appeals by theoretical psychologists for epistemological and methodological pluralism (e.g., Kirschner, 2006; Wertz, 1999; Slaney,

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<sup>7</sup>A similar perspective on the complexity of identity and intersections of multiple identifications is also expressed in McCall (2005).

2015), inter- and transdisciplinary approaches (e.g., Maiers, 2001; Stenner, 2014, 2015), and the adoption of a pragmatist philosophy (e.g., Osbeck, 1993; Osbeck & Nersessian, 2014). Together, these have promoted pluralistic but also integrative and reflective scholarship and practice. It is important, however, to heed Kirschner's (2006) and others' warning about the potential dangers that may accompany integration and unification and of the value of multiple, even sometimes incommensurate, discourses (or, in a more hermeneutic vein, interpretations). Unification for the sake of unification should never be the objective. Hence, the metaphor of an intersectional theoretical psychology I have explored herein should not be taken as a prescription for a theoretical or meta-theoretical system for unifying theoretical psychology. Rather, my aim has been to use intersectionality to explore where the commonalities and differences lie within and beyond the discipline and to suggest some directions for where we might meet to form a common ground.

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# A Critical Reframing of Theoretical Psychology as Maternal: Strengthening Psychology's Inter- and Transdisciplinary Identity for the Twenty-First Century

Mary Beth Quaranta Morrissey

## Introduction

An important focus of dialogue today in social science research, and meta-scientific theorizing, is disciplinary boundaries and disciplinary identity. Psychology stands at a critical crossroads in its own history and identity, facing threats to its perceived hegemony as the fundamental human science and at the same time wrestling with opportunities in the quest to engage meaningfully and non-hierarchically with other disciplines. It is important to place psychology in the particularity and granularity of the historical, social and cultural contingencies of this twenty-first century, and to remain attuned to our situatedness. In other words, theoretical psychology is already a fully embedded participant in the vortex of violence and turbulence of the Anthropocene Period (Morrissey, 2018a) in which we live, along with its sister disciplines and professions in the sciences, and

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is called to question, resist, disrupt and intervene in patterns of global and institutionalized violence—to adopt an ethical stance of activism.

In taking up the task of meta-theorizing about the role of theoretical psychology in relationship to psychology and allied science disciplines and humanities, I argue here that re-envisioning theoretical psychology necessarily involves a reframing of its orientation *as maternal* in multiple social and ecological contexts of engagement, community and solidarity, and in the activist project of building maternal environments that mitigate suffering (Morrissey, 2011, 2015, 2018a; Morrissey & Ellis, 2018; Morrissey & Whitehouse, 2016; Morrissey, Lang, & Newman, 2019). For these purposes, I elaborate on the entanglements of theoretical psychology, psychology as science, science in a maternal attitude, phenomenological psychology as a science that has been called the mother of all science (Wertz, 2016), and an inter- and transdisciplinary psychological humanities, and the arc of these entanglements—from meta-theorizing to grounded engagement in the world. I differentiate a *maternal* framework from “maternal-ism” (Cosgrove & Vaswani, 2018) in its resistance to systematization and all forms of control including systems of surveillance and monitoring. A *theoretical psychology as maternal* critical frame bears no systematic relation to biology, natural science, a naturalized perspective or a gendered or fixed identity; it seeks neither to restrain nor oppress. Rather, it is an open field, a holding, a nurturing environment and affordance (Morrissey, 2015, 2018a) for fruitful inquiry, engagement and solidarity. A critical question presented is whether meta-scientific theorizing that seeks to ground scientific inquiry and social practices can effectively counter diverse ethical breaches that disregard the maternal character of science. In other words, what is the role of theorizing and science in the ethical breach? Here I make a clear moral claim that the theoretician and scientist as part of a community, culture and ethos grounded in maternal ethics cannot remain silent in the wake of violence to the other. It is in the ethical breach that the clarion call for a robust psychological humanities (Teo, 2017) must find its full-throated voice and expression.

Focusing on phenomenological psychology in particular as an exemplar of the capabilities of theoretical psychology to embody a maternal attitude in the project of critical reframing, this chapter examines *phenomenological theorizing as rebellion* (Morrissey, 2017a, 2017b) as a potentially disruptive

framework for challenging social structures of power and oppression in the society—including psychology's own position of power. Phenomenology as a scientific method has been called the mother of all sciences (Wertz, 2016) in the focus it brings to bear on the process of in-depth reflection on the structures of phenomena—for our purposes here, science reflecting on science itself (Fink, 1995). Expanding upon this description to a more general framing of *science as maternal*, I use the example of phenomenology to illustrate the depth and breadth of the framework I am mapping, and identify several essential constituents of a proposed tentative phenomenological structure: (1) openness and receptivity to all experience, and ways of knowing and understanding experience, (2) welcoming of all diversity, disruption, variation, contradiction and conflict, as well as revisions to knowledge; (3) holding, nurturing and supporting relational connection among all things, pursuits and engagements, including science itself as a world-constituting engagement in the world; (4) capacitating possibility and generativity; (5) fundamentally ethical in respecting persons and person-centeredness (it is noted here that the term “person” is inclusive of all sentient life including humans, animals, trees and plants), as well as all things (rocks, water); and (6) fostering healing in the face of suffering, violations and ethical breaches (Morrissey, 2011, 2015, 2018a; Morrissey, Lang & Newman, 2019).

The notion of rebellion in psychology—and the concomitant challenges that would accompany such rebellion, is one that has been thematized by Thomas Teo during his term as president of American Psychological Association Division 24, Society of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology. In taking up the theme of rebellion, I center my inquiry in the larger context of social theory and discourse and social aesthetics including dance, music, literature, theater and drama. Psychology is poised to embrace new insights about inter- and transdisciplinary connections with social work, as well as other allied fields such as public health, law and bioethics. The relevance of these connections to a broad re-envisioning of theoretical psychology may very well parallel psychology's openness to concrete, lived experience itself. The world in its totality and rich diversity—including all possible worlds of suffering that transcend a world framed by the lens of positive psychology—is the proper domain

of psychology, and that world encompasses pluralistic and indigenous ways of knowing that may conflict with dominant cultures and practices.

Researchers in social work, as well as public health, law and bioethics, have turned to phenomenology in the study of social problems in the social sciences, and in so doing have relied predominantly on phenomenological psychological research methods. An examination of the substantive and methodological positions taken by phenomenologists in social work (and psychology's other allied fields) is helpful in understanding how psychology has influenced the development of ideas in these fields, and more recently, how interdisciplinary perspectives may be shaping the contemporary history of psychology and psychology's framing of social problems. In areas of pressing human concern, such as the suffering and trauma of marginalized and displaced persons, immigrants and refugees, and suffering in serious illness and dying, the relation of the psychological phenomenological reduction and the psychological disciplinary perspective to inter- and transdisciplinary theorizing is called into question and thematized. An objective of this paper is to investigate the possibilities of phenomenology, as an exemplar, to address problems of knowledge that span psychology and social work and other allied disciplines, a task that heretofore has not been undertaken in any systematic fashion.

The subject of interdisciplinarity has been addressed explicitly in phenomenology, and advanced in part by an international association of phenomenologists called the Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists (ICNAP, [n.d.](#)). ICNAP was founded by philosopher Lester Embree in 2008 (Churchill, [2018](#)), and since its founding has committed itself to fostering interdisciplinary scholarship in phenomenology. As a member of the community of scholars present at ICNAP's first formal convening in 2009, and a participant and presenter at many of ICNAP's conferences in the ensuing years, I acknowledge the influence of Lester Embree, philosopher Michael Barber and other ICNAP scholars on my thinking as it concerns interdisciplinarity within phenomenology, as well as interdisciplinarity more generally.

Independent of ICNAP, interdisciplinarity also happens to be a subject of long-standing interest and meaning for me from a life-historical perspective. I am the product of a family with an

interdisciplinary professional background. My mother, Mary Ann Quaranta, DSW, was a social work educator and family therapist, and my father, John V. Quaranta, PhD, an experimental psychologist and researcher. Immersed early in life in the scholarly writing of thinkers such as Sigmund Freud and Simone de Beauvoir, and through my mother in the unfolding oral history of social work as it evolved over the course of the twentieth century, I grew to appreciate the legitimacy of diverse knowledge perspectives. I bring a distinctly social perspective to my own scholarly studies and projects that with intentionality, cross the disciplinary boundaries of psychology, social work, law, medicine, public health and bioethics. I have utilized phenomenological psychological research methods in my gerontological health and social work studies of suffering. My gaze is directed toward knowledge at the margins and intersections of the historical boundaries of the respective disciplines that may artificially restrict knowledge generation. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus principally on social work and its intersections with psychology, and discuss implications for allied fields and the flourishing of the psychological humanities.

## Social Theory and Discourse

Psychology and social work share deep roots in social, sociological and social ecological theory—theorizing that has shaped a commitment to understanding the social world and its relevance to inter- and transdisciplinary studies and scholarship. While an exhaustive review of this scholarship is beyond the scope of this chapter, I draw attention to key nineteenth and twentieth century actors who may be placed broadly in the history of social theory—Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), Karl Marx (1818–1883), Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), William James (1842–1910), Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), Georg Simmel (1858–1918), Max Weber (1864–1920), Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), George H. Mead (1863–1931), Theodor Eduard Spranger (1882–1963), Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1899–1951), Alfred Schutz (1899–1959), W. Adorno (1903–1969), Anselm Strauss (1916–1996), Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917–2005), Albert Bandura (1925–),



Thomas Luckmann (1927–2016), Peter Berger (1929–2017), Jurgen Habermas (1929–), Barney Glaser (1930–), Lester Embree (1938–2017), Martin Baro (1942–1989), contemporary phenomenological philosophers Michael Barber and John Drummond and psychologists Jack Martin, Jeff Sugarman, Thomas Teo and Frederick J. Wertz, and prominent women theorists including Jane Addams (1860–1935), Mary Richmond (1861–1928), Edith Stein (1891–1942), Betty Friedan (1921–2006), and contemporary scholars Mimi Abramovitz, Judith Butler, Michelle Fine, Suzanne Kirschner, Lisa Osbeck, Lisa Schwartzman and Mary Watkins among others, who have influenced the course of history. An important part of this legacy is recognizing, framing and legitimating social problems and the context for such problems in social structures of power and oppression, and parallel recognition of the person as situated in relationship to such structures, contexts and problems. The person-in-environment is a foundational framework in social work and increasingly, central to psychology as well. Phenomenological psychology in particular has demonstrated a historical commitment of fidelity to the lived world—the study of the person, the person’s lived experience, and the world-constituting role of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the development of consciousness. Liberation psychologist Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994) has described this process of development as “the awakening of critical consciousness (*concientizacion*) [that] joins the psychological dimension of personal consciousness with its social and political dimension, and makes manifest the historical dialectic between knowing and doing, between individual growth and community organization, between personal liberation and social transformation (Freire, 1971, 1978)” (p. 18). Martín-Baró (1994) calls for a “new praxis, an activity of transforming reality that will let us know not only about what is but also about what is not, and by which we may try to orient ourselves toward what ought to be” (pp. 28–29). The social justice goals of the liberation psychology and liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1988) movements are closely allied with social work and its historical commitment to social justice and social action.

## Problematizing Everyday Existence

What exactly do I mean by calling for the recognition and legitimization of social problems? What kind of problems do I contemplate here? I describe problems of meaning in the suffering of everyday existence that evade and elude us (Morrissey, 2015). I draw on the realms of literature, music, dance and drama here to give a sense of the breadth and depth of experience I contemplate in my focus on suffering. For example, in a December 2017 writing, I described encounter with death in Balanchine's *La Valse*:

I turn first to the realm of art in my reflections. In the great works of the masters, we may often gain deeper access to realities than words or language alone permit. The last scene of George Balanchine's *La Valse*, a ballet set to Ravel's music, features a female dancer draped in black who first appears in the ballet garbed in white and cast as a figure of innocence. As the dance unfolds, the dancer becomes enraptured by Death, and is swept into Death's tantalizing embrace. Balanchine has skillfully intertwined in this ballet choreography the pregnant tensions of possibility in the form of the waltz and the explosive movements of the dancers themselves, as they encounter the real and ever-present threat of annihilation. The dance may be viewed as a type of rebellion—a symbolic representation of the rebellion that is embedded in our existence, a protestation of our human finitude, senselessness, and limitation in the face of death. Possibility appears, for at least a moment in time, to be at risk of being extinguished as the cacophonous tones of Ravel and the frenzy of the un-waltz move inexorably toward disintegration in the climax of the performance. Yet after the denouement, the dancers grieve the loss of their friend and pay her tribute. They seek to reconstitute their community, their agency, and meaning, even in the midst of traumatic suffering and death. (Morrissey, 2017a, 2017b, p. 77)

It is Death too that appears in the Broadway production of Eugene O'Neill's *Iceman Cometh* (O'Neill, 1946) starring Denzel Washington in the role of Hickey, salesman who returns to visit with his comrades amidst a backdrop of despair in a mundane, lower Manhattan barroom setting. Hickey proceeds to question his bar mates' life goals and commitments with a tenacity and persistence that is not welcome. This production of the O'Neill play manages to capture in a way I cannot describe adequately

here our shared humanity, ordinary lives and quest for sense-making and meaning in the universal encounter with finitude and death. The performance also captures our striving for social solidarity in the very presence of sometimes unbearable suffering and inexplicable human limitation, as reflected in the coming together of the fractured community after Hickey delivers a soliloquy describing his brutal murder of his wife while she slept. These are the contexts in which I address the goals of inter- and transdisciplinary sciences that span theorizing and praxis.

## Developing a Social Work Phenomenological Reduction

In my doctoral and post-doctoral studies on suffering—and consciousness of suffering—among frail elderly women in nursing home settings utilizing phenomenological psychological methods (Morrissey, 2011, 2015), one important question that emerged from my project was whether social work occupied its own locus within phenomenological psychology. This question was the impetus for my inquiry into the development of a social work phenomenological reduction that would illuminate what is distinctive to social work—in other words, what constitutes the discipline named *social work*, and potential implications of such inquiry for psychology and psychology's engagement with social work and other disciplines.

The early roots of humanistic psychology can be traced to the anti-positivist movement of the late nineteenth century with the work of Dilthey and other philosophers who followed him and dealt with psychological life (Polkinghorne, 1983; Wertz et al., 2011). Because psychology is often viewed historically as the fundamental human science, it is therefore presupposed that the psychological phenomenological reduction is relevant in all disciplines having to do with human beings. While the disciplines and perspectives of psychology and social work remain closely allied for many purposes, social work has its own distinctive identity and perspectives that have been explored and developed and inform phenomenological research and knowledge generation in social work. While

such knowledge helps to enhance the provision of social services to individuals and families in their various environments as they struggle with practical problems, this chapter examines the possible constituents of a social work phenomenological reduction, its contributions to both social work and psychological research and more specifically, theoretical psychology and theoretical social work, and pathways to an authentically inter- and transdisciplinary humanities.

## What Is the Locus of Social Work in the Regional Ontologies?

Edmund Husserl (1913/1982), founder of phenomenology, speaks to the regional ontologies or the essences of the different regions of being that have different structures. This task of regional ontology also provides the framework for the various subject matters of the sciences (Wertz, 2010). Wertz (2010) explains the foundational order of the regions and their respective disciplines:

According to Husserl's regional ontology, materiality founds psychological processes which in turn found cultural and historical realities, but each level contains something novel that cannot be reduced to founding levels. The interwovenness of different regions poses difficult problems...Of utmost importance for science is that each sphere is clarified with insight into its own essential structure, which would rigorously determine with methodological and conceptual authenticity, its own appropriate theory of reason (Husserl, 1913/1982). (p. 266)

The question presented for social work based on the above is what is its locus in the regional ontologies. Does it have its own regional ontology, or in the alternate does it draw upon various ontological regions and is thereby multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary by nature? As a starting point for discussion, Wertz's explanation of the foundational order of the regional ontologies cited above makes clear that the region of culture and cultural life is founded upon the psychological. If it is argued that social work is a cultural science, then if we accept Wertz's interpretation of Husserl, social work would be founded upon the psychological. However,

even if it were granted that social work is founded upon the psychological, it could still be argued that social work has its own regional ontology with a different structure from the discipline of psychology that cannot be reduced to the psychological, and at the same time is interdisciplinary drawing upon knowledge from other disciplines, as suggested by Embree (2010a, 2010b) in his writing on interdisciplinarity within phenomenology. This view is one that merits exploration based upon the history of social work and review of relevant social work literature. If it is correct that social work does have its own regional or even emerging regional ontology, that sphere or region needs to be defined. An alternate path to explore is that social work is not a scientific discipline with a distinctive ontological region, but rather is informed by and in turn conducts multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary scientific research. If such social work research is phenomenological, it would precisely adopt the proper reductions required by the life world phenomena with which its professional work is concerned, and to do this correctly would require a phenomenological understanding not only of the transcendental reductions but of the various other reductions required by the regions of being with which it is concerned. While a full investigation and exposition of each of these possibilities is a project that is certainly not within the scope of this paper, I suggest that the clear meaning of social work and its disciplinary boundaries necessary to scientific research in social work are still evolving and will be historical achievements. However, I can speak to the core work and values of social work and what I see as possible constituents of a phenomenological social work reduction, and how these values and constituents are influencing psychology.

## Is Social Work a Discipline?

Closely related to the question of regional ontology is the question as to whether social work is a discipline—a question that has haunted social work since the early twentieth century. By way of background, Embree (2010a) has written that within phenomenology there have arisen other phenomenological disciplines beyond phenomenological philosophy. Embree (2010a) reports that there are three dozen disciplines doing

phenomenology outside of philosophy and exhibiting a phenomenological orientation. In seeking to identify what is generic to phenomenology in phenomenological philosophy as well as the disciplines beyond philosophy, Embree (2010a) describes phenomenology as being:

1. Reflective;
2. Descriptive; and
3. Culture-appreciative. (pp. 1–2)

It is the last of these properties that I would like to focus on for the purposes of the goals of this paper. In defining “culture-appreciative,” Embree (2010a) states expressly that this position stands in direct opposition to naturalism, objectivism or positivism: “Under the influence of naturalism the cultural can be overlooked or disregarded, but it is always already there and needs to be recognized for theoretical and practical purposes in phenomenology” (p. 3). Embree goes on to explicate that basic cultural characteristics of things as encountered are learned, shared in groups and involve believing, valuing, willing and uses. Both culture and history play a large role in the process of establishing the groups and their members that are called disciplines. Enculturation involves multidimensional learning that extends among other things to language, experiencing, and valuing. Embree highlights both the positive and negative dimensions of disciplinization including on the negative side, insularity, orthodoxy and disciplinary arrogance. He gives sociology and nursing as examples of cultural disciplines that have distinct cultural characteristics.

Embree (2010b) sheds further light on the questions presented in this paper concerning disciplines and culture in the work that he has done on Schutzian Social Psychology. According to Embree (2010b), theory of cultural science was central to Alfred Schutz’s project and involved disciplinary definition. In his paper, “Founding Some Practical Disciplines in Schutzian Social Psychology,” Embree (2010b) concludes that the practical cultural disciplines such as nursing are “scientific” and “science-based disciplines” even though they are not theoretical disciplines like psychology and philosophy because scientific foundations are provided for them.

Applying these concepts about culture and disciplines to social work, I turn to the early history of social work. In a famous speech in 1915, now viewed as a milestone in the history of social work, Abraham Flexner examined the question: “Is Social Work a Profession?” In taking up this question, Flexner also took up the parallel question as to whether social work was a discipline. Flexner (1915) used six (6) criteria to evaluate social work and its professional and disciplinary identity, as follows:

- Is it “intellectual in character?” (p. 578).
- Is it “learned [in] character?” (p. 579)
- Is there an established “technique capable of communication?” (p. 580)
- Is it “definite in purpose?” (p. 579)
- Is there a “responsibility to a larger end?” (p. 581)
- Is there a “self-organization?” (p. 581)

According to McGrath Morris (2008a, 2008b), Flexner came out in 1915—well over 100 years ago—denying social work the professional standing it was looking for largely on the grounds that the field lacked: “(1) decision making authority in critical thinking process; (2) a definite purpose, and (3) a purposefully organized educational discipline” (McGrath Morris, 2008a, p. 40). The last two criteria in particular weighed heavily in the balance as to whether social work was viewed as a discipline. Flexner raised question as to whether social work had a distinct function in society, concluding ultimately that social work lacked sufficient functional differentiation and that the diffuse nature of work in the field would be an impediment to such a function emerging (McGrath Morris, 2008a, 2008b). Flexner’s speech has been the source of major controversy in the profession for over a century (Gitterman, 2014).

A re-evaluation of Flexner’s speech by McGrath Morris (2008a, 2008b) ninety (90) years later suggests that Flexner’s speech was and continues to be misunderstood. McGrath Morris takes the position that the speech has wrongly been alternately blamed, or praised, for its impact on social work in the first half of the twentieth century, possibly acting as the impetus for social work to abandon its social reform heritage and humanistic traditions. McGrath Morris refutes these interpretations of the speech and recasts it in light of Flexner’s social-evolutionary perspective. Adopting

Gadamer's hermeneutic approach and the lens of social evolutionary theory, McGrath Morris (2008b) re-interprets Flexner, emphasizing his focus on social and ethical responsibility and social progress, and crediting him with giving primacy to the thinking process—"an inductive, problem-solving, reasoning process, which professionals apply in research, practice and education" (p. 742). McGrath Morris argues that Flexner's criteria and assessment were never to be viewed as final or complete, but as developing and changing over time. She concludes that the historical problem for the social work field has mainly been one of ambivalence about its role.

Despite such historical ambivalence about its role, in reassessing today whether social work is now a discipline, there is substantial and credible evidence that such is the case. The International Federation of Social Work (IFSW) recognizes social work as a profession and academic discipline in the following definition of global social work:

The following definition was approved by the IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly in July 2014:

Global Definition of the Social Work Profession

"Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels." (IFSW, 2014)

In brief, some of the factors that have shaped the development of the social work profession and organized and strengthened the field as a discipline have been the pressure of societal needs as a result of the aging of the population, family changes and the increasing number of immigrants and refugees, high unemployment and poverty rates, and the changing labor force, and the unique ability of social work to address these issues; the protection of professional rights; improvements in education and training; licensure; agreement on ethical standards; and the evidence-based practice movement within social work (Quaranta, 2000).



In addressing practical social problems of the society that are to a large extent influenced by culture, social work like nursing is a practical cultural discipline that has developed a strong, scientific evidence base for the work in which it has long been engaged going back to Mary Richmond and Jane Addams and the history of social casework and settlement houses.

## What Are the Core Work and Values of Social Work?

What exactly are the core work and values that form the foundation of the practical cultural discipline of social work? It is necessary to properly define what social work is in order for social work to be accorded the status of a fully legitimated scientific discipline. One of Flexner's observations about social work was that there was to some extent an overlapping between social work and other professions.

As a starting point for this discussion, let us look to the discipline of psychology for guidance as we established earlier that the regional ontology of culture is founded upon the psychological, and that social work is itself a cultural science. I turn to the writing of Amedeo Giorgi for further guidance on the subject of what psychology is within phenomenology. Giorgi (1970) discusses Husserl's hierarchy for the different types of science: under Husserl's hierarchy, the foundational sciences are the theoretical ones which form the basis for the practical sciences. Giorgi states that psychology should be, but is not a well-developed theoretical science. While acknowledging that "a precise...definition of psychology is not yet a historical achievement," Giorgi (2009) goes on to say, "the psychological is given in the phenomenal world of individual experience" (pp. 108–109). Giorgi (2009) also cites Sartre on the development of phenomenological psychology and its viability as a project subject to correction:

In a general way what interests psychology is man in situation. In itself it is, as we have seen, subordinate to phenomenology, since a truly positive study of man in situation would have first to have elucidated the notions of man, of the world, of being-in-the world, and of situation... (Sartre, 1962, pp. 28–29). (pp. 94–95)

Returning to Embree's work on Schutz and practical disciplines in Schutzian social psychology, Embree emphasizes that Schutz clearly defined the sphere of social psychology as the individual and the individual in relations to others. Schutz differentiated social psychology in this way from sociology which focuses on individuals as members of groups.

Examining where social work begins its focus with reference to psychology, we can say with certainty that historically, social work has always been concerned with the individual, but especially as situated in her/his particular environment. Mary Richmond (1917), the founder of social casework, believed that social reform was a humanitarian concern that should be implemented on a one-to-one basis. Social work continues to be concerned with the individual today. Relying on Wertz's (2010) interpretation of the regional ontologies and Giorgi's (1970) writing on Husserl's hierarchy of the sciences, we have to consider that social work is therefore founded upon psychology. The question is where does social work depart from psychology and what attitude is required for reflection in a social work phenomenological reduction?

Let us look at some of the relevant literature. In an article examining the relationship between social work and psychoanalysis, Goldstein (2009) credits psychoanalysis with providing social workers with a theory of personality and human problems, and treatment techniques, and with playing a major role in the professionalization of social work. However, he states further that in more recent history social work has distanced itself from psychoanalytic theory and is still in the process of renegotiating its stance toward organized psychoanalysis. As part of this inquiry, Goldstein asks if there is a core social work identity or differentiated identity that distinguishes social workers from the other helping professions. Citing multiple sources in the literature, Goldstein (2009) delineates the following core functions of clinical social work:

- The importance of person—in-situation in assessment
- An emphasis on genuineness and realness in relationship and the use of the clinician's self as core to the treatment process
- Being where the client is
- Respect for the client's determination

- The need for self-awareness about the impact of the clinician's personality, values and background on the treatment process
- Engagement and treatment as a collaborative process
- The importance of reaching out to hard—to-reach or difficult patients
- Respect for cultural and other types of diversity
- A commitment to working with those who are economically disadvantaged and/or who are the targets of discrimination and oppression
- The mobilization of a client's strengths and the fostering of new learning and behavioral change
- An appreciation of the impact of and work with the social environment, including advocacy; and
- A commitment to social justice. (p. 8)

The centrality of relationship to the core of social work practice has also been examined by Blom (2002), drawing upon Sartre's phenomenological existential philosophy and conceptualizations of freedom and being. Blom argues that the relationship with the other is the basis for transformative change in social work practice.

IFSW identifies core mandates of social work that go beyond clinical social work, and drive social work's commitment to changing oppressive social structures:

The social work profession's core mandates include promoting social change, social development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people.

Social work is a practice profession and an academic discipline that recognizes that interconnected historical, socio-economic, cultural, spatial, political and personal factors serve as opportunities and/or barriers to human wellbeing and development. Structural barriers contribute to the perpetuation of inequalities, discrimination, exploitation and oppression. The development of critical consciousness through reflecting on structural sources of oppression and/or privilege, on the basis of criteria such as race, class, language, religion, gender, disability, culture and sexual orientation, and developing action strategies towards addressing structural and personal barriers are central to emancipatory practice where the goals are the empowerment and liberation of people. In solidarity with those who are

disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty, liberate the vulnerable and oppressed, and promote social inclusion and social cohesion.

The social change mandate is based on the premise that social work intervention takes place when the current situation, be this at the level of the person, family, small group, community or society, is deemed to be in need of change and development. It is driven by the need to challenge and change those structural conditions that contribute to marginalization, social exclusion and oppression. Social change initiatives recognize the place of human agency in advancing human rights and economic, environmental, and social justice. The profession is equally committed to the maintenance of social stability, insofar as such stability is not used to marginalize, exclude or oppress any particular group of persons.

Social development is conceptualized to mean strategies for intervention, desired end states and a policy framework, the latter in addition to the more popular residual and the institutional frameworks. It is based on holistic biopsychosocial, spiritual assessments and interventions that transcend the micro-macro divide, incorporating multiple system levels and inter-sectorial and inter-professional collaboration, aimed at sustainable development. It prioritizes socio-structural and economic development, and does not subscribe to conventional wisdom that economic growth is a prerequisite for social development. (IFSW, 2014)

In reviewing the above core functions and mandates of social work as cited in the social work literature, it could be argued that there continues to be some overlap with psychology. Not all of the overlap can be accounted for, however, by social work drawing from the discipline of psychology. In some cases, psychology in its practical orientation, influenced especially by the qualitative movement (Wertz, 2006, 2011) and its growing emphasis on participatory research, emancipation and social action, may be drawing from social work. Certain core functions and mandates enumerated above, however, stand as being unique to social work and they include its commitment to both social justice *and* social action.

Allison Murdach's (2010) review of social work's relation to the progressive tradition also recognizes the salience of social work's commitment to social justice, activism, pragmatism, democratic values, and public-spiritedness. Murdach (2010) states that the evidence points

to social work having a “culture” of progressivism: “It can still be argued that progressive ideals can enable social work practice to make a unique contribution to American public life because they make social work virtually the only service profession with a solid basis in both social justice and social action” (p. 87). Murdach concludes that social work, although divided to some degree between mainstream and radicalized progressivism, remains focused today on practical social problem-solving to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities. As articulated so well by Murdach, I underscore here the centrality of practical social problem framing to the meaning of social work.

It is also important to ground the work of social work in its ethical code and ethical responsibilities. I turn to the Preamble of the Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) for social work’s framework of mission and values:

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s dual focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Social workers promote social justice and social change with and on behalf of clients. “Clients” is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals’ needs and social problems.

The mission of the social work profession is rooted in a set of core values. These core values, embraced by social workers throughout the profession’s

history, are the foundation of social work's unique purpose and perspective:

- service
- social justice
- dignity and worth of the person
- importance of human relationships
- integrity
- competence.

This constellation of core values reflects what is unique to the social work profession. Core values, and the principles that flow from them, must be balanced within the context and complexity of the human experience. (NASW, 2017)

In addition to the scholarly literature and the ethical code, we as phenomenologists need to look to the lived experience of social workers themselves and their perspectives on the social work profession. I am privileged to have had access to the rich perspective and lived experiences of my mother Mary Ann Quaranta who was a social work pioneer and educator for nearly 50 years, having served as Dean of the Fordham Graduate School of Social Service for 25 years, as well as President of NASW (Morrissey, 2018b). On May 22, 2000, in a 50-year retrospective, she delivered her last speech to the graduating class of the Fordham Graduate School of Social Service. This excerpt from that speech in 2000 and its clear focus on social justice and advocacy on behalf of marginalized persons and populations capture the essence of the social work profession:

It was exactly 50 years ago this month that I got my master of social work degree from Fordham University. A great many changes occurred during these 50 years in our society, in our social structures, in our social mores ... There have been dramatic changes in social work and in social work education as well and these changes have been reflected in your education, and we have made every effort to have our curriculum and our field practice as *au courant* as possible. The 50 years have brought increasing recognition to our profession as being a meaningful one and as improving life for others and we have developed a greater level of credibility in the academy for our research and for developing our own solid knowledge base. During the past

decades, we have been licensed or certified for practice in all 50 states. Some things have really not changed, however. What has not changed is the fundamental theme of our profession, which is our mission to promote social justice in our society and in all communities where we work. Also, what has not changed is the unacceptable percentage of people in our society and in all societies around the world who are marginalized, who are destitute, who are forlorn, who are downtrodden and oppressed, and not experiencing the bare minimum requirement for a decent quality of life. (Quaranta, 2000)

In summary, the central themes that emerge from the review of the selected literature, the code of ethics, the international definitions and mandates, and the lived experience data are the focus of social work on individual well-being *and* the well being of the society, that is, social welfare, social justice, *and* social action to effect change for marginalized and vulnerable populations. It is in these spheres that social work moves beyond the psychological sciences and the focus on the individual into a much broader realm of the *person-in-environment*, that is, the person as situated or embedded in ecological, social and cultural contexts. Such contexts frame the particular social issues and problems, and their social structures, that call for formulation of concrete practical action agendas to address such problems through employment of diverse methods, including social reform and community organizing.

## How Is Phenomenology Done in Social Work?

In explaining phenomenology and its relevance to psychology, Giorgi (2009) describes two attitudinal changes that are necessary for phenomenological psychology: (1) making the shift to scientific analysis; and (2) making the analyses psychologically sensitive. Social work research within phenomenology requires the same two attitudinal changes, except that in the second attitudinal change, scientific analysis through employment of the scientific phenomenological method must be conducted in a way that will be both psychologically sensitive *and* sensitive to the person-in environment that is a central dimension of social work. My purpose here is to explore what is involved in this additional dimension of the second of the attitudinal changes.

## Selected Phenomenological Social Work Studies

I turn now to studies that have been done by social work researchers in health social work for purposes of illuminating the central social work dimension of person-in-environment. I have chosen health (or medical) social work for the very reason that health social work has a strong identity and culture within the larger field and has clearly defined boundaries. Most social workers in health care settings are delivering their services in institutions or agencies like hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, and are not well integrated into the host organization or the organizational culture. In the last decades, they have been confronted with enormous challenges in negotiating a changing health care landscape that is often not welcoming to social workers who often have different values than the neoliberal enterprises by which they are employed (Morrissey et al., 2019; Silverman, 2008). Phenomenological methods have been used by social work researchers in this area of investigation in an effort to move away from the biomedical model that has historically dominated this research and resulted in objectification of the illness experience and marginalization and medicalization of the person (Morrissey, 2015, 2018b). For this reason, this area is ripe for the present inquiry.

Drawing upon Embree's (2011) work in applying the Schutzian perspective to phenomenological nursing, I use Alfred Schutz's theory of cultural science as a framework for understanding social work phenomenology, how it is done and its place within phenomenology. As Embree (2011) explains more fully, this theory of cultural science is intended to include the social sciences and its focus on living contemporaries, and can be applied in phenomenological social work research. The research done in social work phenomenology can be considered a type of cultural-scientific social science. In addition to the foregoing disciplinary definition, Embree (2011) delineates two other components of Schutz's science theory that are useful, as follows:

- basic concepts for the cultural sciences such as interpretation of experience and meaning and ideal-typical concept formation; and
- methods and operational rules including subjective interpretation and adequacy.



Embree (2011) explains further that Schutz's structure actually has four levels: (1) the ground level of common-sense thinking and the meanings of action; (2) at the second level, common-sense constructs based on research by the cultural scientist; (3) at the third level, scientific science theory encompassing disciplinary definition, basic concepts and methodological procedures of the particular sciences referencing the lower level constructs and meaning, and (4) finally, at the fourth level, philosophic science theory which is theory of science in which more than one discipline is involved and is related to sociology, the social and to the cultural sciences. It would seem therefore that this theory of science would also relate to social work as a cultural science.

The social work phenomenological studies I have selected will help to illustrate the attitudinal change, as outlined by Giorgi (2009) above and Wertz (1983a, 1983b, 1985, 2005, 2015), that is necessary in social work, as well as the possible constituents of reflection in social work. I have chosen the studies as exemplars of what is distinctive to social work reflection across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (the studies themselves span the years 2001–2005).

The first study I discuss is a social work phenomenological investigation into the life-world of home hemodialysis technology (Giles, 2003). The goals of the study were to investigate and explore the embodied life-world experiences of four people with end-stage renal disease. The objectification of medical illness in previous research and the role of technology in the illness experience, as well as the role of social work in home care, were identified as primary research concerns. Giles (2003) acknowledges social work's participation in the failure to make a paradigm shift from the mind-body dualism of medical science to a framework based on bodily knowledge—the presenting problem of knowledge in social work. This phenomenological investigation addressed this specific problem of knowledge in social work by exploring and investigating: (i) participants' lived experiences of illness in their life-worlds; (ii) the social context and value of the home care setting in which participants received treatment; and (iii) the lived body in the experience of illness. Citing Merleau-Ponty, Zaner and others, Giles (2003) states that phenomenological methods

are well suited to the research questions and aims of the study because of the humanistic perspective of phenomenology and its focus on the life-world and lived experience.

Study findings were grouped under four phenomenological categories of lived time, lived body, lived spatiality, and lived relations with others and self. The study findings suggest that the medical discourse and practice of hemodialysis technology transformed the bodily experience of the participants. The types of experiences participants lived through and shared concerned bodily experiences involving urination, an arm graft, pain from the insertion of needles, disruption of lived space, resistance to technology, and privacy and perception by others. One of the more powerful findings of the study was the impact the medical practices had on both the body and home as integral to the life-world of the participants.

I draw upon the work of Jager (1999) to elaborate upon the findings of a relationship between the lived body and the place of dwelling:

It is clear that any thought that proposes to rethink the relationship between soul and body ...must also at the same time rethink the relationship between the person and his place of dwelling. A new understanding that refuses to view the body as a piece of equipment animated by a sovereign soul can thereby neither support the belief that a place of dwelling is but a machine a vivre, or that a house or city is but a kind of material framework or container that indifferently holds its human cargo. Any thought concerning the body affects our understanding of the home ... the hospital. (p. 153)

Jager explicates further, building on the work of Merleau-Ponty, that this phenomenological approach to housedness, dwelling, inhabiting opens up ways of having a body, habit, language, that signify movements in and toward the world.

In summary, the major substantive research findings of the study were the centrality of the lived-body and the home to the illness experience of seriously ill persons receiving home dialysis treatment. Consistent with the phenomenological understanding of the relationship between the body and the home, additional major findings emerged from the study based upon participants' express concerns about potential threats to the

stability of care in the home, such as space, water quality and health and safety standards in the home setting. Such concerns extended to broader issues of access to care, such as risks of homelessness affecting the population receiving home dialysis technology treatment and permanent barriers to care for the homeless, as well as access to treatment for renters and people living in shelters.

The study findings provide evidence of deeply ingrained cultural attitudes in the home-dialysis technology treatment environment. The belief systems embedded in the medical model of care support the effectiveness of technology as an intervention that by itself can make seriously ill persons better. What is valued by the systems delivering care are improved health outcomes measurable by physiologic and psychosocial dose-response patterns. These system beliefs and values conflict with the positionality of persons with serious illness whose experiences of the technology and treatment are described in some depth. The seriously ill persons' accounts describe struggling in a threatening environment through which their lives and homes are transformed by the dialysis technology. They express strong desires to keep their lived bodily experiences intact and free from intrusion. The study findings suggest that persons with serious illness value the integrity of their whole personhood.

Giles (2003) concludes that these study findings call for radical changes in both medical discourse and social work assessment and practice to assure that the bodily integrity of the seriously ill person is respected, and perhaps even more urgently, in housing policy to respond to federal cut-backs in subsidized housing and to the needs of seriously ill persons who need to access dialysis treatments in their home. In this social work phenomenological investigation, the ecological perspective of social work and attitudes of sensitivity to the person-in environment are clearly framed in contexts of social justice and social action. The study results provide a snapshot of the social ecology of homecare hemodialysis in all its variegated dimensions.

The second study of interest (Leichtentritt & Rettig, 2001) in this inquiry examined the values underlying end-of-life decision making for older adults and their family members in cultural milieux outside the United States. The social work literature is quite rich in this area of research. However, phenomenology as a method has not been favored in

social work research investigations. Phenomenological methods were used in this social work phenomenological investigation in Israel, published in the *Health & Social Work Journal* in 2001. There were 19 Jewish Israeli older persons and their family members participating in the study, a total of 47 participants representing 19 families. Data collection was conducted using face-to-face individual interviews—in Hebrew—with the participants in their homes. The researchers (Leichtentritt & Rettig, 2001) speak to the influence of Israeli culture (including Jewish religious beliefs) in shaping the end-of-life decision making process, and the communitarian philosophical values that characterize the culture. According to the researchers (Leichtentritt & Rettig, 2001), the communitarian framework connotes the following: "...values that are embedded with a high degree of collective consciousness, solidarity, belonging, mutual concern, and interdependence. These collective values were generated in Israel partly by the influence of Jewish religious beliefs and partly by historical conditions..." (p. 150). Leichtentritt and Rettig (2001) pay particular attention to the practical character of end-of-life decision making, entanglements of decision processes with social and cultural contexts, and cultural valuing of the social consequences of end-of-life decisions.

Before being interviewed, participants were asked to review case examples involving withholding and withdrawing treatment, active euthanasia, and physician-assisted death. The purpose of the study was to describe central values related to end-of-life decision making, and deepen understanding of such values and their role in ethical decision making. Study findings showed that although values did not change by type of decision, attitudes did change and the priority of values changed. Value struggles and emphases were organized around four life domains or themes that highlighted the fears and consequences of decisions that would threaten closely held values: physical-biological; social-psychological; family; and societal. The study findings showed that the four domains were connected by three transcendent values: dignity, quality of life and quality of death.

In describing the social–psychological self, participants emphasized terminal personal values, defined as desirable end states such as integrity, wholeness, dignity and quality of life and death. Integrity was identified as the central value. From the perspectives of the Israeli older citizens, the terminal social values that were central included legacy, continuity,

collectivism, justice, fairness and dignity. Leichtenritt and Rettig (2001) highlight the importance of social context to participants' decision making process: "Ecological theory acknowledges that an end-of-life decision is an individual, relational and social cultural phenomenon ... participants in the decision making process took into consideration the social, community and family contexts, giving attention to both past and future time perspectives" (2001, p. 150).

The problem of knowledge in social work addressed by this study is a lack of evidence about attitudes and values in end-of-life decision making, particularly in social and cultural contexts. Similar to the previous study discussed, the aims of the study respond to the knowledge problem in social work. This phenomenological investigation sought to answer these questions: What are the attitudes of Israeli older adults toward end-of-life decision making? What are the types of experiences pertaining to these attitudes? What are these older adults' beliefs and values? Social workers need the knowledge gained through such research to guide their practice with older adults and family members in the end-of-life decision making process. The researchers stress that end-of-life decisions are very much practical problems that are context-dependent and involve multiple systems. In discussing the implications of the study, they recommend future studies comparing communitarian and less communitarian states and societies and their respective values in end-of-life decision making. This study highlights social work's attention to the ecological perspective, social contexts and systems, and the practical nature of problems presented in end-of-life decision making processes.

Leichtenritt, the lead researcher of the previous study, reported with colleagues (Leichtenritt, Blumenthal, & Rotmensch, 2005) on a second phenomenological study also conducted in Israel with Israeli women hospitalized because of high-risk pregnancy. The goal of this study as presented by the researchers was to deepen understanding of lived experience of hospitalization due to high-risk pregnancy. Concerns articulated in connection with this goal were the role of medical technology in this area of health care, and the need to provide guidelines to health care social workers for improving the care provided to women with high-risk pregnancies. Researchers cited the paucity of evidence on the psychological experience of hospitalization for this population, and the lack of

attention to the voices of women and their perspectives and experiences. Previous knowledge about this problem was based on nursing research that used quantitative measure to evaluate stress levels.

The study was placed in the cultural and social context of Israeli society. According to the researchers (Leichtentritt, Blumenthal, & Rotmensch, 2005) social attitudes favoring childbearing and procreation in Israel were reflected in government policy and normative roles for women in the society. The local context of the study was a mid-size hospital serving a low to middle-income population.

Focus groups were used to collect data. Fifty-seven married women participated in the study. All participants observed Jewish tradition in some form. Data analysis was conducted using phenomenological methods, preparing a phenomenological description, identifying meaning units and an essential theme.

The phenomenological analysis identified findings of emotions, fears and anxieties, need to establish boundaries, and feelings of ambivalence on the part of the participants. The desire to nurture and to become a mother was found to be related to the participants need for self-actualization. There was also a strong emphasis on the cultural meaning of the family in participants' perceptions of the social system. The researchers identified ambivalence as the essential theme or core dimension of the participants' experiences of hospitalization due to high-risk pregnancy. Examples of this ambivalence were demonstrated by conflicting feelings and meanings concerning health and well-being, and normative roles in society. Similar to findings of conflict in the end-of-life decision making study (Leichtentritt & Rettig, 2001), these study findings also highlight the role of conflict in health care decision making.

## **What Are the Possible Constituents of Descriptive Social Work Reflection?**

Drawing upon both Giorgi (1970, 2009) and Wertz (1983a, 1983b, 1985, 2005, 2010, 2015), I clarify what is meant by the psychological phenomenological reduction in order to elucidate the move to a social work phenomenological reduction. Once the researcher assumes the

human scientific phenomenological reduction, the researcher will proceed to read and analyze the raw data, applying the disciplinary perspective. Wertz (2005) has delineated constituents of descriptive psychological reflection:

- Empathic immersion in the situations described
- Slowing down and dwelling in each moment of the experience
- Magnification and amplification of the situations as experienced
- Suspension of belief and employment of intense interest in experiential detail
- Turning from objects to their significance. (pp. 204–206).

Reflecting on the above, how would constituents of descriptive social work reflection be tentatively discerned and examined to determine if such constituents differ in any significant way or expand on what Wertz has delineated? As I have discussed, social work and psychology are allied in many areas of knowledge building and have certain overlapping core functions. I have considered that social work is founded upon psychological processes and certainly draws significantly from the discipline of psychology. For this reason, the constituents that Wertz enumerates would serve as the foundation for the embryonic development of social work reflection. With this in mind, in reviewing the selected studies discussed earlier, it is possible to identify several broad domains in which social work has established a perceived disciplinary identity and prominence in the culture, especially the sub-culture of the helping professions and the social welfare community. Those domains stand out and include:

- Social ecology;
- Social welfare;
- Social justice; and
- Social action.

These domains are not separate and distinct but overlap and theoretically, together would form a unitary regional ontology of social work.

Giorgi (2009) explains:

The focus of psychology is on how individual human subjects present the world to themselves and how they act on the basis of that presentation... It should also be borne in mind that the scientific phenomenological reduction is a partial reduction. While the objects are reduced, the acts are not, so they refer to a worldly subjectivity that is influenced by society, culture, others and the world at large. (p. 135)

Social work is broadly implicated in the meaning and interpretation of worldly subjectivity. In the first study presented (Giles, 2003), the worldly subjectivities negotiated by the participants included the vast medical enterprise and culture that transformed their lived bodies and homes. Social work reflection would involve the researcher's adopting an attitude of sensitivity to the ecosystem in which the participants perceived themselves to be situated, and as Wertz described, empathically immersing oneself in the worlds of the participants. Social work reflection would point to interrogation of the data that reveal inequities in housing policy to gain a deeper understanding of the social structure that disadvantages certain at-risk and vulnerable patients, and to design practical problem-solving approaches to change. The researcher engages in these activities of social work reflection from the stance or attitude of social work reflection, which is oriented to social welfare, the well-being of the individual and the larger society, social justice and ultimately social action. The values underlying the social work attitude are clearly spelled out in the NASW Code of Ethics (2017) cited earlier.

The second study discussed (Leichtentritt & Rettig, 2001) looks squarely at values underlying attitudes toward end-of-life decisions. Here again social workers are implicated in reflecting on the culture and social systems that have been entangled with the process of valuing and the values themselves. The reflective activity of the social worker moves beyond the individual *qua* individual and the individual in situation to the ecosystem and the social structures in the ecosystem that are involved with end of life such as the home, the family and the society as perceived by the individuals in their life worlds. The activity of the social work reflection involves dwelling in these structures to gain insights about them. What is the intersectionality of these structures? The social work researcher expresses an individual structure of end of life decision making,



with a sensitivity to concerns and values of social work. Moving from the individual level to the general level, some of the questions that would be part of the reflective activity in this case are: What is the social ecology of end-of-life decision making? What is the well being of older persons at the end-of-life who are faced with making end-of-life decisions? Are there unmet needs? How are the social ecology and the social welfare of older persons at end of life related? Are there inequities in the social structure that disadvantage vulnerable persons or populations? As Wertz (2005) points out, the constituents of reflection are not discrete but are interwoven and integral to the stance or attitude adopted. A general structure of end-of-life decision making is formulated by the researcher.

The last study discussed (Leichtentritt et al., 2005) involving lived experience of being pregnant and medicalization of the person, provides insight into some additional possible constituents of the social work attitude adopted in social work reflection. The findings of the study with respect to high-risk pregnant mothers who were hospitalized showed an essential ambivalence on the part of the mothers in a society with normative roles defining family and mothering. First, we turn again to the concept of the “home” in the lived bodily experiences of the mothers who have a strong desire to give birth, nurture their infants and give milk. These primordial and pre-reflective experiences and their meaning have been well illuminated for us by Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Levinas (1969) among others. Psychologist Eva-Maria Simms (2001) sheds light on the meaning of these experiences: “Milk reveals to us...that the body is not enclosed in itself but engaged in a meaningful web of relations: the infant other is part of the structure that determines what milk is” (p. 26). Social work will be concerned not only with the voices of the mothers and their own perspectives, but with the structure of the home in which the mothers perceive themselves to be situated and the influence of culture.

But the social work attitude in this case will introduce a distinctly feminist perspective to the descriptive reflection and later the analysis of the mother’s accounts. Social work has been acculturated in a feminist viewpoint that would be adopted in the interrogation of the participants’ accounts to gain insights into the presence of visible or invisible social structures such as patriarchy, gendered division of labor and social reproduction. The social work attitude in the phenomenological reduction

would be sensitive to patterns of injustice that oppress women and deny them their human rights. An important constituent of social work reflection is dealing with conflict, making it explicit and problematizing it. Social work reflection would sort out any embedded conflict perhaps between a postmodern feminist understanding of the lived experience of pregnant women and mothers and their individual choices, and critical feminist alternatives to understanding women's bodily experience of pregnancy, mothering and providing milk as implicating fundamentally *social* structures and norms (Morrissey, 2018b). If I were able to craft any language that I would add to the constituents that Wertz has outlined and that social work would operationalize somewhat differently, it would be giving voice to a distinctively social work attunement to and awareness of social structures as context for conflict. The power of a social work stance informed by these perspectives within the phenomenological reduction opens up new horizons of possibility in understanding human experience.

## Conclusion

Theorizing at the margins of the discipline of psychology may be seen as a generative form of rebellion that will disrupt dominant theories and practices and open the field to new ideas, connections, conflicts and engagements in fruitful dialogue. Social work's rich history in social justice *and* social action has helped to forge and crystallize its identity. Social work's hallmark strengths perspective, and firm and settled commitment to both individual and social welfare, will continue to position social work as a leader in a disruptive and progressive social change agenda in this twenty-first century. Theoretical psychology *as a maternal science* has much to gain by understanding the history and contemporary interests and projects of social work, and other disciplines, in pursuit of a shared and strengthened commitment to the advancement of a truly inter- and transdisciplinary psychological humanities. At stake is the very identity of psychology and its capabilities to ground activism in the face of massive global suffering across diverse indigenous and cultural groups, communities and nation-states.

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# A Role for the History of Psychology in Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology

Saulo de Freitas Araujo

The existence of theoretical and philosophical psychology (hereafter TPP) as a field of knowledge, if not as a discipline or sub-discipline, cannot be denied. Three well-established facts leave no doubt: (1) the founding of two societies (the *Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology* and the *International Society for Theoretical Psychology*); (2) the establishment of three academic journals (*Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, *New Ideas in Psychology*, and *Theory & Psychology*); and (3) the launching of a book series (the *Annals of Theoretical Psychology*). All these initiatives are alive and well.<sup>1</sup> So, what is the matter?

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<sup>1</sup> Both societies promote annual or biannual meetings; all three journals have high submission and rejection rates; and the series is going to its sixteenth volume. It should be added here the 8-volume set on theoretical psychology, recently published by Sage (Stam, 2012a).

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It seems that, despite the flourishing of theoretical activities in psychology, we are still very far from reaching two ideals that have frequently appeared in the literature: (a) to develop robust psychological theorization; (b) to impact the training and research agenda of psychologists. Regarding the first one, Gerd Gigerenzer has repeatedly observed that there is no overarching theory in psychology.<sup>2</sup> Instead, psychologists have been developing surrogates for theory, which consist, among other things, in one-word explanations, redescriptions, vague dichotomies, and data fitting (e.g., Gigerenzer, 1998, 2010).<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, neither is there overarching theoretical psychology. As for the second, it is a common place among theoretical psychologists that most psychologists “continue to lack interest in or remain ignorant of the accomplishments and potential contributions of a theoretical subdiscipline” (Tissaw & Osbeck, 2007). Therefore, against the optimism of some theoretical psychologists over the years (e.g., Fowers, 2015; Kukla, 2001; MacKay, 1988), it seems that the advent of theoretical psychology has changed very little, if anything, in academic psychology.

One might speculate about the reasons for that situation. On the one hand, it is obvious that current institutional, political, and economic factors within universities all over the world have been pushing undergraduate and graduate training in the direction of productivity scores, impact factors, social benefits, etc., in which case there is little room, if any, for critical reflection on the very purposes and outcomes of education in the first place. This situation can be described as “the spectre of a bluntly economic instrumentalism brought to bear on education” (Small, 2013, p. 60) or, more specifically, “the all-administrative university” (Srigley, 2018).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, there is also an old intellectual ethos within

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<sup>2</sup>To a greater or lesser extent, both goals appear in most attempts to define and situate theoretical psychology (e.g., Gigerenzer, 2010; Madsen, 1985; Martin, Sugarman, & Slaney, 2015a; Robinson, 2007; Slife & Williams, 1997; Teo, 2015a).

<sup>3</sup>It is interesting to note that, about 50 years before, Gustav Bergmann had already drawn attention to the low level of theorization in psychology (Bergmann, 1953).

<sup>4</sup>A good example of how this can affect the relation between the history of psychology and psychology within universities is given by Alan Collins and Geoff Bunn (2016). Although their focus is on the British case, it is happening to a greater or lesser extent almost everywhere. Ultimately, one can say that this specific problem is closely related to the so-called “crisis in the humanities” debate (e.g., Bate, 2011; Nussbaum, 2016; Small, 2013).



many psychology departments that antecedes the recent transformations in the universities. It is the naïve, sometimes implicit assumption that good science is made of empirical work alone. What Stephen Toulmin and David Leary described as “the cult of empiricism in psychology” seems to fit very well our current situation, as it did more than 30 years ago (Toulmin & Leary, 1985).

The challenge, then, as I view it, is not to create theoretical psychology anew, but instead to rethink and reinvigorate the existing attempts, which can be done in different ways. Here, I want to explore *one* of them, by bringing the history of psychology to center stage. Accordingly, my purpose in this paper is to reflect on whether and how the history of psychology can help rethink and reinvigorate TPP.

## Varieties of TPP: The Missing Element

Before I can come to my thesis, a preliminary obstacle must be overcome: the challenge of definition. Is the thesis I am going to defend dependent on a specific definition of TPP or is it compatible with multiple ways of conceiving TPP?<sup>5</sup> Let us begin to answer this by taking a look at some of its usual definitions.

In one of the first attempts to define the field, Gustav Bergman understood theoretical psychology as “a branch of the philosophy of science” (Bergman, 1953, p. 435), which would restrict itself to an epistemological analysis of psychology. In this sense, TPP could never aspire to become a psychological theory itself. Instead, it should offer “the logic of psychology” (Bergman, 1953, p. 435). By this, it goes without saying, Bergmann meant the application of logical positivism—or scientific empiricism, as he preferred to call it—to psychological methods, concepts, and theories (Bergmann, 1940a, 1940b, 1943, 1951).

Andre Kukla (1989) sees the emergence of theoretical work in psychology as a new era of rationalism against radical empiricism in

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<sup>5</sup>A quick look at the specialized publications in the last two decades is sufficient to convince one of the multiplicity of conceptions of TPP. Some of them overlap, but some are incompatible (e.g., Martin, Sugarman, & Slaney, 2015b; Stam, 2000, 2010, 2012b; Teo, 2009).

science. For him, theoretical psychology is a metatheoretical enterprise that should be understood as a series of activities sharing two basic characteristics: “(a) they are indispensable for the advancement of psychological knowledge, and (b) they do not involve empirical research” (Kukla, 1989, p. 785). Such activities include not only theory construction, but also coherency analysis, conceptual innovation, and the search for hidden presuppositions, among others. More specifically, for Kukla, theoretical psychology “stands in the same relation to psychology as theoretical physics does to physics” (Kukla, 2001, p. 4).

Moving in a somewhat different direction, Slife and Williams (1997) propose theoretical psychology as a formal subdiscipline of psychology, the main goal of which is “the clarification of issues that are fundamental to the discipline [...] along with an evaluation of outcomes and consequences, pragmatic as well as rational and moral” (p. 121). According to them, despite the familiarity of many philosophers with the same questions, “psychology is a unique disciplinary context with distinct requirements and traditions. This means that a specially trained set of people, with an expertise in both theory and the unique requirements of psychology, is necessary” (p. 121).

Following the idea of theoretical psychology as a subdiscipline, Jack Martin (2004) presents an expanded view of the tasks that are integral to theoretical psychologists. For him, the theoretical tasks to be done can be divided into three subsets: those involved in empirical work, in psychological practice, and in the public presence of psychology. The engagement with such self-criticism should lead us, according to Martin, to a “contextualized self-understanding,” meaning a knowledge of ourselves “in wider intellectual, sociopolitical, and moral context” (Martin, 2004, p. 12).

More recently, Thomas Teo (2009, 2015a) sees theoretical psychology not only as a subdiscipline, but also as a practice, the essence of which is to be critical. Regarding the scope and tasks related to such an enterprise, Teo also envisions for TPP a wide range of objects. For him, “theoretical psychology needs to reflect on ontological, epistemological, ethical-political, aesthetic, and substantive issues in psychology” (Teo, 2015a, p. 117).

This brief excursion on different conceptions of what a TPP should entail is already sufficient to reveal a common underlying trait, namely, the acceptance of a meta-theoretical level of analysis. Be it conceived as a branch of philosophy of science or as a subdiscipline of psychology—and regardless of the breadth of its scope—most authors concede that TPP implies first and foremost a second-order perspective, that is, a reflection on theoretical assumptions that guide psychology in general.<sup>6</sup> However, I want to explore a second, not so obvious, common trait: there is little room, if any, for the history of psychology.<sup>7</sup> Although many of these writings refer to historical figures or theories in psychology, there is no explicit and systematic treatment of the role of the history of psychology in TPP.<sup>8</sup>

## Possible Relations Between the History and the Philosophy of Psychology

The next question, then, is “how to approach the relation between the history of psychology and TPP?”. My point of departure is some current debates in the history and philosophy of science (hereafter HPS). The

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<sup>6</sup>It is true that theoretical psychology has been sometimes conceived of as primarily related to theory construction and evaluation (e.g., Gigerenzer, 2010; Longuet-Higgins, 1982; Madsen, 1985; Royce, 1978; Valsiner, 2015). It might be argued, then, that theory construction involves also first-order analyses, in which case TPP would not be a purely metatheoretical enterprise. Even in that case, however, it must be assumed that theory construction involves constant second-order reflection, such as judgements about the adequacy of epistemological assumptions to validate certain empirical data.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Madsen, for example, states this very clearly: “the history of psychology and other empirical studies of psychology ... do not belong to theoretical psychology unless their purpose is ... to contribute to psychological metatheory” (Madsen, 1985, p. 9). He does not say, though, *how* this contribution might happen.

<sup>8</sup>It is not a coincidence that the American Psychological Association has two separated divisions—one for TPP (Division 24) and one for the history of psychology (Division 26)—with little interaction. However, even if this were not the case, a mere institutional arrangement does not guarantee intellectual collaboration and exchange, which is exactly my point here. This is not to say that there is no recognition at all of a potential role for the history of psychology in TPP. For example, Teo (2015b) addresses the issue of how historical thinking in general can be used as a tool for theoretical psychology, by focusing on the topic of objectivity. In the same vein, Valsiner (2015) claims that the history of psychology can serve as “a tool of reflexivity—focused on the past, but oriented to the future” (p. 45). Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that most of the programmatic writings for a theoretical psychology envisage at best a loose place for the history of psychology.

relationship between the history of science and the philosophy of science can be understood from different perspectives. On the one hand, it is possible to say that they have little, if anything, in common as they pursue distinct agendas: while historians look for particulars, philosophers search for generalizations (Kuhn, 1977). On the other hand, many authors argue for an integration of both disciplines into a field of studies called the HPS. One of the rationales behind this proposal is that “history of science without philosophy of science is blind, [...] philosophy of science without history of science is empty” (Hanson, 1962, p. 580).

In recent publications (Araujo, 2016, 2017a, 2017b), I have argued that HPS debates can be fruitful for historians and philosophers of psychology as well. For instance, they allow us to raise at least two important questions: (1) how can philosophical analyses of psychological projects lead to a more accurate historical knowledge? and (2) how can historical investigations of concrete psychological theories and concepts be relevant to contemporary philosophical discussions in psychology? Both questions are in consonance with two general strands in HPS: a philosophical history of science and a historical philosophy of science (Arabatzis, 2016). Having previously approached the first of the above questions (Araujo, 2016, 2017a, 2017b), now I want to turn to the second one: Can the history of psychology be relevant to the philosophy of psychology?<sup>9</sup>

## History of Psychology as Perspective

Debates on the function and value of history in general are not new. Nietzsche (1874/1997), for example, by recognizing our complex relationship to history, clearly saw the ways in which it can be molded and distorted to fit present needs to the point of becoming worthless—a feature that Herbert Butterfield (1931/1965) would later call “the Whig interpretation of history”. In fact, there can be little doubt that history can be used and abused for different purposes, as historians have been

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<sup>9</sup>In this paper, I am using the terms ‘philosophy of psychology,’ ‘theoretical psychology,’ and ‘theoretical and philosophical psychology’ interchangeably, to refer to a broad reflection about the theoretical foundations of psychology. Although I recognize that these terms can and should be more narrowly defined in other contexts, this is irrelevant for my present purposes.

showing over the years (e.g., Ferro, 1984; Fischer, 1970; Fritze, 2011; Lefkowitz, 2009; Macmillan, 2010). Should we dismiss historical knowledge on that ground? Professional historians believe that such abuses can and should be avoided by careful and rigorous investigation of the available sources. In other words, they defend not only that it is possible to obtain reliable knowledge of the past, but also that it matters (e.g., Guldi & Armitage, 2014; Howard, 1991; Hunt, 2018; Tosh, 2008). Assuming, then, that history can be used without being abused, the question of its relevance immediately arises. What can it teach us after all? This brings me back to the history of psychology.

In the last decades, a growing professionalization and approximation to the history of science have generated among historians of psychology a critical distance from scientific psychology. According to some, there is an inevitable tension between the history of psychology and academic psychology, which makes the first seem irrelevant to the latter (e.g., Ash, 1983; Brock, 2016; Danziger, 1994; Gergen, 2014). In this context, Michael Petitt and Ian Davidson (2014) raise the question of the impact of the history of psychology on psychology. For them, “one role for the historian in psychology is explicating an ‘eventful psychology’” (Petitt & Davidson, 2014, p. 710). In the end, they see the more positive role of historiography not exactly in addressing the historical development of psychology as discipline, but in attending to “those events that contributed to contemporary forms of subjectivity” (p. 713).

Although I do not want to deny the relevance of a historical psychology so conceived, I do want to offer a different answer to the question of the impact of the history of psychology. I think the latter can have a more significant impact upon psychology as discipline, including theoretical psychology. So, I will part ways with Petitt and Davidson.

More recently, Roger Smith (2016) and Aaro Toomela (2016) have grouped together a series of arguments to defend the relevance of the history of psychology and its potential impact upon psychology in general. All these arguments are directed—implicitly or explicitly—toward a common target, namely, the irrelevance thesis or, as Smith calls it, “the dismissal of history” (Smith, 2016, p. 4), according to which the history of psychology can make no contribution to the present psychological knowledge or practices. Apart from the fact that the irrelevance/dismissal

thesis is a historical thesis—as Smith correctly observes—with tacit assumptions about what historical knowledge is, which I will not discuss here, the arguments presented by Smith and Toomela are convincing. Even if one does not accept all of them, it is difficult not to concede their point.

More specifically, I want to explore two points. First, Smith defends that the history of psychology can bring “perspective, and hence awareness of positions from which one might understand and perhaps criticize what is otherwise taken for granted” (Smith, 2016, p. 10). Second, according to Toomela, history allow us to look into roots of ideas. For him, “when we forget how the knowledge we accept as scientific has been created and justified, we may erroneously assume that the justification is actually acceptable” (Toomela, 2016, p. 57).

Although both arguments were primarily raised for psychology in general, I want to show how they can be specially applied to TPP. I will argue that the history of psychology can bring perspective to the theoretical psychologist by making him/her aware of at least two things: first, of the historical contingency of the very idea of a theoretical psychology; second, of some persistent theoretical and philosophical problems that underlie the very constitution of a psychological science. In both cases, the history of psychology would serve as a tool for both critique and self-critique in TPP.

## Bringing Perspective 1: Contextualizing the Idea of a TPP

In this section, I will illustrate my first argument by way of four points. I will explore four relevant contexts related to the emergence and consolidation of TPP, which we would do well to remember.

- *Context 1:* The idea that psychology needs—and should never be divorced from—a kind of meta-theoretical reflection is not a novelty introduced either by the alliance of some psychologists with positivism or by the foundation of APA’s Division 24. In the nineteenth century, different representatives of scientific psychology proposed a very simi-

lar idea, such as Wundt. For him, psychological work should be preceded by a systematic philosophical reflection on the very foundations of psychological theories and concepts.<sup>10</sup> He never gave a name to this part of psychology, but he reserved to it an important portion of his *Physiologische Psychologie*, which later came to be published as an independent book (Wundt, 1903). Moreover, one should not forget the explicit relation between his psychological project and his philosophical system (Araujo, 2016).<sup>11</sup>

- *Context 2:* In the first half of the twentieth century, the alliance of some psychologists with logical positivism led to the idea of a theoretical psychology closely related to the logical analysis of psychological language (Bergmann, 1953; Koch, 1951). For example, doing theoretical psychology at the height of neobehaviorism, Bergman accepted that “the logic of science is one thing; its history and the psychology of the scientist is another thing” (Bergmann, 1953, p. 456). The same pattern can be found in the early Sigmund Koch, while still under the spell of logical positivism. Settling the agenda for the future of theoretical psychology, he defended that “the central problem of the fundamental psychologist is not what doctrine to embrace or concoct, *but simply to assay, realistically, how psychology can be made to move towards adequate theory*” (Koch, 1951, p. 298, italics in original). At this time, Koch still believed in the possibility of a general theory for psychology, which he later came to reject.
- *Context 3:* The establishment of Division 24 in 1962 inaugurated a new conception of TPP. Now, philosophical questions about psychology originated from a new source: the approximation of psychology to phenomenology, existentialism and the humanistic movement in gen-

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<sup>10</sup>This preparatory work is to be understood as the application of his theory of knowledge (*Erkenntnistheorie*) to psychology. For instance, Wundt accepted the concept of ‘mind’ (*Seele*) in psychology, but gave it a new definition, avoiding traditional metaphysical commitments (e.g., mind as a substance). The same is valid for his principle of psychophysical parallelism (e.g., Wundt, 1911). For a detailed discussion of the relation between Wundt’s psychology and his philosophical assumptions, see Araujo (2016).

<sup>11</sup>It should be also noted that, in a prescient essay, Wundt (1913) warned against the damaging consequences for the psychologist of an institutional and intellectual divorce between psychology and philosophy. He predicted, for example, that psychologists would gradually lose the ability to recognize and/or deal effectively with conceptual problems. According to James Lamiell (2013), this is exactly what has happened in contemporary psychology.

eral, which culminated with the Rice symposium in 1963 (Williams, 1999). Simultaneously, philosophy of science was undergoing a dramatic change, as historically-oriented proposals began to emerge (e.g., Hanson, 1958; Kuhn, 1970; Polanyi, 1958; Toulmin, 1961). In this context, it suffices to remember the role Michael Polanyi's book played in the development of Sigmund Koch's later conception of theoretical psychology, as the latter himself acknowledges in his autobiography (Koch, 1999, p. 13).

- *Context 4*: After the 1960s, the emergence of post-positivistic and post-structuralist philosophies of science also had an impact upon the development of a theoretical psychology, as one can see in the proposals of Slife and Williams (1997), Martin (2004), Martin et al. (2015a), and Teo (2009, 2015a). These proposals have in common the attempt of psychologists to come to terms with the new developments in philosophy of science and to propose a new framework for psychology in accordance with them. This represents much of our own ideas about theoretical psychology now, which shows how far we are from the beginning of the twentieth century.

What does all this tell us? In the first place, it shows that the very idea of a TPP is context-sensitive, that is, the need for a TPP arises in specific contexts and depends on concrete configurations of psychology and its theoretical assumptions in specific periods. As the proper configuration of psychology in society changes, the prospects for a TPP should take these changes into account. For that reason, there is not, and there will probably never be, a single and unchanging way to conceive of, and practice, TPP.

By losing sight of the historical development and the present configuration of the very idea of TPP one is willing to propose, there is always the risk of forgetting the contingency of a specific theoretical program and its relation to the historical moment in which it is embedded, which can lead to a certain blindness to one's own assumptions. In this way, it is easy to ignore that what has been proposed in the past is not necessarily coincident with contemporary appraisals of this same past.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Arguing for the importance of the history of science for philosophy in general, Gary Hatfield (1996) shows how contemporary appraisals of modern philosophers tend to distort and erase the



For example, Lisa Osbeck (2005) has shown that the assumption of method as a mechanical, external and absolute set of rules, which is dominant in contemporary TPP, is too restrictive in the light of historical evidence. According to her, “to strengthen theoretical psychology’s potential for enduring influence, the task is to wrest method back from the clutches of quantitative psychology (or any rule-book view) and to impart it with the more humane and less mechanical conception that it has always had, but that has been similarly covered up and obscured” (Osbeck, 2005, p. 24). More recently, Barbara Held (2011) has argued that, by not paying attention to concrete cases of critical thinking within mainstream psychology, theoretical psychologists can end up in an empty criticism. She calls for a “disciplinary contextualism” (Held, 2011, p. 190) before TPP can begin its critical task. However, contextualization requires historical perspective. In both cases, the point being made is that TPP cannot operate either too abstract or in a vacuum; if it does, it runs the risk of isolation and irrelevance. That is exactly the first level at which I think the history of psychology can play a meaningful role. By bringing it into dialogue with TPP, we become aware of the core assumptions and limits of our own perspective, which is the pre-condition for any critical stance. In this way, historical contextualization is fundamental for both critique and self-critique.

## Bringing Perspective 2: Persistent Theoretical Problems in the History of Psychology

This is not the whole story, though. There is still a second way to consider the role of the history of psychology in TPP, which is related to a long-term perspective: the identification of persistent philosophical problems

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context of their relationship with science. For him, “deep engagement with intellectual history and the history of science is a necessary condition for reading the texts of theoretical philosophy. Here, the history of science as a discipline can guide us methodologically, for we can learn to emulate the best history of science by looking to predecessors first in establishing textual contexts, by relying on primary sources to establish the most important contexts, and by reading widely, as opposed to jumping from ‘great’ to ‘great’” (Hatfield, 1996, p. 131). I think the same goes for the relation between the history of psychology and TPP.

in the constitution of psychology as a science. I take the following as good candidates for analysis: Is there an ontology of mental or subjective life? In which way can psychology be conceived as a science? Is it possible to measure mental states and processes? What is a psychological explanation?

At the turn of the century, Tweney and Budzynski (2000) observed that psychologists were repeating the same questions of the nineteenth-century. Is this a mere coincidence? In my view, this can be partially attributed to a lack of historical perspective. By neglecting the historical development of psychology in terms of the main theoretical and philosophical debates of the past, we end up repeating history itself, despite superficial differences to the contrary. To put in different words, the roots of psychology's "philosophical embarrassments"—to borrow Herbert Feigl's expression (Feigl, 1959)—lay deep in its past.

Due to space constraints, I will take here only the first question. Contemporary debates on the mind-body problem repeat arguments that have been presented centuries before. For example, different proposals of reductions of mental phenomena to brain processes have scared psychologists all over the world, leading them to fear or avoid neuroscience.<sup>13</sup> However, a closer look at previous debates over the mind-brain problem in the nineteenth century suffices to show how this same idea had already been discarded as conceptually untenable. Wundt (1911) and James (1890/1981), to mention but two among the most influential psychologists of the past, have offered arguments against such proposals that remain unchallenged. But we can go much further in the past, and recover Aristotle's claims against similar logical inconsistencies.<sup>14</sup> The list goes on. Despite all this, new representatives of materialism or physicalism, in the absence of consistent empirical evidence, keep repeating the same metaphors and analogies of centuries ago, as if they were new (Searle, Dennett, Churchlands). This is what I have called "materialism's eternal return"

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<sup>13</sup> That neuroscience is not incompatible *in principle* with psychology can be seen in recent attempts to integrate them (e.g., Machamer & Sytsma, 2007; Schwartz, Lilienfeld, Meca, & Sauvigné, 2016). However, this, too, is something to be learned from the history of psychology (e.g., James, 1890/1981; Wundt, 1911).

<sup>14</sup> In his *De Anima*, Aristotle drew attention to logical problems arising from materialistic attempts to explain the *psyche* through the body or some of its parts (Aristotle, 1995). According to Michael Bennett and Peter Hacker, contemporary cognitive neuroscience repeats the same pattern of logical mistakes: "the mereological fallacy," as they call it (Bennett & Hacker, 2003).

(Araujo, 2012), which involves, although it is not limited to, a lack of historical perspective. When logical and conceptual confusions are involved, no empirical data collection can save them, despite naïve hopes to the contrary.<sup>15</sup> A logical contradiction does not disappear just because we forget it. It does not matter who has identified and when this occurred. It is a persistent problem, unless one assumes that logic itself is a cultural product with no general validity for scientific reasoning. This is the lesson of the history of psychology for theoretical psychology that I want to emphasize at this second level. The history of psychology can increase the theoretical psychologist's awareness of his or her own present task by giving him/her a historical understanding of persistent theoretical problems—such as the mind-brain relation—in psychology. By forgetting the conceptual inconsistencies that have already been pointed out in psychology's past, theoretical psychologists run the risk of reinventing the wheel, despite the novelties of contemporary discourses and technologies.

## Concluding Remarks

The two levels of analysis discussed here make clear the relevance of the history of psychology to TPP in any of its usual definitions. If TPP's general goal is to move toward a more constructive approach to contemporary psychology, the lack of an explicit role for the history of psychology can only help increase the low level of theorization and the distance between empirical and theoretical research.

More specifically, by bringing perspective to the theoretical psychologist, the history of psychology can help rethink and reinvigorate TPP in three ways. First, a broader perspective fosters open-mindedness. In its turn, open-mindedness tends to promote self-critique. Finally, self-critique, being a precondition for a real dialogue, can lead to mutual collaboration

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<sup>15</sup>The same point equally applies to the case of mental measurement and statistical procedures. For example, Joel Michell (1999) claims that contemporary psychometrics—despite its practical dissemination in society—is grounded on flawed theoretical assumptions that are also related to a lack of historical perspective. By the same token, Lamiell (2015) shows how history can help us identify conceptual problems underlying the use of population-level statistical knowledge in contemporary psychology. I think this comes close to what Gigerenzer (2004) called “mindless statistics,” the substitution of statistical rituals for statistical thinking.

among empirical and theoretical psychologists, historians of science, philosophers of science, etc.

In this way, a reinvigorated, historically informed, TPP might have a positive impact on psychology in general, thus contributing to modify the current situation described in the introduction. Of course, none of this can guarantee either that theoretical psychologists will stop talking to themselves alone or that empirical and professional psychologists will be interested in a dialogue. After all, how far one wants to reflect is not something that can be imposed from outside. However, as a tool for both critique and self-critique, a historically informed TPP has more chances of success. Only time will tell.

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# The Indispensable Subject of Psychology: Theory, Subjectivity and the Specter of Inner Life

Suzanne R. Kirschner

A specter is haunting Psychology—the specter of interiority, with its insistence on human first-person inner life. Many of the old and new powers of Psychology have entered into a wholly antidualist alliance... to exorcise this specter, this Ghost in the Machine,<sup>1</sup> or what others, more recently, have derided as the “hegemony of skin and skull”<sup>2</sup>—the specious belief that the mind is in the head.

If you are acquainted with *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1978/1848), the preceding paragraph might remind you of its

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<sup>1</sup>This is a reference to the philosopher Gilbert Ryle’s (2009) argument against Cartesian dualism and its concept of mind.

<sup>2</sup>This phrase is from Clark and Chalmers (1998, p. 18); they assert that we should not think of the mind and cognitive processes as bounded by an individual’s body, but rather as extending into their environment.

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opening sentences.<sup>3</sup> Since this chapter originated as an invited paper for a symposium titled, “Re-envisioning Theoretical Psychology: Rebels with(out) a Cause?,” it seemed appropriate to begin by invoking, if only in parody, that prototype of modern revolutionary rhetoric. But this is not a manifesto; my goal in writing it is neither to overthrow a political system nor (for now) to overturn an intellectual one. I simply want to draw attention to the fact that many psychologists, including quite a few theoretical psychologists, have an aversion to the idea that human beings’ inner lives (the specter referenced above) should be included within the scope of psychological inquiry.

When I say a human being has interiority, I mean that she experiences herself as having thoughts, feelings and dispositions that are characterized by what William James called “absolute insulation” (Leary, 2018, p. 180). In other words, she knows herself to possess a kind of inner life, which is enclosed within her singular awareness, and accessible to her (if only partly) in ways it is not accessible to others. To acknowledge the reality of first-person interiority also implies an exterior, and thus a gap or separation between my first-person inner life and that of other persons. This in turn spotlights the conflicts and other vicissitudes that arise from human beings’ often-divergent interests and desires, as well as the ways in which those divergences, mixed motives and conflicts—between and within individuals, and (paradoxically) between individuals and the sociocultural matrices in which their subjectivities take form—engender the layered complexities inherent in human inner life.

## Theoretical Psychology and the Boundary-Line of the Mental

Theoretical psychologists explore questions that are foundational for our discipline. Understood in this way, theoretical psychology’s history long precedes the founding of academic psychology. But as an institutional-

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<sup>3</sup>The original section is:

A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism. All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this specter: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies. (Marx & Engels, 1978/1848)

ized subfield, the former's origins are much more recent. The theoretical psychology organizations that were established in the early 1960s (The American Psychological Association's Division of Theoretical Psychology, now the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology) and the early 1980s (the International Society for Theoretical Society and the British Psychological Society's History and Philosophy section) have enhanced the resources, intellectual fellowship and legitimacy available to psychologists who, for various reasons, recognize the importance of scrutinizing the philosophical and theoretical assumptions that inhere in all approaches to psychological inquiry (Williams, 1999). These societies have been particularly attractive to those of us who, in addition to having a more general interest in metatheoretical work, are dissatisfied with hegemonic approaches to psychological theory, research and practice because we believe that those approaches do not do justice to important dimensions of human experience, activity and sociality. Consequently, in addition to producing critiques, many of us have developed, extended or worked within alternative approaches (Kirschner & Martin, 2010; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2000). Many of those alternatives—perhaps the majority—have envisioned human beings and psychological phenomena as inextricably entangled with, or even constituted by, their social, cultural and other contexts; they conceive of “the mental” as something that is inherently discursive, “public,” relational, co-constituted, intersubjective, enacted or embodied. These strongly constitutive, contextualizing approaches (which, admittedly, diverge from one another in significant ways) include social constructionist, discursive, relational, hermeneutic, dialogical, neo-Vygotskian, and narrative theories, along with their attendant methodologies.<sup>4</sup>

One of the great virtues of scholarship by theoretical psychologists is its engagement with non-psychological fields. In developing approaches such as those noted above, we have crossed an assortment of disciplinary boundaries,

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<sup>4</sup>Some “4e” (embodied, embedded, enactive and extended) approaches to cognition (Menary, 2010; Osbeck, 2009; Zahavi and Gallagher, 2012), who draw on the ideas of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists, have similar anti-dualist dimensions. While in some respects these “corporist” (Strawson, 2017, chap. 4) theories are a reaction against the putative idealism of earlier constructionist and discursivist psychologies, they have affinities with the latter's efforts to exorcise the aforementioned specter of a private inner life from psychology, often in tandem with their goal of undoing “Cartesian” subject-object dualism.

drawing upon philosophy, sociology, political theory, anthropology, history, biology, theology and the arts. Social, cultural and humanistic theories and modes of inquiry, in particular, provide us with intellectual resources that are more adequate for studying human beings than the decontextualizing, reductive and unwaveringly empiricistic perspectives of a great deal of so-called “mainstream” psychology. But the justified enthusiasm we have for those continental and analytic philosophical trends can also lead us to accept them as canonical, and thus to dampen our critical appetites for scrutinizing some of their limitations. As beneficial as it has been for us to marshal these self-proclaimed anti-dualist philosophical traditions in order to promote psychologies that recognize the socially constituted and intersubjective dimensions of human subjectivity, our devotion to them has sometimes led us to avert our gaze from the full range of phenomena that ought to be considered as psychological. These phenomena include what contemporary philosopher Galen Strawson refers to as “the fundamental privacy of mental life,” (akin to James’ “absolute insulation”) and our “ever-present awareness of it” (Strawson, 2017, p. 87). Strawson puts this very clearly:

Those present-day philosophers and psychologists who, following and perhaps overextending Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Gibson and others, have come to find it hard to admit the innerness of so much of our experience (2017, p. 82).

Many strongly constitutive and intersubjectivist psychologies also downplay, in one way or another, how the disjunctions and conflicts inherent in social and emotional life play out in the constitution of human interiority, and hence of human subjectivity, in complex ways.

In the introduction to this chapter, I wrote satirically of “antidualist alliances”—otherwise disparate intellectual constituencies that share a reflexive tendency to disparage all views that smack of respect for and attentiveness to the reality of interiority and its concomitants. They attempt to discredit affirmations of the fundamental privacy and separateness of human individual experience by calling such theories “dualist” and “Cartesian” (not always using these terms in completely accurate ways). Many self-identified anti-dualist theoretical frameworks, and the studies they engender, are brilliant and useful. But as totalizing moves against

conventional psychology's inapt decontextualization, they have traveled too far in the opposite direction and hardened into "theoretical overreactions" (Strawson, 2017, p. 82). Surely such entrenched theoretical habits work against what William James had in mind when he wrote that we should be on guard against prematurely foreclosing the parameters of the psychological:

The boundary-line of the mental is certainly vague. It is better not to be pedantic, but to let the science [of psychology] be as vague as its subject, and include such phenomena as these if by so doing we can throw any light on the main business in hand. It will ere long be seen, I trust, that we can; and that we gain much more by a broad than by a narrow conception of our subject. (James, 1890/1950, p. 6).

While we theoretical psychologists contribute a great deal to the broadening of our subject by extending its reach outward, persuasively affirming the relevance of context, culture and relational field, we seem less inclined, at the present time, to take as liberal a stance towards including that which is private and interior. How can we be so open in other ways, yet have already settled on the conclusion that interiority oversteps the boundary-line of the mental? This question is linked to even more fundamental ones about the boundaries of "the psychological," and about what should be included within the scope of psychological inquiry. I would like to see theoretical psychologists recognize the centrality of these larger questions more explicitly, and consider them more directly and deeply. My contribution, in this chapter, is to draw attention to our apparent aversion both to interiority and to several dimensions of human sociality that are interiority's correlatives. In doing so, I explain why I think those "exteriorizing" theoretical trends move our work in a direction that is at worst misguided and at best premature.

## **The Disavowal of Inner Life Processes: Antidualist Alliances**

There have been many efforts, both past and current, to exorcise the specter of interiority from the field of psychology. If you are a psychologist who thinks that interiority should not be included within the scope of

our discipline, you might have read this paper's opening epigraph not as satire, but as a straightforward call to eliminate, from the work we do, all remaining references to presences that are not, in some way, publicly accessible. Some psychologists and philosophers want to banish this specter because they find claims of human first-person experience, thought, feeling, belief, and so on, to be essentially fictive, or the product of deep misunderstandings about ourselves (Churchland, 2013; Dennett, 2017). Others reject such claims for methodological reasons, as when John Watson (1924/2009, p. 3), over a century ago, said of consciousness that it is "neither a definite nor a usable concept" for anyone who wants to develop a science of psychology, because psychology, like other sciences, should only deal in observable, or at least operationalizable and measurable, phenomena. During psychology's long past and shorter history, there have been quite a few influential assertions that inner life processes are (or might as well be) essentially irrelevant to our work. From de la Mettrie (1760/2015) to Crick (1995) to Churchland (2013), from Loeb (1912) to Skinner (1953) to Dennett (2017), there have been numerous efforts to delegitimize or disavow such processes, often by redescribing the mental so that it is framed as something material.

But behaviorism and neurobiological reductionism are not the only approaches favored by those who want to guide psychology away from any focus on interiority. Some psychologists, while emphatically distancing themselves from both behaviorism and physicalism, nevertheless are in a kind of de facto "antidualist alliance" with the reductive materialists. In this respect not unlike behaviorists and eliminativists, sociocultural approaches (Kirschner & Martin, 2010) eschew visions of humans as having separate, private, insulated inner-subjective lives. Rather than subscribing to a reductive materialist ontology, they draw on other critiques of interiority, critiques that are grounded in logic, the nature of language, and a rejection of individualism on both ontological and ethical grounds. Such non-physicalist, non-dualist approaches include Wittgensteinian-discursive, relational, hermeneutic, neo-Vygotskian and narrative theories, along with so-called 4e approaches to cognition (enactive, embodied, embedded and extended cognition, many of which claim to draw on phenomenological philosophy). Their aversion to interiority is due mainly to its alleged association with two philosophical concepts

that have been deemed illegitimate: first, Cartesian substance dualism and second, the idea of a “private language,” which was pronounced logically impossible by Wittgenstein.

We need to reconsider what has become an almost reflexive aversion to theoretical tropes that frame human psychological life in terms of inner-outer separation and other types of division. I’m referring here to a tendency to deny or disavow claims of separateness and disjunction between individual subjects, and between individuals and the societies that constrain as well as form them. In the sections that follow, I explicate the concept of subjectivity and then highlight two aspects of interiority that many sociocultural theorists of subjectivity repudiate or minimize. This is followed by a brief discussion of two approaches to psychological inquiry (person-centered ethnography and psychosocial studies), and a form of literary representation (third-person free indirect style), in terms of their potential to do greater justice to the reality and moral complexity of human beings’ inner lives.

## Sociocultural Psychologies and the Allure of (Inter)Subjectivity

In this chapter, I use the term *interiority* interchangeably with “first person inner life processes.” Both terms refer to a key aspect of the broader phenomenon of *subjectivity*, a focus of inquiry that places the complexities of human first-person being in the foreground. For several decades, the word *subjectivity* has appeared frequently in the writings of cultural and literary theorists, social and political theorists, and cultural (including psychological) anthropologists, but relatively less so in the work of psychologists, with the exception of sociocultural and critical psychologists (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008; Kirschner, 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Teo, 2017; Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Below, I explicate the term *subjectivity* and discuss some of the complexities of its usage.

I use *subjectivity* to refer to a view of human beings as singular centers of first-person being who experience, feel, suffer resist, improvise, create and know, while at the same time being subjected to formative systems of



meaning and governance that they are always already immersed in, and that suffuse and shape their thoughts, feelings and dispositions to act and react. The distinguished anthropologist Sherry Ortner emphasizes that subjectivity is inseparable from its contexts—from the “cultural and social formations...that shape, organize and provoke these modes of affect, thought and so on” (Ortner, 2006, p. 107). Thus, a defining feature of subjectivity is that it posits that first-person inner life processes and patterns of deportment cannot be fully disentangled from the social and cultural processes from which they emerge. I follow Ortner in using the term subjectivity to denote both mental and embodied processes, which are both conscious and unconscious. All of these processes are subjected to systems of meaning and governance, systems that suffuse and “provoke” (Ortner, 2006, p. 107) our ways of experiencing, thinking, and feeling, as well as our embodied dispositions to act and react. Subjectivity is formed through processes that both constrain and enable the subject—processes that incite and condition, without absolutely determining, how we experience and conduct ourselves. One implication of this is that since subjectivity is formed in distinctive contexts, it always has cultural and historical specificity. It’s also important to note that the term is used not only to refer to a single individual, but also to a collective phenomenon. In other words, it can denote shared tendencies, perspectives and dispositions to respond, which are common to a group by virtue of its members living and developing within the same milieu and, in some instances, situated in the same social position.

While many sociocultural and critical psychologists have sought to promote the study of subjectivity within psychological inquiry (Gonzalez Rey, 2014, 2017; Kirschner, 2010, 2013, 2015a, 2015b, 2018; Teo, 2017), their aims in doing so are more varied than is often acknowledged. This is not surprising, since sociocultural and critical psychologists draw on diverse traditions of philosophical and sociopolitical thought. These include, but are not limited to: analytic philosophy (Harré, Ryle, Wittgenstein); critical theory (Adorno, Habermas) and other post-Marxist theories (Vygotsky, Gramsci); cultural phenomenology (Geertz); hermeneutic ontology (Heidegger, Gadamer, Taylor); hermeneutic phenomenology (Ricoeur); historical ontology (Hacking); phenomenological traditions that emphasize embodied experience (Merleau-Ponty);

poststructuralism and postcolonialism (Althusser; Butler, Fanon, Foucault, Said); social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, Gergen) and symbolic interactionism (Mead, Goffman).

Although some of these traditions and perspectives are amenable to integration, others are in tension with each other. They are not fully aligned in their views of human nature, the dynamics of social and political life, and the role played by these and other elements in the constitution and dynamics of subjectivity. They also don't all agree about the extent to which we are "interpretation all the way down" or are "made up" by our relationships and contexts. Finally, these theoretical traditions diverge in their ideas about what a desirable society is, the likelihood of achieving such a society, and the goals of social and psychological inquiry. The tensions between these views (and the apparent internal contradictions in some of them), and the diverging conceptions of subjectivity with which they are associated, warrant longer and more detailed exploration in the future.<sup>5</sup>

Those of us who are interested in subjectivity are also not of one mind about whether it is desirable or even possible to construct an overarching, unified theory of subjectivity. Recent calls for such a grand synthesis are interesting and laudable (see, e.g., Teo, 2017; Zahavi, 2014). As with the differences noted above, I leave more detailed consideration of these prospects for another time. My aim in this chapter is to highlight and explicate the dimensions of subjectivity that are particularly important for psychologists to include, but that are often neglected or even dismissed. To the extent that I take those dimensions and qualities to be foundational, I am asserting that there are some processes and dynamics that seem to be integral to how subjectivity should be conceptualized and studied. But that still leaves a lot of room for acknowledging "the contingency of subjectivity and the openness of the term's meanings today" (Biehl, Good, & Kleinman, 2007). Given the wide and disparate range of subjectivity-focused projects and ambitions, I find it preferable, at the present time, to not insist on all-embracing trajectories or bedrock

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<sup>5</sup>For discussions of some points of divergence between these theoretical traditions (see Connolly, 1987; Kirschner, 1996, pp. 202–209, 2010, pp. 772–773; and Kirschner & Martin, 2010, pp. 17–21).

ontologies, about which there remains much debate (Good, 2012a, 2012b; Lester, 2013; Rorty, 2007; Zahavi, 2014).

Such differences and complexities notwithstanding, these sociocultural psychologists share a dissatisfaction with the broader discipline's decontextualization of psychological phenomena—the tendency to treat its objects of study as variables that are ontologically prior to their socio-cultural, political-economic and relational surrounds. Sociocultural approaches make subjectivity a key element, because it brings those dimensions of human existence and experience to the foreground in ways that behaviorism and physicalism (as well as other, relatively less reductionist approaches to psychological inquiry) have not. But, as noted, their focus on public minds and historical kinds—on discourse, text, narrative, positioning, or relational assemblage—while not reductive in a materialist or biological way, and while not endorsing conventional empirical methods, nonetheless risks reductionism of a cultural, social or socio-rational (Gergen, 1982) sort. Often with deliberate intent and care, such initiatives steer theory away from including, or even taking seriously, “the deep interior”—or, in the most extreme cases, any interior at all (Gergen, 1991, 2009). Most do not disavow interiority and discrete individuality as explicitly or radically as Gergen does, and even take pains to distance their work from his (Harré, 2010; Richardson & Fowers, 2010; Westerman, 2013). But in asserting that psychological phenomena are constituted discursively, culturally, narratively, enactively or relationally, they too risk minimizing, rationalizing, or trivializing the unavoidable conflicts that complicate the relationships between individual subjects and the sociocultural matrices out of which those subjects emerge.

## The Denial of Disjunction

As a theorist and qualitative researcher who has spent much of the past decade advocating for a stronger focus on subjectivity within psychology, I find it noteworthy that many of my fellow advocates for the sociocultural turn thus play up some of subjectivity's dimensions, while downplaying, ignoring, or even rejecting others. Many sociocultural psychologists tend to be skittish about—and in some cases, openly dis-

missive of—two particular dimensions of human existence and sociality, both of which are connected to inner life. The first of these, which I noted at the beginning of this chapter, is what James (referring to consciousness) called its “absolute insulation,” his assertion that “[n]o thought ever comes into direct sight of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own.... [and that] The breaches between thoughts are the most absolute breaches in nature” (James, 1981/1890, quoted in Leary, 2018, p. 221; see also Strawson, 2017, especially chapter 5). In other words, each individual has a uniquely intimate and private relationship to his or her own consciousness. (As will be evident in the following paragraphs, which introduce a level of sociological analysis as well as a psychodynamic dimension, this does not imply, in my view, that individual subjectivities are wholly transparent to themselves). In the penultimate section of this chapter, I return to the ineluctable fact of individual experience and its sense of enclosure, and suggest that we might look to fiction to explore how some of its techniques offer intimations of the reality, qualities and complexities of inner life in enlightening and compelling ways.

The second dimension of subjectivity that anti-interiorist, anti-individualist sociocultural approaches often minimize is its moral complexity—more specifically, how that complexity is provoked and constituted by the vicissitudes of human existence and sociality. In previous writings, (Kirschner, 2010, 2015a, 2018), I’ve voiced concern that strongly relational approaches to subjectivity do not place enough emphasis on how subjectivity is forged through what Freud called “our suffering from our relations with other men [*sic*]” (Freud, 1929/1961, p. 26). In this sense, the “breaches” referred to in the preceding paragraph are not only the gaps between your and my thoughts, which are “sundered by the barrier of belonging to different personal minds” (James, 1890, p. 226). They are also divergences between your and my desires. That disjunctive dimension of human social life belongs to a broader range of existential disunities between human beings’ wishes and all kinds of limitations imposed by reality and society.

In saying that a human being’s suffering in relation to others is “perhaps more painful to us than any other,” Freud was referring, at the very least, to the ways other people disappoint and frustrate us (and we them), to

the pain of loss and abandonment regardless of the cause, and to the inevitability of unfulfilled longing and desire. Included in these vicissitudes are the disappointment, frustration, conflict and competition (for all kinds of material and symbolic resources) that are sometimes present in even the most loving, close and attuned of relationships, as well as the guilt and shame often associated with such ambivalences and conflicts.

But “sociality” doesn’t just refer to the relationships between individuals. It also denotes the multivalenced relationships and orientations that we individuals have to the shared social and cultural systems that form us and yet to which we do not completely belong (Durkheim, 1973, pp. 152–153). One of the functions of social and cultural systems, structures and practices is to regulate the expression, and even the conscious experience, of motives, desires and actions that are potentially disruptive to social life (as well as to an individual’s ability to tolerate, and function in, constraints imposed by society and reality). Those sociocultural systems suffuse our individualities, but although they “make us up” (Hacking, 2006), they are not all that we are.

We do not need to assume that all human beings have a large reserve of anti-social impulses which are barely contained behind our well-mannered masks. I believe that to say that some types of conflict and competition are inevitable does not require that we assume the existence of an aggressive (in the sense of destructive or sadistic) instinct—certainly not one that exists universally in equal measure. It is, instead, a claim about the inevitable dynamics of social life: a claim about what living with other, separate human beings in a world of diverging desires and finite resources elicits from us and about how it shapes us. It is also important to note that I am not suggesting that conflict is more foundational in human beings than care or a capacity for embodied attunement and collaboration. Rather, what I underline is the fact that a group’s discursive practices, language, cultural symbols, and macro- as well as micro-social rules, rituals and roles—all of the sociocultural stuff that forms and completes us—exist not only to enable and amplify humans’ inherent bent towards attunement and coordination, but also to help mitigate, attenuate and rechannel asocial and potentially disruptive or destructive tendencies. While we are inclined towards social coordination, and are shaped by sociocultural codes and shared practices, these relational and

collective processes also, paradoxically, do “violence to certain of our strongest inclinations” (Durkheim, 1973, p. 163). The fact that those counter-social, “unrealistic” or amoral inclinations are constituted, or at least conditioned, within the fruitful constraints of our shared existence does not make them any less consequential for the formation of our subjectivities: “where there is power,” wrote Foucault, “there is resistance.” And, owing to those inclinations’ and resistances’ existence and persistence, “[t]he interests of the whole are not necessarily those of the part” (Durkheim, 1973, p. 163):

[O]ur inner life has something that is like a double center of gravity. On the one hand is our individuality...on the other is everything in us that expresses something other than ourselves....We cannot pursue moral ends without causing a split within ourselves....There is no moral act that does not imply a sacrifice. (Durkheim, 1973, p. 152)

What makes these lines especially striking and relevant, not to mention ironic, is that they were written not by a psychoanalyst, or even by a philosopher associated with the classical liberal tradition, but by Émile Durkheim, one of the most important intellectual ancestors of social constructionism, in an essay titled “The Dualism of Human Nature and its Social Conditions” (1914/1973). Durkheim’s lumping together of human beings’ individuality, asocial aspects, bodily and sensory nature, and “absolute egoism,” as well as his binarism of body/individual versus mentality/soul/society, seem to me to be more reductionist and simplistic than they need to be. There are many kinds of wishes, and there are many kinds of valued resources and “capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) that humans are motivated to seek and sometimes compete for. Thus, it seems unnecessary, and I think unwise (not to mention remarkably Freudian), to relate asocial, antisocial or “resistant” dimensions of human motivation as closely to physical desires and sensations as Durkheim does here. But what I want to highlight is the fact that even this founding figure of sociocultural theory—someone known for opposing the reduction of social and cultural phenomena to the psychological level—recognized that individual interests are not wholly identical with those of society and thus that “society cannot be formed and maintained without our being

required to make perpetual and costly sacrifices.” Moreover, he reasoned, “it is wholly improbable that there will ever be an era in which [individual human beings] can live a life that is easier and less full of tension” (Durkheim, p. 163).

All the complex dynamics I have discussed here comprise a kind of undertow within human subjectivity, a dimension that Ortner’s previously discussed definition takes account of, but that is not as well accommodated by strongly constitutive sociocultural psychologies. In foregrounding their anti-dualism, those approaches (in various ways and to varying degrees) underemphasize, ignore or in some cases even deny consequential aspects of our separateness from each other, as well as the “perpetual and costly” features of the individual’s relationship to the sociocultural discourses and practices that both constitute and constrain her.

I am not claiming that sociocultural and relational approaches depict people as always being and acting in accord with each other (see Kirschner, 2010, p. 773). I also acknowledge that most sociocultural approaches can be used to criticize their own societies and cultures—in fact, they are frequently mobilized for that purpose. Such cultural and political critiques are evident, for example, in the anti-individualism championed by interpretive psychologists and relational theorists, in the emancipatory teleological narratives implicit in the work of critical and Cultural-historical (CHAT) psychologists, and in the activist ends for which discursive psychologies are often used. But such critical potential notwithstanding, many of the most impressive and developed constitutive sociocultural approaches offer “oversocialized” conceptions of subjectivity (Wrong, 1961).<sup>6</sup> By “oversocialized,” I mean that they emphasize intersubjective coordination as subjectivity’s foundation as well as its function. This is a view of human beings as highly receptive to and assimilable into the discourses, relational configurations and identities that their social contexts afford, ascribe or make available to them. It leaves little room for recognizing the force and depth of the various contrapuntal elements that also play an important role in the emergence and composition of individual subjectivities.

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<sup>6</sup> For a fuller discussion of this point (see Kirschner, 2010, pp. 771–776).

A psychology of subjectivity thus needs to allocate greater space for all the forms of disjunction I have discussed here. I refer to this type of psychology as more “complete,” borrowing that term from William James, who used it to describe religious and spiritual systems that include among their formal elements the many forms of suffering, conflict, and agonism that are part of the human condition.<sup>7</sup> In the following section, I introduce two current approaches to subjectivity—one from psychological anthropology, the other from critical psychology—that attempt to do justice to the dualisms discussed above by according a prominent place to conflict and complexity. I then turn to the intimations of interiority found in fiction, especially in a form of third-person writing known as free indirect style.

## **Towards More Complete Psychologies of Subjectivity: Person-Centered Ethnography and Psychosocial Studies**

Person-centered ethnography has roots in the experience-near approaches within psychodynamic anthropology that surfaced in the 1970s (Levy, 1975) and 80s (LeVine, 1982), and have recently attracted wider attention among anthropologists involved in global mental health (Good, 2012a, 2012b). Psychosocial studies, as I use the term here, is an outgrowth of a branch of critical psychology, especially as that field has developed in the UK since the late 1970s. Originators and practitioners of both approaches have voiced concerns that parallel those I expressed in the preceding section. Both person-centered ethnography and psychosocial studies incorporate psychoanalytic theories and methods because of the latter’s emphasis on the social and individual dynamics I’ve discussed, doing so in ways that are compatible with a view of subjectivity as emerging from a sociocultural matrix. By highlighting the complexity of indi-

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<sup>7</sup>James contrasted more complete religions to those he termed “healthy-minded.” Complete religions were so named not only because they included acknowledgement of evil and suffering, but also because their incorporation of those elements can enable some attenuation of suffering, via a deeper integration of life’s vicissitudes than simply turning away from them can effect (James, 1982; Kirschner, 2002).



vidual dynamics, person-centered ethnography and psychosocial studies also provide ways to study individual variation, or what Hollway and Jefferson (2013, p. 12) call “the diversity of individual lived experience.”

## Person-Centered Ethnography

During the past 15 years, several prominent anthropologists have emphasized the need for an approach to subjectivity that includes experiential and psychodynamic dimensions while still adhering to the inseparability of the social and the psychological. It is striking how often “experience,” “inner states” or “inner processes” are mentioned in these anthropologists’ definitions and treatments of subjectivity (Biehl et al., 2007, Biehl & Moran-Thomas, 2009; Good, 2012a, 2012b; Good, Good, Hyde, & Pinto, 2008; Kleinman & Fitz-Henry, 2007; Ortner, 2006; Willen & Seeman, 2012). These scholars seek “new ways to link the social to the psychological, to examine how the lives of individuals, families and communities are affected by large-scale political and economic forces associated with globalization [and] to theorize subjectivity within this larger context” (Good et al., 2008, p. 1). They desire a psychology that will help researchers grasp more thoroughly and incisively “everyday modes of experience, the social and psychological dimensions of individual lives, the psychological qualities of social life, the constitution of the subject, and forms of subjection found in diverse places where anthropologists work at the beginning of the twenty-first century” (Good et al., 2008, p. 1).

Their voice dissatisfaction with poststructuralism and practice theory (two frameworks that dominated anthropology in the latter decades of the twentieth century), as well as with the similarly influential cultural phenomenological and interpretive traditions, finding in none of these the means with which to do justice to complex psychological experience. In light of these concerns, they have called for a fully anthropologized psychology of subjectivity (Good, 2012a, 2012b, Ortner, 2006, Willen & Seeman, 2012), one that encompasses conscious and unconscious inner life processes and embodied dispositions, as well as the dynamic social, cultural and political matrices in which human subjectivities take form.

Some of these anthropologists have gravitated towards methodologies and methods first developed by person-centered ethnographers in the 1970s (Levy, 1975; Levy & Hollan, 2014) and '80s (LeVine, 1982), and further elaborated over the past two or three decades. Person-centered ethnography is an approach to psychocultural research that enables researchers to explore the intertwinement of the individual and the socio-cultural without dissolving either one into the other. It utilizes a type of interview that combines phenomenological and psychodynamic elements, along with participant-observation. Person-centered research methods and modes of interpretive understanding regard interviewees as both informants and respondents. Thus, the interview works on multiple levels: it provides descriptive information about local cultural models and customary practices' manifest meanings and motives, and it also yields material that can be probed for submerged desires, wishes, fears, conflicts and ambivalences. These may be disavowed or repressed, but are enacted tacitly or embodied symbolically, both during the interview event and in other contexts. Such material provides insights into how certain emotions, behaviors and self-understandings are hypercognized (Levy, 1984) by a society while others are minimized or prohibited. It also illuminates defensive resources that the culture provides for dealing with conflicts and anxieties engendered by these prohibitions.

## Psychosocial Studies

The need for sociocultural psychologists to theorize and study human inner life in its complexity, intimacy and individuality also figures prominently in psychosocial studies, which is both a form of critical psychology and an interdisciplinary field. It envisions human subjectivity as a phenomenon that is "*both* socially patterned and constructed, varying cross-culturally and historically, *and*...has a life of its own, that...is experienced as beyond the control of reason, as inherently individual, internal and as particular to specific relationships" (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013, p. xi). Many of its proponents and practitioners seem to have affinities with (and a few of them were part of) a group of British critical psychologists who initially emerged in the late 1970s as

the *Ideology & Consciousness* collective (Adlam et al., 1977) and who later produced *Changing the subject* (Henriques, Hollway, Urwin, Venn, & Walkerdine, 1984). This was an early, seminal work on subjectivity that theorized a deep merging of the social and the individual, while also recognizing the value of psychodynamic interpretation to help account for the persistence and intransigence of various kinds of domination and inequality even after the emancipatory social movements of the late 1960s. By the 1990s and 2000s, interest in developing psychosocial studies was also fueled by dissatisfaction with poststructuralism and the discursive turn (Frosh, 2003; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Walkerdine, 2008). Like person-centered ethnography, psychosocial research uses psychoanalytic techniques of data collection and interpretation, ideally supplemented by ethnographic methods, and usually centered around open-ended interviews (often multiple ones with the same person), the analysis of free associations, and interpretations of the researcher's countertransference responses or the intersubjectively constituted relational field.

Psychosocial studies is not a unified approach: there are debates over a number of issues, including which schools of psychoanalysis should be used for research and interpretation (this is also true of person-centered ethnography), what kinds of methods should be used and what kinds of interpretations are valid and helpful (Walkerdine, 2008, p. 344). But as a broadly psychodynamic orientation to the study of subjectivity, it has attracted the attention of psychologists, psychoanalysts and social researchers on both sides of the Atlantic (Montagner, [https://www.ipa.world/IPA\\_Docs/Derek%20HookTranscript%201.pdf](https://www.ipa.world/IPA_Docs/Derek%20HookTranscript%201.pdf); Layton, 2008; Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012).

## Inner Life Itself: The Psychological Realism of Fictional Minds

It is quite possible—overwhelmingly probable, one might guess—that we will always learn more about human life and personality from novels than from scientific psychology. (Chomsky, 2008, p. 249)

In this section, I highlight some qualities of human interiority that are particularly challenging to explicate, and even more difficult to find a space for within the formal discipline of psychology. I'm referring here to the felt experience of one's solitary, enclosed inner life, along with some basic realities of human existence that are corollary to that experience. To lay stress on these intimate, singular aspects of experience runs counter to a goal that many of psychology's otherwise disparate bedfellows share: to reframe mind as public, in one way or another. But I know I am not alone in believing that it is important to affirm the reality and consequences of having (dare I say) private experience.

My aim here is to begin to articulate how fiction can provide a kind of psychological realism that—paradoxically—cannot be achieved through the study of actual persons. In order to explain what I mean when I say “paradoxically,” I first return to James' point about the absolute insulation of consciousness:

No thought ever comes into direct sight of a thought in another personal consciousness than its own. Absolute insulation, irreducible pluralism, is the law.... Neither contemporaneity, nor proximity in space, nor similarity of quality and content are able to fuse thoughts together which are sundered by this barrier of belonging to different personal minds.... The breaches between thoughts [of different individuals'... "personal minds"] are the most absolute breaches in nature. (James, 1890, p. 226)

James' phrase, “absolute insulation,” underscores the fact that I have special access to my own conscious experience that I do not have to yours, and vice versa. This is not an argument for substance dualism or for private languages. Nor does it reify “consciousness” or other concepts we use when we talk about subjectivity and interiority. And it doesn't imply that my inner life is fully transparent to me. It is simply an assertion of the separateness of individual subjectivities, and thus also an assertion of their plurality—of the fact that an inconceivably large number of distinct individual subjectivities exist, in addition to mine. Their engagement with one another therefore necessarily entails some opacity and mystery; consequently, there can be misconstruals and miscommunications between individuals—often without awareness that such miscomprehension is taking place (not surprisingly, this is a common plot device in fiction).

While such flawed understandings and connections can be problematic, they can also be felicitous, since frequently they have the effect of keeping social intercourse running smoothly.

Such lapses notwithstanding, it can be tempting to point to the relative efficacy of intersubjective coordination to support a denial of a private and singular interior life—or, if not denial of its existence, a denial that it matters for psychological inquiry. But the purpose of this chapter, as stated earlier, is to encourage reflection on the widespread aversion to taking such interiority seriously, and to accord greater importance to the awareness that most people have of the insulated nature of all of our inner lives. How, then, might we honor the reality of such privacy and singularity, and incorporate it into how we understand human beings—even as we need simultaneously to recognize that our individualities develop in a shared sociocultural soup?

I gesture towards a response by returning to the figure with which I began this chapter: the specter. Almost 100 years ago, in *Aspects of the novel*, E.M. Forster wrote:

For human intercourse, as soon as we look at it for its own sake and not as a social adjunct, is seen to be haunted by a spectre [*sic*]. We cannot understand each other, except in a rough and ready way; we cannot reveal ourselves, even when we want to; what we call intimacy is only a makeshift; perfect knowledge is an illusion.... (Forster, 1955/1927, p. 63)

Many of us (myself included) would consider this rather bleak declaration to be overstated, and probably partly wrong. But even if so, Forster's pronouncement still provides an important corrective or supplement to the overemphasis on intersubjectivity that characterizes the sociocultural approaches that I've criticized in this chapter. He makes this statement in the context of explaining what is distinctive and uniquely valuable about fiction, and, in particular, how fictional representations can provide a kind of awareness others' inner lives that we cannot have in real life:

But in the novel we can know people perfectly....In this direction, fiction is truer than history, because it goes beyond the evidence, and each of us knows from our own experience that there is something beyond the evidence, and even if the novelist has not got it correctly, well—he has tried. (Forster, 1955/1927, pp. 63–64)

In declaring the importance of trying, Forster highlights how curious we are about other people's hidden thoughts and feelings, and the pleasure and excitement (not to mention the sense of greater control) we feel when we have access to them, even if the inner lives to which we are privy are those of fictional characters that we have either created ourselves or are reading about. But surely such curiosity and its satisfaction are predicated on a belief that there *is* such an inner life; thus, part of the value of such trying, I think, is that it asserts the reality of a dimension of other persons—as of oneself—that is beyond the (empirical) evidence.

Literary theory and criticism have undergone many transformations and developments since Forster wrote *Aspects*, including contributions from several generations of theorists who have studied the representation of consciousness in fiction (Cohn, 1978, 1999; Felski, 2008; Fludernik, 1996; Hamburger, 1973; Wood, 2008). They have developed more sophisticated perspectives and complex analyses of the techniques used to affirm and depict the inner lives of the imagined beings whose fictional minds are displayed. It is relatively uncontroversial, at least among the theorists I reference, that the depiction of a character's inner life is always an interpretive act: most endorse some version of the Aristotelian truism that "mimesis is an act of making rather than copying" (Ricoeur, 1979, p. cited in Felski, p. 84). Yet these made things, these transmutations, convey something true about the existence and dynamics of inner life, something that cannot be conveyed as richly through any other medium.

The distinguished contemporary critic James Wood celebrates one such technique, called free indirect discourse or close writing. It opens the interiority of a fictional mind to view, couching this representation in language that has a greater or lesser degree of "dramatic irony"—so that, for example, a character is presented in such a way that we "see through the character's eyes while being encouraged to see more than the character can see" (Wood, 2008, p. 11; see also Felski, 2008, p. 89). The use of free indirect style, along with other stylistic and poetic techniques that combine "artifice and verisimilitude" (Wood, 2008, p. xvi), do not only affirm recognizable qualities of inner life itself. Such devices can also convey the complexity and specificity of a character's personality, marshaling rhetorical and narrative resources to provide "the best account(s) of the

complexity of our moral fabric” (Wood, 2008, p. 179).<sup>8</sup> A survey of the styles and techniques that effect such portrayals would go a long way towards elucidating what Chomsky was referring to when he said that fiction can offer insights into human life and personality that no “scientific psychology” can provide.

Of course, a character’s “imaginary psychology...the psychology of possible human minds” (Ortega, quoted in Cohn, 1978, p. 6) can also be scrutinized in terms of the processes discussed earlier in this essay: how their subjectivity draws from its sociocultural and historical surround, and does so in a way that demonstrates the singularity and unevenness of how any individual is both formed by and struggles against her contexts. The literary theorist Rita Felski (2008) refers to fiction’s “rendering of the qualities of [a distinctive] life-world” as “social phenomenology” (p. 89) or “deep intersubjectivity,” noting that some novelists are particularly strong “literary ethnographers,” giving us “not just anthropology, but phenomenology: a literary rendering of how worlds create selves, but also of how selves perceive and react to worlds made up of other selves” (Felski, p. 91).

It is indeed ironic that novels and short stories can affirm and illuminate key aspects of human experience that we cannot get at through the study of real persons. Using various stylistic and poetic techniques to creatively represent rather than imitate, such works of art can, at their best, recognize moral complexity within sociocultural specificity, while also affirming an existential reality we know to be true—that we experience ourselves as having insulated inner lives, and that there is an absolute impassability between my experience of my inner life and your experience of yours.

Both fictional depictions of interiority, and the techniques for achieving them, deserve—indeed, demand—the attention of those who would practice psychological inquiry. However, we should be careful not to conflate the study of literature with the study of real persons. Doing so risks misrepresenting the distinctive features and limitations of both kinds of analysis. As illuminating as it can be to use literature to study how socioculturally constituted subjectivities are manifest in individuals

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<sup>8</sup> Wood (pp. 176–179) views fiction as having the capacity to fulfill the prescription of the philosopher Bernard Williams, who thought that moral philosophy should attend to the messiness and “tragic dilemmas” inherent in inter- and intrapersonal relations. I do not take this to mean that by presenting the moral complexity of its characters, fiction is supposed to tell us how we should live.

in distinctive ways, I agree with literary theorist Charles Altieri that good literature should never be framed as second-rate psychology: “if we put too much analytic pressure on the forms of representation literature offers, we may well lose its special qualities and treat it only as inferior social science, psychology, or philosophy” (Altieri, 1981, p. 271, quoted in Felski, 2008, p. 88). I am also not suggesting that we psychologists rush to adopt literary techniques for representing interiority when we write about real persons. It isn’t just that very few of us have the talent or even the desire to write fiction that could effectively do what I’m talking about here. It’s also that writing the inner life of an actual person, living or dead, as if one did have direct access to it, would automatically turn one’s work into fiction. Perhaps this is why it always seems disingenuous or self-deluding to me when a psychologist tries to write about her subjects or patients in a wholly literary way, as if she knew them as fully and confidently as a novelist knows a character of her own creation. All this makes it more challenging (though no less important) to come up with ways for these psychological insights, and the manner in which they are conveyed in fiction, to somehow better inform how we conduct psychological inquiry and introduce the subject of psychology—including the study of subjectivity in psychology—to rising generations.

I am aware that, particularly in this last section, I have ventured into theoretical territory that is bound to invite questions and provoke challenges. These include questions about alternative approaches to the study of fiction, such as formalism and reader-response theory, and especially versions of the latter that favor enactivist approaches to cognition. There are also questions about the relationship of interiority to modernity and modernism. I look forward to addressing these and other concerns in detail in future work.

## Conclusion: Psychology for the Time Being

In closing, I note that the attention I give to subjectivity—and particularly the emphasis on inner life that has been my primary focus—is predicated on the claim that the felt quality of experience cannot, in good faith, be dismissed out of hand. Versions of that argument have been produced by



a number of philosophers over the past 40 years, including Nagel (1974), Chalmers (1995), McGinn (1989) and Levine (1983), who wrote about the still-unbridged “explanatory gap” between conscious experience and the neurological hardware from which, it is assumed, experience somehow emanates. Chalmers called this “the hard problem of consciousness” (as opposed to some putatively easier ones).

There is no dearth of claims to the contrary: assertions that there is no such gap, or that the problem isn't so hard, or that it's irrelevant, or that it has been solved. Physicalists who issue such demurrals blithely dismiss the fact that at the present time we have no idea by what means conscious experience issues from material brain processes, though my pointing this out is not likely to dispirit anyone who holds fast to physicalism. It will likewise not change the (extended, embodied) minds of those who believe that cognition is not a function of brain processes alone but comes about through a dynamic interaction between an acting organism and an environment that it thereby creates. Nor will it give pause to those who subscribe to some kind of neutral monism or panpsychism.

At the present time, all of these moves towards resolving, transcending or falsifying the mind-body problem are more promissory than realized. Perhaps their hopes—couched in rhetoric that sometimes borders on the redemptive—will be fulfilled in such a way that constructs like culture, social power, and even inner life will wither away, and psychology will become absorbed into one consilient theory of everything. Currently, we have no way of knowing when, or whether, the kind of scientific progress that will most certainly be made will lead towards such a denouement. For now—for the time being—we theoretical psychologists would do well to encourage our discipline to respect, include and do justice to the subject of psychology, and to heed the specter of inner life.

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# Testing the Limits: Theoretical Psychology Re-envisioned in Light of Boundary-Pushing Trends in Theoretical Physics, Philosophy of Biology, and Philosophy of Psychology

Barbara S. Held

## Introduction

Is theoretical psychology in need of re-envisioning? According to Thomas Teo (2017a) there can be no question: “Neither rebellious deconstruction nor reconstruction, that may include another round of interpretations of classical texts, showing slight variations, are sufficient.” Instead Teo maintains that “theoretical psychology needs theory ‘construction’ that includes the development of original theoretical-psychological ideas that inspire psychology and articulate mental life and subjectivity more adequately.” Are his twin goals of inspiring psychology and articulating mental life and subjectivity more adequately compatible? After all, many

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theoretical psychologists<sup>1</sup> have constructed theories about mental life and subjectivity that were designed expressly to re-envision the very mainstream psychology that they have criticized for decades, with no discernable impact on mainstream practices. Hence Teo's hope for a re-re-envisioned psychology by way of a re-envisioned theoretical psychology:

It is time to rethink and re-envision the duties, responsibilities, hopes, and tasks of theoretical psychology. This is due to the age of the subdiscipline but also because the gap between alternative approaches and the mainstream has widened, and significant changes in society, culture, technology, the discipline and profession of psychology, that include processes of internationalization, intellectual and philosophical innovations in other disciplines, and changes in how we conduct our lives, afford possibilities of a new orientation in theoretical psychology. (Teo, 2017a)

Theorists have criticized the mainstream extensively for indiscriminately treating mind-dependent/human/social kinds as mind-independent/natural kinds (e.g., Martin, Sugarman, & Thompson, 2003; Messer, Sass, & Woolfolk, 1988; Miller, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1983; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999; Wertz et al., 2011). It is famously said to suffer from misguided “emulation” of physics (aka physics envy) by adopting natural-science methodology that, in its inattention to human agency and situated subjectivity and its insufficient self-critical reflectivity (e.g., Morawski, 2005; Tafreshi, Slaney, & Neufeld, 2016; Teo, 2017b, 2018), constitutes an “epistemopathy” (Koch, 1981, p. 258). It is in this acrimonious soil that the seeds of various “re-envisioned” psychologies have been sown—enriched by the continental philosophies (e.g. hermeneutics, phenomenology, existentialism) that rarely appear in the mainstream's empiricist tradition.

If a nontrivial goal is to inspire mainstream psychologists, then theoretical psychologists have failed. Moreover, if theorists are serious about

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<sup>1</sup> The term “theoretical psychology” encompasses theoretical and philosophical psychology, as stipulated in the Society for Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology ([www.theoreticalpsychology.org/history](http://www.theoreticalpsychology.org/history)). Teo (2018) states that “the terms theoretical and philosophical psychology are often used interchangeably, but professional philosophers prefer the term philosophical psychology when reflecting on psychological topics” (p. vi).



getting the mainstream to engage in self-critical reflection and change its ways, then we might take our own advice. Tisaw and Osbeck (2007) wrote of our lack of “critical engagement *with* the mainstream,” questioning the extent to which we

do [our] part to keep abreast of mainstream research developments and to represent these developments as fairly and accurately as possible, even while subjecting them to critique. Do we demonstrate willingness to draw from mainstream work to revise our assumptions to enhance our own theoretical efforts in view of these new developments? (p. 161)

In so asking they answered their own question (see Held, 2011).

This is not to say that theoretical psychologists do not engage questions that pertain to empirical research, but rather that when done for purposes of critique theorists may not always notice that the discipline has moved on. For example, Osbeck, Malone, and Nersessian (2007) noted a widespread tendency among critics to equate cognitive science and psychology with *cognitivism*, defined as entailing a “strong commitment to internal or mental representation and computation as explanatory, particularly in the hands of its critics” (p. 245). The resulting critiques include charges of “mechanism, dualism, passivity, disembodiment, [and especially] individualism and isolation from context” (p. 249). Osbeck et al. demonstrated how prominent lines of research within mainstream cognitive science reject these tenets of cognitivism; yet they remain un- or under-represented in most critiques. Accordingly, Osbeck et al. recommend increased familiarity with up-to-date advances in psychology’s various subdisciplines.

Here I add that we might strategically apply a lesson from our clinical handbooks and “speak the client’s language.” If we began therapy by telling a new client what is wrong with him/her based on our favorite theory, the first session might last five minutes. Instead, we first try to understand his/her own experience of the problem, *his/her subjectivity*, and then tailor our work to *that* reality. Nonetheless, in 2001 APA’s Society for (then the Division of) Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology sponsored a symposium in which invited mainstream scientists presented research papers, each of which was immediately critiqued by a different theorist. The hope

apparently was that upon hearing these critiques, prominent mainstreamers would see the theoretical light—theorists didn't seem to suppose that we might see their light. These mainstream scientists were not seeking our help, yet they were at least amenable to critique. Still, not everyone was shocked when Daryl Bem, in responding to criticism about his philosophical determinism, said with unmistakable defiance (in this close paraphrase), "I am an unreconstructed empiricist, determinist, and Vienna circle logical positivist." That was the first and last time this sort of event was attempted.<sup>2</sup>

More to the general point, if, in a Kochian spirit, theoretical psychologists who criticize the mainstream can find no instances there of sound psychological science, or if they can but cannot reach consensus about which instances constitute good science, then what? I anticipate just this objection to my suggestions herein, but such objection makes the point. For the question of which criteria should be used in assessing the legitimacy of any psychological research process and product is nothing less than the question of what psychological research should consist in; and this question is parasitic on theorists' "first principles," many of which oppose the mainstream's (implicit and explicit) principles. In short, it is hard to know if theorists can find no acceptable mainstream research because there is none, or because theorists are so determined to dismiss mainstream research *a priori* that they make no attempt to discriminate between different kinds of mainstream work. This last question raises the issue of whether there exists a monolithic mainstream, given the many diverse programs and methods that contribute to what theorists call mainstream psychology, or whether that label constitutes a reification.

To put this differently, how many of us, *as* theorists, have tried to understand a subdisciplinary (empirical) problem from the point of view of our mainstream colleagues, having first immersed ourselves in their literature? Have we worked to bracket our favorite meta-theories to understand what their particular problems are, as experienced by them, in their subjectivity *as scientists* (see Osbeck, Nersessian, Malone, &

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<sup>2</sup>Teo (2018) also uses a therapy analogy: "It may be the case that critical-theoretical psychology has advanced arrogant analyses of psychology, combined with self-righteousness, which have made it difficult to accept critique ... Perhaps a forced therapy is less effective than the process of asking basic questions that need to be discussed" (p. 15).

Newstetter, 2011)? If we think that mainstream scientists are not only using the wrong methods but are also asking the wrong questions, then there is no place to engage them dialogically, in the spirit of openness to which theorists pay homage. After all, mainstream psychologists are, in an ironic way (i.e., despite their disciplinary dominance), “othered” by theorists who paint them with an unsuitably broad brush that fails to represent them accurately, as Tisaw and Osbeck (2007) and Osbeck et al. (2007) observed. This, despite theorists’ calls for keen attention to the subjectivity of the Other.<sup>3</sup>

It is not only mainstream psychological researchers with whom we could be cultivating greater engagement and dialogue. Less intuitively, we might consider researchers and theorists in other disciplines—including those natural scientists whose ontological and epistemic templates theoretical psychologists deem odious for psychology yet whose own internal dialogues may nonetheless prove instructive in reconsidering psychology’s longstanding internal divides (see Osbeck, 2019). With the goal of inspiring ourselves as well as mainstream psychologists, and taking up Teo’s invitation to consider other disciplines, I turn to boundary-pushing trends and challenges in theoretical physics, philosophy of biology, and philosophy of psychology.<sup>4</sup>

## Can Theoretical Physics Inspire Theoretical Psychology?

I begin with theoretical physics, in distinction to experimental physics, even though it bears only nominal similarity to theoretical psychology. Therefore any attempt to analogize it to theoretical psychology is highly limited, not least for the obvious reason that theoretical physics investigates mind-independent kinds and so is not entangled in a web of folk

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<sup>3</sup>The “Psychology and the Other” conference and book series is one formalized example (see [www.psychologyandtheother.com](http://www.psychologyandtheother.com)).

<sup>4</sup>Teo (2017b, 2018) convincingly advocates expanding psychology’s disciplinary boundaries by way of the “psychological humanities.” Whether my turn to boundary challenges in the natural science are viewed as the self-limiting, if not outright regressive, emulation of the natural sciences decried by many theorists remains to be seen.

psychological human-kind concepts that psychologists must consider. Less obvious, it is not clear that theoretical physicists engage expressly in metatheoretical work, as do theoretical psychologists (and philosophers of physics), though as we shall see that question has been debated in the physics literature. Moreover, theoretical physics and experimental physics together comprise the “mainstream” (if there is such a concept in physics), whereas theoretical psychologists stand in proud distinction to psychology’s mainstream (while lamenting the mainstream’s disinterest). Recognizing that the analogy is hardly apt, I nonetheless ask whether the enviably tight relationship between theoretical physics and experimental physics can inform our own efforts, as ridiculous as that proposition will no doubt appear to theoretical psychologists who believe that emulation of physics, if not outright physics envy, corrupts our mainstream.

For example, Dan Robinson (2007) rejected the applicability of the physics paradigm to psychology. He asserted that unlike physicists, even theoretical psychologists have failed to identify the “proper subject-matter of the discipline” (p. 188). Theoretical physics exists because there “actually are physical entities” (p. 190) that enable theories about them: it constructs models of “what we take to be physical reality [that are] framed [so] as in principle to allow ... experiments sufficient to reveal the defects of these very models” (p. 190). Thus, “the broader translation of the theoretical physics model into psychological terms does not work,” because there is “no settled position regarding the contents and boundaries of ‘psychological reality’ ... There is no settled ontology” (p. 191). He, like many other theorists, wants to explain life as it is actually lived. Yet there remain many questions and considerable disagreement about what constitutes a bona-fide psychological explanation, in which the age-old human-science distinction between (person-level) reasons or meanings and (subpersonal-level) causes features prominently (see Held, 2017).

Robinson is of course correct that theoretical physicists agree with their experimental colleagues about the physical nature of the phenomena they investigate, whatever finer-grained differences among them obtain. By contrast, theoretical psychologists have not reached internal disciplinary consensus about the constitution of psychological entities/phenomena, let alone consensus with our experimental colleagues, who appear unfazed by our metaphysical “speculations.” In his critique of the

functionalism that on his view dominates contemporary psychology, Hank Stam (2012) challenged the “theorophobia” he finds in mainstream psychology’s collective failure to question “the kinds of objects that are genuinely psychological” (p. 228), in the rush to define entities by “how they act rather than what they are” (p. 231). By contrast, I wonder if theoretical psychologists are guilty of too much “theorofilia”? After all, there are all sorts of internal tensions about the proper subject matter of a psychology that might rationally and best guide inquiry; there is no settled ontology in theoretical circles. Yet that has not stopped us in our (meta)theoretical tracks (see Held, 2007, 2011).

If, apropos of Robinson, our aim is first to settle on some psychological ontology, we had better talk amongst ourselves a whole lot more. But if an aim is to inspire the hegemonic/mainstream component of disciplinary psychology, we might take a page from theoretical physicists’ playbook, which requires theorists not only to chart new territory in highly specific, untested domains, but also to be well educated and up to date on the scientific findings about which they theorize. One example of this in physics is the Nobel-Prize-winning LIGO experiments on gravitation wave detection, which not only provided direct confirmation of a prediction in general relativity theory but also put constraints on string theory (Aasi et al., 2014).<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the question theoretical psychologists will be quick to ask, rightly, is whether the recently constrained-by-LIGO-data string theory constitutes a form of metatheory: if not, it becomes hard to see how this example applies to theoretical psychology. The answer to this hypothetical question, then, is important, even though, in line with attempts at metatheoretical unification in psychology, string theory is a highly “speculative unification of quantum theory and gravitation” (general relativity); it enjoys little if any “empirical evidence with direct bearing on it” (Peter Lewis, personal communication, October 9, 2017). Then again, unlike metatheories in psychology, it is in principle possible to test string theory empirically—or is it?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>My thanks to philosopher of physics Peter Lewis for this example.

<sup>6</sup>There abounds fierce debate about whether string theory can in principle be tested empirically, and if not, whether it should or should not be considered a bona-fide scientific theory in physics. See, for example, Dawid (2013) and Woit (2006), who hold opposing views about this. The implications of this debate for theoretical psychology exceed the limits of this chapter.

## Philosophers of X Versus Theorists of X

It is hardly surprising, then, that theoretical physics in itself is of little help in re-envisioning theoretical psychology. I therefore ask if comparison of the boundaries between philosophers and theorists *within* a discipline can help to innovate theoretical psychology. Philosophers of psychology (scholars educated in philosophy departments), who engage in the metatheoretical practices of theoretical psychologists (scholars educated in psychology departments), are the obvious choice. Though I know of no express “philosopher-of-psychology envy,” at least none in writing, I nonetheless suggest that philosophers (especially analytic philosophers) of psychology may have something to tell us yet, despite many theoretical psychologists’ preference for continental philosophy. I also consider the traditional field of philosophy of biology in relation to the burgeoning, boundary-expanding field of biophilosophy, in which I find significant implication for the kind of boundary expansion I call for in theoretical psychology—an expansion already seen in philosophy of psychology and which I herein call “psycphilosophy.” And I return to physics to explore the tense relation between philosophers of physics and theoretical physicists, in which there are many conflicts that raise disciplinary-boundary questions that may perhaps inform theoretical psychology.

### Philosophers of Psychology Versus Theoretical Psychologists

The training and function of theoretical psychologists overlaps substantially with that of philosophers of psychology, who therefore provide a reasonable basis for comparison. Most important for my comparative purposes is this: unlike many theoretical (and philosophical) psychologists, many, though certainly not all, philosophers of psychology (especially those within an analytic tradition) rely on the very mainstream psychological research that theoretical psychologists often reject on principle. For example, implicit bias research in psychology has been used to advance traditional epistemic work, as seen in philosopher Katherine Puddifoot’s (2016) criticism of the epistemic doctrine of accessibilism (or

accessible internalism). According to accessibilism, “All of the factors that are relevant to the justification of a belief are cognitively accessible to the believer” (p. 422). Puddifoot summarized the empirically-informed problem:

Recent research in social psychology suggests that many beliefs are formed as a result of implicit biases in favour of members of certain groups and against members of other groups ... Beliefs of this sort present a counter-example to accessibilism in epistemology because the position cannot account for how the epistemic status of a belief that is the result of an implicit bias can differ from that of a counterpart belief that is the result of an unbiased response to the available evidence. (abstract, p. 421)

Because accessibilism allows only cognitively accessible states to bestow epistemic warrant, it cannot explain the pervasive intuition that implicit/unconscious bias should affect epistemic warrant detrimentally.

Philosophers Lassiter and Ballantyne (2017) took implicit bias research in psychology into moral as well as epistemic territory.<sup>7</sup> They argue that implicit racial bias, which carries moral implication, need not entail the “epistemic costs” that other philosophers (such as Gendler, 2011) find in the dilemmas allegedly faced by “epistemic agents” who live in a society “structured by racial categories” that are reflectively “disavowed”: according to Gendler the agent must in that case

*either* fail to encode the relevant base-rates and cultural background information *or* encode [them]. If the [former], then she pays the epistemic cost of base-rate neglect. If [the latter], then she experiences cognitive depletion by regulating the chains of associations that are activated [by] the encoded base-rates, which is itself an epistemic cost. (Gendler, 2011, p. 37, cited by Lassiter & Ballantyne, 2017, p. 80)

Lassiter and Ballantyne challenge Gendler’s “epistemic pessimism”: “Though epistemic agents *encode* discriminatory information from the environment, not all encoded information is *activated*. Agents can [intentionally] construct local epistemic environments that do not activate

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<sup>7</sup> See Lassiter and Ballantyne (2017, note 1, p. 94), for citation of other such work.

biasing representations, effectively avoiding the consequences of activation [all emphasis added]" (abstract, p. 79). They cite experimental social psychology findings (e.g., Lai, Hoffman, & Nosek, 2013) to support their moral view that agents *should* overcome their cognitive "Fast" System 1 implicit/automatic biased associations in part because they *can*, by deploying "Slow" System 2 deliberate/reflective strategies that prevent their activation. They conclude that "avoiding the effects of living in a racially structured society involves following strategies uncovered by social psychologists for reducing the effects of implicit bias" (p. 92).

There are conflicting views within this research domain,<sup>8</sup> and here I aim only to illustrate how some of this research has been deployed by philosophers, in pursuing their philosophical interests in ways that push their traditional disciplinary boundaries. In making their psychologically-informed argument about what we *can* do as epistemic agents, Lassiter and Ballantyne hold us morally responsible for seeking out and constructing environments that combat racist encoding, as "situationism in social psychology" teaches us that some environments promote praiseworthy actions and some promote blameworthy actions. Thus, "Agents (morally) ought to seek out virtue-inducing environments" (p. 92); and this imperative extends beyond merely seeking such environments to actively constructing them.

My point is that many philosophers turn to mainstream psychological findings to make their philosophical case—the very mainstream research that many theoretical psychologists reject on philosophical grounds. Yet some of that same research is relevant nonetheless to the aims and concerns of theoretical and philosophical psychologists—for example, Lassiter and Ballantyne's moral argument, aided by empirical findings, surely intersects if not harmonizes with the many critical-theoretical (and indigenous) psychologists who, in their "re-envisioned psychologies," seek to combat oppression and subjugation (e.g., Bhatia, 2018; Gone, 2016, 2017; Teo, 2013, 2015, 2017b, 2018; Ting & Sundararajan, 2017). Given many theorists' intense interest in the twin themes of social

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Hahn, Judd, Hirsh, and Blair (2014) empirically challenge the claim that seemingly implicit biases are unconscious, and Madva (2017) considers the moral implications of that challenge.



justice and the context-dependent nature of subjectivity, we might expect research such as that cited in Lassiter and Ballantyne to be noticed and appreciated by theoretical psychologists who seek a psychology that entails social action. But in my experience that has not typically been the case.<sup>9</sup> Such lack of interest may well reflect an association of this kind of empirical work with the mainstream's alleged philosophical dependence on naturalistic philosophy of science and hence its seeming (implicit) expression of (experimental) physics envy, in which subjectivity and agency are, if considered at all, at best a distant second to prediction and control (Koch, 1981, p. 266). Another related obstacle inheres in the power implications (epistemic violence) of mainstream psychology's disciplinary dominance (Teo, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2015, 2017b, 2018).

### Theoretical/Philosophical Objection

Some might object that empirical research with moral implication does not constitute the bona-fide moral re-envisioning that many theoretical psychologists seek (e.g., Miller, 2004; Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999), as it does not rest psychology on an expressly moral foundation. Others may object that, in using the findings of mainstream psychological science, the philosophers I just considered are engaging in a form of experimental (moral) philosophy, which pushes disciplinary boundaries too far and so does not (and should not) constitute bona-fide philosophical work.<sup>10</sup> Yet it is hard to see just how attention to empirical work necessarily obviates advancement of bona-fide metatheoretical/philosophical work, regardless of whether the empirical work was done by that same philosopher or theoretical psychologist. Either way, arguments against

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<sup>9</sup>Existential social psychology is another candidate for consideration by theoretical psychologists who emphasize moral concerns. For example, Rothschild and Keefer (2017) demonstrated how and when moral outrage at social injustice “alleviates guilt and buffers threats to one’s moral identity” (title, p. 209) rather than serving to combat injustice. This mainstream work has important implications for psychology’s participation in advancing social justice.

<sup>10</sup>In experimental philosophy the nature of “folk” concepts is empirically tested rather than presumed (see, e. g., Phillips, De Freitas, Mott, Gruber, & Knobe, 2017; Phillips, Misenheimer, & Knobe, 2011), and there is much debate about whether its findings significantly challenge “armchair philosophical methods” (Ichikawa, 2014, p. 207). Stich and Tobia (2016) review diverse research programs in experimental philosophy.

this trend have been said to reduce to boundary disputes about what constitutes bona-fide philosophical work in the first place (see Alfano & Loeb, 2014). These disputes include the view in theoretical psychology that psychological science needs metaphysically “pure” foundations—foundations untarred by empirical brushes (e.g., Hibberd, 2014). By contrast, there is an emerging trend in philosophy of biology, which deploys empirical findings to advance philosophical work.

## Philosophy of Biology Versus Biophilosophy

In the burgeoning field of biophilosophy, biological findings are necessary components of philosophical theorizing (Smith, 2017a).<sup>11</sup> Biophilosophy stands in distinction to traditional philosophy of biology, which uses philosophy to “ground” biological research. To illustrate biophilosophy, Luc Faucher (2017) explains how biological findings about “race” refute the reality of race (p. 253), thereby implicating ontological and conceptual work on scientific race concepts in distinction to folk race concepts. Faucher also expresses normative worry, namely, the *racist* implications of retaining the term “race” in science if it entails the folk attribute of racial essentialism, in which each member of any particular racialized group is wrongly believed to embody an underlying and unobservable immutable essence that is unique to that group and gives rise to observable physical and psychological features. Faucher calls such essentials “fictions—and damaging ones at that” (p. 251). In short, biological findings stand to advance philosophical work.

### Enter “Psychphilosophy”

The rejection in biology of typological thinking in favor of population thinking has contributed to the philosophical/scientific view that races are not real kinds (e.g., Faucher, 2017; Hochman, 2013; Machery &

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<sup>11</sup> “Biophilosophy is neither a metaphilosophical position nor a philosophical subdiscipline [but rather] a *way* of doing philosophy that uses tools drawn from the biological sciences to address non-biological (or non-paradigmatically biological) questions” (Smith, 2017b, p. 4).

Faucher, 2005; Smith, 2011). Because most people think of races as real kinds, this literature suggests (implicit) cognitive biases in everyday/folk experiences of race.<sup>12</sup> We have already seen how these biases have been investigated empirically within social psychology, whose findings pervade the moral work of Lassiter and Ballantyne and the epistemic work of Puddifoot. Whether we call their work “experimental philosophy” or not, the philosophical thrust remains: in professing moral and epistemic oughts, these philosophers exceed questions that science alone can settle. I thus find in these examples an analogy to biophilosophy that I will call “psycphilosophy,” in which empirical psychological findings are deployed in the service of traditional philosophical questions. As with biophilosophy, psycphilosophy constitutes a boundary-challenging form of scholarly activity. Here I turn to boundary disputes between theoretical physicists and philosophers of physics, in search of more implications for boundary-expansion in theoretical psychology.

## Philosophers of Physics Versus Theoretical Physicists

The tight relation between theoretical physics and experimental physics is not replicated in the relation between theoretical physics and philosophy of physics, where tensions abound in ways that are surprisingly analogous to tensions between theoretical psychology and mainstream empirical psychology. In fact, some philosophers of physics hold the theoretical (though not experimental) “mainstream” in physics in what can only be called contempt, in ways that sometimes seem close to theoretical psychologists’ attitudes toward psychology’s mainstream. Are there any lessons for theoretical psychology in the recent standoffs between philosophers of physics and theoretical physicists?

Philosopher of physics Peter Lewis, in a series of personal communications (January 2017–October 2017), considers the value of philosophy of physics to theoretical physics “a contested matter.” He elaborated: “Stephen Hawking famously said recently that philosophy is dead ... There’s no room for philosophy of physics—theoretical physics can

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<sup>12</sup>My thanks to David Livingstone Smith for pointing this out.

answer its own foundational puzzle on its own terms.” Yet Lewis found Hawking’s categorical dismissal of philosophy ironic:

His writing is full of philosophy—full of conceptual interpretations of theoretical physics. In *The Grand Design*, Hawking [2010] claims that wave-particle duality in quantum mechanics is not problematic—it’s just an instance of ‘model-dependent realism’ [in which] the existence of multiple, overlapping models of the same phenomena is perfectly consistent with realism, even if those models describe reality in different and *prima facie* incompatible ways.

Lewis is surely right about the philosophical nature of conceptual work and talk of realism. In this he suggests that the boundaries between philosophy of physics and theoretical physics are not as distinct as some theoretical physicists insist. Elaborating the acrimonious basis for a theoretical/philosophical divide, Lewis said that theoretical physicists “often feel that the philosophers don’t have a deep enough grasp of the theories they write about. The philosophers often feel that physicists pronounce ‘authoritatively’ on the metaphysical implications of their theories (e.g., realism) without knowing enough about philosophy.” If this is so, each seems to view the other as exceeding their “proper” disciplinary limits. Lewis illustrated with his gloss on a much-publicized squabble:

Lawrence Krauss [2012] (a theoretical physicist) wrote a book on nothingness, informed by recent theoretical physics. David Albert [2012], a philosopher [and also a theoretical physicist], wrote a damning review in the *New York Times*, accusing the book of being philosophically naïve. Much arguing ensued online, culminating in Albert being uninvited from a panel debate on the nature of nothingness at the Museum of Natural History. (see, e.g., <http://www.math.columbia.edu/~woit/wordpress/?p=4509>)

Much ado about nothing—literally! That aside, theoretical physicists’ metaphysical pronouncements might activate in theoretical psychologists a kind of physics envy of our own, as we could only dream of such display of interest in metaphysics, of such “engagement” with theoretical psychology, on the part of psychology’s mainstream.

Lewis went on to question the theoretical/philosophical boundaries in physics, saying that “philosophy of physics can help us get a clearer conceptual understanding of our physical theories.” But he also reinforces those boundaries, in qualifying that he is “not sure that such an understanding is crucial to the progress of physics, even theoretical physics, [which mostly requires] a deep understanding of the mathematical structures you’re dealing with, without worrying too much about what those structures represent.” By contrast, theoretical psychologists make much of the ways in which scientific progress is impeded by the mainstream’s failure to examine just what *its* concepts/constructs mean (e.g., Machado & Silva, 2007; Petocz & Mackay, 2013; Slaney & Racine, 2011; Stam, 2012<sup>13</sup>; Tisaw, 2007).

And yet—Lewis qualifies that last pronouncement about the irrelevance of conceptual work in theoretical physics: “[Theoretical] physicists do philosophy too—they think about the proper conceptual understanding of the theories they construct.” For example, theoretical physicist Sean Carroll (June 23, 2014), in his “Preposterous Universe” blog entitled “Physicists Should Stop Saying Silly Things About Philosophy,” states that the best philosophy of physics practice is “continuous with” physics practice.<sup>14</sup> Carroll also says,

Many of the best philosophers of physics were trained as physicists, and eventually realized that the problems they cared most about weren’t valued in physics departments, so they switched to philosophy. But those problems—the basic nature of the ultimate architecture of reality at its deepest levels—are just physics problems, really. And some amount of rigorous thought is necessary to make any progress on them. Shutting up and calculating isn’t good enough.

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<sup>13</sup>Stam (2012) critiques the functionalism he finds dominant in psychology on the grounds that it spawns an infinite number of meaningless variables: “Functional descriptions ... can be multiplied indefinitely [without] limit to the kind and degree of number of entities that can be imagined” (p. 231).

<sup>14</sup>Just what it means for philosophy of science to be “continuous” with science has been debated. In the concluding section I touch on this question briefly.

Lewis's qualifications thus reflect diverse opinion about the boundaries (constitutive disciplinary practices) between theoretical physics and philosophy of physics.

Philosophers of other natural sciences have challenged the “philosophobia” they find in physics. For example, philosopher of biology John Wilkins (July 31, 2012), in his “Evolving Thoughts” blog entitled “On Birds, and Ornithologists, and Mutual Respect,” complements Carroll’s call for “continuity” between philosophy and scientific practice: he challenges those who are less than sanguine, notably, Mark Perakh, “a well-known physicist,” whom Wilkins quotes as saying that

the sole value of philosophy of science is its entertaining ability. I [Perakh] doubt that all the multiple opuses debating various aspects of the philosophy of science have ever produced even a minute amount of anything that could be helpful for a scientist, be he/she physicist, biologist, geologist, you name it. It can, though, be harmful.

Wilkins extended his challenge to acclaimed theoretical physicist Richard Feynman:

A comment ascribed (but nowhere to be found in any of his written words) to Richard Feynman is “Philosophy of science is as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds.”... A steady stream of physicists ... seem to think that while their own discipline is noble, authoritative and has extensive conceptual ramifications (that we should really call philosophical), my discipline is just “entertainment value.”... It’s pretty clear that he, and his entire field, has a set against philosophy. Why is this? It cannot be because they think philosophical issues and debates are unnecessary. Physicists since time immemorial (i.e., before 1900) have written philosophical tomes, both under the rubric of philosophy and under the rubric of physics.

Noting the tight historical relation between philosophy of physics and physics, Wilkins again asks why physicists, more than other scientists, “seem to fear philosophy of science so much they must attack it outright and deny it any intellectual standing.” For him the answer lies partly in the irrational fear that philosophers will try to legislate science practice:

If philosophers of science in the Dark Ages (before around 1970 [!]) tried to tell scientists what to do, it doesn't follow that either *we* are trying to rein the horses, or that we are trying to do that *now*. That isn't what we do ... As Locke wrote, philosophy's duty is to clear the undergrowth for science, not to do it.

Wilkins added that Kristian Camilleri, a philosopher of physics, argued that "there was once a time [prior to philosophy's post-WW II professionalization] when physicists [such as Einstein and Bohr] thought it their professional duty to discuss philosophy with the philosophers." And Wilkins concluded that "the justification for the philosophy of science is no more about what contribution it makes to the practice of science any more than the justification for ornithology ... is the contribution it makes to what it studies."

In Wilkins we see a philosopher of science in knots over the scientific "mainstream's" dismissal of his discipline, but he just wants a little respect. Is respect *all* that theoretical psychologists want from psychology's mainstream? Are we merely "clearing the undergrowth" for the mainstream, without dictating what to do or how to do it? Are we immune to seeking justification for our discipline in its impact on mainstream scientific practice? After all, a considerable amount of scholarship in theoretical psychology is devoted to critique of mainstream psychology (e.g., Martin, Sugarman, & Slaney, 2015; Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005; Teo, 2018) that calls for rectification of a host of doctrines found in mainstream literature. These include naturalism, epistemic imperialism, atomism, individualism, decontextualization, reductionism, determinism, objectivism, essentialism, absolutism, mechanism, foundationalism, and a variety of "dualisms," such as subject/object, inner/outer, self/context. If a desire for mainstream respect of theoretical work inheres in these calls for mainstream course-correction, it is implicit at best.

These theorists also call upon mainstream scientists to engage in a variety of specified alternative practices, including, for example, (a) circumspect use of quantitative methods (Tafreshi, Slaney, & Neufeld, 2016); (b) reflexivity in all aspects of science practice (Morawski, 2005); and (c) grounding conceptual analysis (Machado & Silva, 2007). Many critics also make the aforementioned case (Wertz, 2016) for rejecting the

subpersonal-level, physical-science naturalism that they deem constitutive of mainstream psychological science, in favor of a person-level “indigenous psychological science”<sup>15</sup> of lived experience, which for some entail a “general theory of subjectivity,” such as that found in Teo’s (2017a, 2017b) call for theoretical re-envisioning.

## An Indigenous Imperative?

In sum, it is hard to find an apt analogue in other disciplines for theoretical psychology: (a) despite considering ourselves theoretical *and* philosophical psychologists, theoretical psychologists are unlike many philosophers of psychology, owing to pervasive rejection of mainstream empirical work, if not a desire to transform it profoundly; (b) we are unlike theoretical physicists, who enjoy the respect of their experimental colleagues with whom they are intimately engaged in constituting the “mainstream”; and (c) we are unlike philosophers of physics, who, in their long tradition of “continuity” with theoretical and experimental physics, do not seek to re-envision or revise physics but just want some respect. Moreover, these philosophers of physics are relevant enough to theoretical physicists to be noticed and challenged by them.

Do the limits of these comparisons point inescapably to an “indigenous psychology” in the sense of a discipline that rejects natural-science assumptions and methods altogether in addressing psychological questions in expressly phenomenological terms (see my note 15)? If so, how can theoretical psychologists best contribute to that effort, and inspire mainstream scientists in the process?

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<sup>15</sup> The term “indigenous” is polysemous. I distinguish indigenous psychologies as culturally contextualized, which Teo (2013) says all psychologies are, from “indigenous psychology” as a unique approach to a disciplinary psychology that rejects the naturalism of natural sciences, regardless of its geographical origins. I find the latter meaning in Wertz (2016), who seeks an expressly psychological science free from its naturalistic underpinnings, in its grounding in phenomenological philosophy.



## Inspiring Empirical Scientists

Theoretical psychologists' determination to impact if not outright inspire the mainstream has not attenuated in the face of ongoing failure to do so. Do philosophers of science in all fields hope to impact/inspire their respective scientists? They certainly work to explain the grounds of scientific findings and suggest new areas of inquiry, but do they also critique their "mainstream" scientists in hope of transforming them? Do they seek justification for their efforts in that way?

I once asked philosopher of science/epistemologist Harvey Siegel whether the failure of scientists to notice his relevant philosophical work bothers him. He said something close to this: "They do science and we do philosophy of science. If they are not interested in our arguments, so what? We are different disciplines, with different audiences." Similar to Siegel, philosopher of physics Peter Lewis (2016) says he wrote *Quantum Ontology: Implications of Quantum Mechanics for Metaphysics* for philosophers, not physicists, and in the Preface he describes his book as a "guide to quantum mechanics for the philosophical consumer" (p. x). In writing that quantum mechanics "reshapes metaphysical debates in surprising, empirically informed ways," Lewis injects scientific findings into metaphysics—thereby implicating a "physphilosophy" analogous to biophilosophy—with no intention to influence scientific inquiry: "Physicists need no help from philosophers like me, and the business of using quantum mechanics goes on largely independently of foundational metaphysical concerns" (p. xi). Lewis (personal communication, January 12, 2017) added, "I don't expect my work to have any influence on physicists, and that doesn't bother me." In Lewis and Siegel we thus see two philosophers of science, in two different subfields, who insist that they need no legitimation from scientists.

Though not seeking legitimation from scientists, philosopher of psychology, psychoanalysis, and biology David Livingstone Smith (personal communication, 2011) recommends a return to philosophy's "preprofessional" incarnation. Consistent with Camilleri's aforementioned regret about the post-WW II professionalization of philosophy that made philosophy of science irrelevant to (empirical) scientific practice, Smith

maintains that philosophy should not exist independently of the disciplines it philosophizes about: philosophy of  $X$  should be a subdiscipline of  $X$ , and not a subdiscipline of philosophy. He thus advocates against modern academic departmental boundaries that separate philosophy of science from relevant science practice. In Smith's terms, theoretical/philosophical psychology (as practiced by both theoretical psychologists and philosophers of psychology) should be a subdiscipline of psychology. Although theoretical psychology has from its start "co-existed" alongside mainstream psychology in the academy, that shared departmental space has not brought it into productive contact with mainstream science.

If, as Teo (2017a) maintains, "the gap between alternative approaches and the mainstream" has indeed widened in the last 50 years, then the hoped-for impact of theoretical work on the mainstream does not look promising. To be sure, theoretical psychologists could just soldier on, saying we need another 50 years to make an impact. But isn't that what the mainstream says when charged with inconsequential or inconsistent findings? And theorists object when they do, decrying *their* supposed lack of self-critical reflection.

Earlier I raised the notion of "philosopher-of-psychology envy" on the part of theoretical psychologists. To express this more positively, I now ask how education in a psychology department (versus a philosophy department) might advantage theoretical psychologists. Here is one answer hiding in plain sight. Because, analogous to theoretical physicists, we are "trained" *as psychologists* and so have much to say about psychological science "from the inside," why not just do the empirical science ourselves (*pace* Locke via Wilkins)—in addition to and informed by our theory and philosophy of psychological science? Some theoretical psychologists have done this. For example, Wertz, in his phenomenological investigations of profound "suffering and transcendence" (Wertz et al., 2017); Sass (2014), in his studies on the nature of self-disturbance in schizophrenia; Osbeck et al. (2011), in their ethnographic studies of psychological processes (e.g., "epistemic identities") in biomedical-engineering research laboratories; and LaFleur (2017), in his study of "moral injury" as distinct from PTSD, in veterans.

## Conclusion

Much more theoretically and philosophically inspired empirical research abounds, but there is much more to be done. If one goal of theoretical work is to inform mainstream psychological science, perhaps it is time to conduct more of the kinds of psychological science on whose behalf theoretical psychologists have persistently advocated—and then see who (beyond our redefined borders) takes note.

I am not suggesting that all theorists do this. But against those who maintain that psychology must start *de novo* with a thoroughgoing, empirically untainted or pure metaphysics of psychological kinds that unifies the field (e.g., Hibberd, 2014; Petocz & Mackay, 2013), by “clearing the underbrush” for empirical work,<sup>16</sup> I contend that theoretical psychology already has the tools it needs to advance the cause of mattering to, perhaps even inspiring, the mainstream—but that requires self-reflection on our part. Surely any theory construction that is constructive requires *self-critically-informed* construction. This includes theoretical work on the nature of our subjectivity *as* theoretical psychologists, as well as and in relation to the nature of the aforementioned subjectivity of mainstream psychological scientists. A propos of my own efforts, I expect many theoretical psychologists to be inclined to dismiss psychphilosophy as hopelessly regressive. Nonetheless, I continue to hope for their self-critical reflection on that well-rehearsed reaction to mainstream psychological work, despite their many compelling criticisms.

Theoretical psychologists are right to insist that any ideal science is philosophically informed. At the same time I agree with biophilosophers—and their counterpart in psychphilosophers—that empirically-informed philosophy of science has its virtues, and, depending on the metatheoretical question, should not be dismissed out of hand as not constituting bona-fide philosophy. After all, what is the point of a metaphysics so removed from science practice (in its alleged, untouched-by-observation empirical “purity”) that it makes no contact with the

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<sup>16</sup>Stam (2012) rightly challenged the view that science proceeds and should proceed from first principles: “The idea that knowledge can be created from a grand theory or from first principles looks ever more remote and archaic” (p. 236). “Genuine scientific inquiries will always follow problems, not dictates or disciplines” (p. 229).

questions that inspire us most? In psychology, these often pertain to questions of lived experience, which implicate the subjectivity that for many should feature prominently in disciplinary psychology (Teo, 2017b, 2018).

The view that theory is always already infused with practice in its most general sense (e.g., Stam, 2012, p. 234) suggests yet another reason to consider how we might expressly deploy existing science practice to advance theory. This would restore the ancient “continuity” between philosophy of science and science practice, whose loss is lamented not only by ourselves but also by philosophers in such fields as physics and biology. Here I do not mean the twentieth century “continuity” advocated by Quine, whose influential work gave philosophy of science a supporting role at best in the scientific enterprise.<sup>17</sup> Instead, like biophilosophers and philosophers of psychology, I suggest that theoretical psychologists consider deploying empirical findings (their own and/or others’) where they themselves deem them relevant to their metatheoretical/philosophical work. Applying Smith’s (2017b) aforementioned words about biophilosophy, *psycphilosophy* is “a *way* of doing philosophy”; it is not a way of doing psychological science (see my note 11).

Smith’s belief that philosophy of science should not constitute a separate philosophical discipline from the science about which it philosophizes suggests one way of restoring the “ancient” continuity I propound. With that in mind, let’s try this thought experiment: can we think of any instance(s) of good science within psychology’s mainstream? And if we can, what are its features that might inform our theorizing? It is surely true that we cannot just read ontology off empirical science practice; but such practice could, if given a more open-minded look, perhaps inform our own ontological work and beyond.

Theoretical psychology originally differentiated itself from empirical science practice, and now pushes for more differentiation by way of a potentially limitless “indigenization” in all senses (see my note 15). The original differentiation came with an invoice whose payment is overdue. The good news is, we are (in distinction to philosophers of psychology) already in a subdiscipline of psychology. So let’s get back to the job we started more than 50 years ago, this time by broadening the boundaries

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<sup>17</sup> See Thomasson (2015) for explication of Quinian and neo-Quinian (scientific) positions.

of theoretical psychology so as to incorporate empirical practice in ways that transcend (as well as continue) critique of mainstream practice. After all, if you think you have a good thing, as mainstreamers evidently do, and you feel you have insufficient reason to think otherwise, as mainstreamers evidently feel, then you need to be given a stronger reason to try something else—one that packs some motivational punch. Let's supply that reason—not only in theory, but also in practice.

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# Vertical and Horizontal Development in Theoretical Psychology

Lisa M. Osbeck

The assignment to provide a vision statement for a constructive project for theoretical psychology is daunting and a little uncomfortable. Yet I am grateful for it, not only for the chance to participate in the important conversation, but also because the task requires some effort to make sense of what I have been doing in my own career. In attempting to make the tacit more explicit in my own case, I will use what insights emerge as a basis for making broader claims about constructive practices for theoretical psychology, and hope the reader will forgive the egocentric indulgence.

In my own work I can identify two broad directions that invoke the question of what theoretical psychology has been and might be. The first direction involves evaluation of concepts, assumptions, and questions of method specific to theoretical psychology—a kind of introspective gaze on theoretical psychology's processes and productions (Osbeck, 2005, 2018; Tissaw and Osbeck, 2007), along with evaluation of the concepts and methods perpetuated in psychology more broadly. The other direction involves diversification and expansion, by which I mean an effort to

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identify scholarly and methodological developments outside of theoretical psychology and even psychology (properly speaking), and considering the implications for theoretical psychology. Here I include collaboration in philosophy of science, science and technology studies, and newer frameworks in cognitive science (Osbeck, 2009; Osbeck, Malone, & Nersessian, 2007; Osbeck & Nersessian, 2014). Furthest afield, and with great trepidation, I have been captivated by the significance of new insights and achievements in theoretical physics and the philosophical questions they provoke (Pandit & Dosch, 2013). If the self-examination is an introverted project, we might call this direction an extraverted one, drawing analogy from the nebulous realm of the psyche to the yet more nebulous realm of theoretical psychology, and remembering the original depiction of psychic “attitudes” as two manifestly opposing but ultimately complementary directions of energy flow (Jung, 1971/1921).

Like the psyche, a field of practice is a system that must progress or face stagnation, and this is the basic idea I want to convey here. As names for two directions of development necessary to any scholarly discipline, “vertical and horizontal development” seem as good as any other, and give the suggestion of a spatial metaphor and implicit structure to both contain and extend theoretical effort. For the present purposes I will attempt to describe more fully how these directions might be understood, with a view to exploring how they might be useful in reflecting on the possibilities for a constructive project for theoretical psychology going forward. My assertion is that contemporary challenges for theoretical psychology must be situated within or balanced against more longstanding, perennial, even necessary tasks; that is, projects that are relevant to any generation of theoretical psychology. Vertical and horizontal development is the name I am giving to describe these tasks. In making this assertion, I do not contest the point made by Araujo (this volume) that Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology is something that itself displays historical variation and contingency. Nevertheless, the point I make is a logical one: As an evolving system of human practice, any field of inquiry must both examine its own practices in a critical and responsible way *and* must open itself to new directions of thought in order to raise new questions and new possibilities for evaluation. Even with radical changes in content, the

basic structure of vertical and horizontal development remains intact as a precondition of its very continuance as a field of practice.

## Vertical Development

Extending the spatial metaphor, the projects facilitating vertical development concern what we might call somewhat clumsily “outer and inner” circles of verticality. The outer ring of vertical development entails ongoing analysis of the theoretical grounding for the possibility of an empirical science of psychology, including its subject matter, methods, goals, and ethical parameters. There are various tasks associated with this outer ring of analysis, such as determining the clarity, coherence, consistency, and coordination of empirical concepts, attending to instances of invalid inferential reasoning, and establishing the grounding of theoretical progress. Projects of this kind are easier to identify in past efforts than in present activities identified as theoretical psychology. Koch’s *Theoretical Psychology at 1950* (Koch, 1951) is a paradigm case. At this stage of his writing, Koch identified the responsibilities and defined the pursuit of theoretical psychology to include education in philosophy of science, analysis of the unique problems of psychological science, “internal systematization,” “intertranslation and differential analysis,” which in turn provide the basis for new theory construction (Koch, 1951, p. 298).

Well known examples of other projects in this “outer ring” of vertical development include critical analysis of cognitivism that point to the incoherence and problematic implications of “internal representation” (e.g., Still & Costall, 1991); analysis of “operationism” in psychology (Feest, 2005; Koch, 1992), critique of “positive psychology” (Held, 2004), critiques of neuroscience that invoke the mereological fallacy (Bennett & Hacker, 2003), discursive critique of neonatal imitation (Tissaw, 2007), and in the broadest sense, the entire project of critical psychology (Teo, 2015). These directions of analysis are in keeping with the standard tasks of philosophy of science, applied to the specific and special case of aspirations to psychological science. However, in contemporary theoretical psychology, the activity in this outer ring shows some imbalance in the direction of metacritique. As Koch noted, vertical

development also the requires necessary if less glamorous analytic tasks of theory comparison—historical and contemporary, with reference to specific and concrete research examples, both as a means of identifying conceptual problems in the scientific literature and to determine the generally new aspects of new theoretical alternatives. Essays in Koch and Leary’s “Century of Psychology as a Science” (1992) and in the series that preceded it (Koch, 1959) are exemplary here, as are comparisons of learning theories (Minke, 1987), theories of emotion (Harré & Parrott, 1996); and analysis of competing accounts of memory systems (Machamer & Osbeck, 2000). One reason comparative analyses of this kind have been downplayed more recently among theoretical and philosophical psychologists may have to do with perception that they support the project of a unified theoretical framework for psychology (e.g., Staats, 1999). However, it is worth noting that this kind of analysis has also been useful, for example to Stam (2015) in the service of supporting a conclusion that a unified framework for psychology is a misplaced goal. Moreover, Wertz et al. (2011) displayed a comparative analytic strategy to compare qualitative approaches in an effort to better understand their underlying commonalities and unique features and their convergence with historical uses of qualitative methods in psychology.

The point of such comparative activity is the activity itself, rather than a goal of saturation or sufficiency. This is not so much because of the special problems of psychological science but because of the nature of empirical science itself. That is, as long as psychology continues to define itself and its practices as empirical science, there remains a parallel need for ongoing theoretical analysis to make sense of the science, integrate it, and offer constructive challenge. For if there is no end in sight for the philosophy of physics, the same must be said for the philosophy of psychological science. There is a continuous need to apply thoughtful analysis (sound reasoning) to the conceptual infrastructure of theories (e.g. Machado & Silva, 2007) and to critically evaluate their implications—ontological, epistemic, and ethical. This cannot be done in a “one size fits all” manner but must continuously raise (as Koch phrased it) “*specific* questions about *specific* theories and *specific* methodological issues” in what he called “the modest pursuit of logical analysis” (Koch, 1951,

p. 295). As a traditional task of philosophy of science, the constructive goal is to continue in the effort, not to lose sight of or bypass it, even in the interests of proposing innovative new frameworks for psychology.

The inner ring of development is a matter to treat with greater delicacy. By this odd term I refer to the need to make use of the same kinds of analytic tools and direct the same kinds of critical questions toward the methods, concepts, and theories *theoretical* psychology employs in the business of evaluating coherence, consistency, and coordination in psychology's empirical practices and in proposing alternative theories. That is, such an inner ring of vertical development requires us to examine the concepts forwarded in theories posed as an alternative to traditional psychological science, including the very concept of *theory* when removed from identifiable empirical grounding, and the dozens of ambiguous concepts on which theoretical formulations rely to articulate frameworks that depart from those of psychological science in the main. Of course I should amplify this point with examples. From my own work, greater clarity around concepts such as "situated," "integrated," "acting," and "persons" would all be instructive, with scrutinizing analysis of the kind of epistemic work these concepts actually do, with possible modification or abandonment based on the analysis. Some of this I have tried to do, and there is more work waiting (e.g., Osbeck, 2014). Barbara Held and I have attempted to clarify the concept of "intuition" by comparing historical and contemporary contexts of use (Osbeck & Held, 2014). However, although the purpose of mentioning these specific examples is self-criticism and self-scrutiny, I mention them with them with some trepidation, because I am not alone in granting some of these concepts a privileged position, and therefore I risk of stepping outside of the boundaries of self-criticism. The broader point is this: In attempting to identify examples of concepts needing focused analysis for the sake of vertical development, I was unable to identify a single concept to use as an illustrative example without imagining that in so doing, I would be risking relationships with other members of the theoretical and philosophical psychology community. For it is human nature to be hurt or offended by critical remarks, even if directed at ideas, especially if they are ideas with which one feels a personal connection or identity. I say this on the basis of intellectual knowledge of the dynamics of power relations

operative in all social systems but also on the basis of empathy, and with first-hand, experiential knowledge of personal critique. Interestingly, theoretical accounts of the nature of spatial metaphors—such as are invoked in depicting scholarly development as vertical and horizontal—acknowledge the close association of emotion with the metaphor of verticality, activated, for example, in descriptions of a mood state as “high” or “low” (Damjanovic & Santiago, 2016; Gottwald, Elsner, & Pollatos, 2015). It is not unreasonable, then, to include emotional considerations in expressing my concerns about the community of theoretical psychology’s ongoing vertical development. Viewed positively, it attests to the strength of the community, and to the community’s important function of providing a supportive environment in which to share ideas, find common ground, and create buffers against the isolation and alienation theoretical psychologists are likely to feel in other academic or professional settings.

Yet there is a longer range problem at stake, if the immediate benefits of community, camaraderie, support, and affirmation constrain the inner ring of vertical development, thereby undermining the long-term viability and impact of the activity to which the community is devoted. I do not think it is a matter of necessity that conflict ensues between these two important functions of the society—one of developing like-minded community; the other of challenging, provoking, and sharpening the body of thought the community produces. Rather, the conflict in question reflects a particular normative configuration that has developed within a particular community. By contrast, for example, professional philosophers seem more comfortable with a culture of argument and genuine debate.<sup>1</sup> It is the common practice therein to hold one another accountable even during a talk, and sometimes loudly to point to inconsistencies, require clarifications, extensions, amplifications, and implications, after which it is not out of keeping to head to the bar and raise a convivial glass to the long debate. This practice, however, while good for thought and the intellectual brotherhood, establishes conditions of possibility not only for alienating more reticent persons for whom the verbal jousting is not only unpleasant but traumatizing. I mention the brotherhood deliberately,

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<sup>1</sup> This basis for this claim is personal experience in communities of philosophers, for example, as a Fellow of the University of Pittsburgh Center for Philosophy of Science.



because it is at least a matter of water cooler talk that the under-representation of women in professional philosophy owes in part to a professional culture in which norms of bravado and emotional indifference to critique are valued and actively cultivated.

The reason many are drawn to participate in the community of scholars who claim identity as theoretical psychologists is because of the community's alleged receptivity to a wide range of psychological methods and theories, a receptivity that is positioned against the methodological hegemony attributed to psychology in the main (e.g., Koch, 1993). However, in an oasis of openness, conceptual challenge can be experienced as hierarchical oppression, a limiting force on creative expression or a policing of personal values. Innovation in any domain, whether science, art, or philosophy, requires a certain disregard or at least willingness to overstep the limits or standards in place. It requires willingness to challenge implicit conceptual authorities, to practice rebellion. Against this value, internal critique (i.e., directed at other members of the theoretical community) might be read as stifling, conformist, or constraining, if conducted with implicit appeal to a set of logical standards or conceptual inconsistencies with existing traditions of thought. The issue of clarity is also subject to politicization when associated with the telos of an oppressive academic regime. Whatever its source or origin, constraints on conceptual refinement and critique threatens the inner ring of vertical development required for the long range progress of the project of theoretical and philosophical psychology.

Accordingly, a second barrier to vertical development that is at the same time a point of strength is the very diversity of values—epistemic, social, and aesthetic—among theoretical psychologists. There is no consensus on the range of legitimate projects, the meaning of theory, the unit of analysis, on procedures or method, on acceptable style of expression, or on the goal(s) of theoretical analysis in psychology. For example, there is little agreement on whether the aim of theoretical and philosophical psychology is to enhance the products of empirical psychology with greater conceptual clarity or to actively work against the production of scientific knowledge on the part of psychologists, to resist and rework the conceptual foundation of the discipline into something other. The patchwork of models, methods, and aims obstructs conceptual progress and

has unhelpful social ramifications, contributing to splintering and subgroup formation at the expense of coalescence in a broader theoretical community (e.g., see Longino, 2002).

In *Science in a Free Society* (1979) Feyerabend analyzes obstacles to genuine interaction in any scholarly community, including but not limited to communities of science. Traditions of scholarship are and inquiry are distinguished by differing sets of norms, values, and methods as much as if not more than they are distinguished by a specific domain of subject matter. It is these infrastructures that lend coherence to a tradition, enabling it to stand as a cohesive and strong alternative to a more dominant tradition. The analogy is easily drawn to political parties, which must shore up internal unity to make substantial impact. By contrast, theoretical psychology seems currently to harbor clusters of alternative traditions (traditions within a tradition). These clusters themselves have different internal structures, we might say, organized around differing methods, norms and values: hermeneutics, discursive psychology, psychoanalysis, critical/historical, feminist, constructionist, phenomenological, analytic philosophical, and others. Although this diversity enables internal choice and dialog, there may be reason to expect that the long-range impact of theoretical psychology will be compromised by the internal incoherence, especially in relation to more powerful traditions in psychological science, wherein internal strength is secured through well-articulated methods and standards, problematic and limiting though they be. There is, in short, an ongoing dilemma confronting theoretical psychology: The greater the openness and diversity within the community of theoretical psychologists, the lesser may be the community's potential for broader disciplinary influence, that is, influence in and on the discipline of psychology writ large.

I have no good solution to what seems to be an abiding problem, but I call attention to it in order that the choices may be clearer. Vertical development requires bold, even stark examination of the inherent conflicts generated by theoretical psychology's intrinsic values, even if resolution remains elusive.

## Horizontal Development

In contrast to the introspective energy of vertical development, what I characterize as horizontal development entails pushing the boundaries of psychological theory into other disciplinary domains, and considering the implications of new research and scholarship within and beyond psychology for its bearing on the enduring concerns of theoretical psychology. Most importantly, horizontal development recognizes new questions and analogies that arise from new extra-disciplinary trajectories. The aims are expansive rather than restrictive, broadening out in new directions rather than honing and disciplining the concepts, methods, and assumptions (broadly, the intellectual practices) currently in use. There are in principle almost limitless possibilities for expansion, branching out into every disciplinary direction, and incorporating any number of new points of view. For the sake of example I will point to some developments that I believe to be especially worthy of greater exploration in our present historical context. They relate recognizably to the projects of theoretical psychology, inasmuch as they offer opportunities for engagement on topics of mutual interest—boundary work—and in so doing raise methodological questions and fertilize ground for new ideas. I will mention these developments in historical order and comment on their possible significance.

1. “4E” *Cognition*: For over 20 years, new models of cognition—learning, reasoning, problem solving in all domains have offered important alternatives to information processing models for understanding cognitive phenomena. These perspectives have been strongly influential in cognitive science, learning science, education, science studies, and related fields. The development has been so fruitful, indeed, that there is some consolidation around the effort to conceptualize cognition with “four E’s”: *Embodied, Embedded, Extended, Enactive*, in a manner that honors historical and conceptual differences in these literatures but also recognizes their consolidation as an alternative to representational models (Protevi, 2007). Individually and collectively these models offer a coherent and viable alternative to the model of reasoning and problem solving that has dominated cognitive psychology for generations—that is, the

model of cognition as a physical symbol system or language of thought artificially abstracted from material and social context, for which “processing” consists in heuristic manipulation or computation of what are essentially disembodied symbols (e.g., Fodor, 1975). In seeking new models, cognitive science displays its own horizontal development, drawing from phenomenology, dynamical systems theory, transactionalism, activity theory, ecological theory, and early functional psychology for conceptual tools, and from anthropology, sociology, history, and related fields for methodological tools (Osbeck & Nersessian, 2014; Protevi, 2007).

These alternative models of cognition are important to the theoretical psychology community for several reasons. One reason is that cognition has been undertheorized in theoretical psychology in comparison to social/cultural and experiential dimensions of being, at least in the version of theoretical psychology that has been prominent in North America in the twenty-first century, and instantiated in organizational activity through the Division of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology and the International Society for Theoretical Psychology.<sup>2</sup> The underrepresentation of constructive cognitive theory is epiphenomenal to the success of many lines of critique of *cognitivism* (e.g., Still & Costall, 1991). It is important, however, that cognition itself not be conflated with the “*ism*,” that is, the model by which cognition is understood solely in terms of computation over representation (Osbeck, Malone, & Newstetter, 2007). A second reason it is important to incorporating the literature on 4E cognition is that important theoretical and ethical questions arise around the meaning and boundaries of cognition (e.g., “cognitive acts” or “practices” rather than “processes”); there are questions relating to notions of selfhood, identity, psychopathology, and agency—even subjectivity (see especially Robert Wilson, 2014); there are implications for clinical practice and education. There are also important methodological implications to explore. FourE frameworks arise from the use of case study, ethnographic and philosophical methods that include thought experiment. The use of these methods within a framework of scientific realism

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<sup>2</sup>There are, of course, always exceptions. In this case one important exception is Mark Bickhard’s interactionist model of cognition (Bickhard, 2009).

can be a valuable resource for thinking through about the epistemic projects of theoretical psychology in ways that transcend conventional natural science/human science divisions. That is, these perspectives are of value to theoretical psychology not because they provide some kind of ready “answer,” but precisely because of their function in generating new questions.

Moreover, in new questions lie possibilities for new applications. In my view an especially fruitful line of pursuit is evidenced by recent efforts to explore the implications of distributed and embodied cognition for designing innovative research in environmental psychology, specifically aimed at increasing possibilities for addressing sustainability. For example, Chandrasekharan and Tovey (2012) explore implications of distributed cognition’s emphasis on the direct “reading” of external representations (contrasted with internal symbol manipulation) to develop principles guiding design initiatives (e.g., for architecture, infrastructure, and other shared objects) that enhance or encourage environmentally sensitive decision making and sustainable resource use. Cognitive scientists Dutta and Chandrasekharan (2017) utilize 4E cognitive frameworks to enhance education in sustainability, arguing that it is necessary to move beyond information-based educational strategies to increase motivation for action. Their focus is on understanding how engagement in local community based practices such as creation and maintenance of a communal garden can lead to value transformation and prolonged motivation for responsible environmental stewardship, even in the most urbanized of contexts. The focus of these efforts is “transformative action,” by which transformation is understood as entailing modification in the environment as much as in the self, seeing the self and environment in reciprocal relationship. If it is true that these perspectives find compatibility with more familiar frameworks long held dear by theoretical psychologists, this is not reason to dismiss the new applications as superfluous but to partner with them in but to challenge our conceptions of the transformative potential of theoretical psychology as we know it.

2. *Empirical Philosophy*: A second area important to the horizontal development of theoretical psychology is the convergence and solidification of an empirical philosophy, including empirical philosophy of

science. This represents no single line of effort but, rather, encompasses several stands of development including historical scholarship as it bears on questions traditionally thought to transcend empirical analysis. All have implications for engagement with theoretical psychology at various levels, including method, orientating concepts, and interpretation of results. In particular, the recent advent of an “experimental philosophy” reflects a kind of horizontal development in philosophy of mind, in that it shows expansion in the direction of social science, especially psychology, by seeking empirical test of assumptions held to be universal through consultation of lay intuitions (e.g., Deutsch, 2009; Knobe and Nichols, 2013; Machery, Mallon, & Nichols, 2004). Many potential controversies attend experimental philosophy studies, at the level of method, concepts (e.g., intuition itself), and the implications of principal findings.<sup>3</sup> For example, there is much debate over whether professional philosophers enjoy a special form of expertise that makes their intuitions more reliable and valid than those of laypersons (Williamson, 2011). The broader point for our purposes, however, is that it is important for theoretical psychology to engage the literature on experimental philosophy, to consider its overlap with various historical approaches to psychological science and to participate in ongoing conversations concerning its usefulness and limitations.

Qualitative studies of scientific practice also have increased in scope and number over the past 15 years (e.g., Andersen, 2016; Calvert & Fujimura, 2011, Kastenhofer, 2013; Nersessian, 2008; Osbeck, Nersessian, Malone, & Newstetter, 2011). These analyses rely on observational, interview and ethnographic investigations of scientists in real world contexts, and afford the opportunity to enter into and evaluate the fullness of the scientific life-world, and the rich, multifaceted environments of scientific problem solving. From these empirical projects emerge grounds for enlarging or revising conceptions of scientific practice, for example by foregrounding the centrality of model based and analogical reasoning and (Nersessian, 2008) and showcasing the affordances for innovation through conceptual transfer between sciences (Osbeck & Nersessian, 2017).

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<sup>3</sup>These controversies are reviewed by Ichikawa (2014).

Studies of this kind in turn raise or more accurately *revive* basic questions for theoretical psychology such as what is the nature of the empirical, how we should understand its scope and its limits, what is the relation between the empirical and the conceptual and what are the specific practices and conditions conducive to genuine innovation. To emphasize the obvious, questions concerning the nature of science and the meaning of “empirical” have implications for the understanding and ongoing critique of psychological science—projects more clearly in the purview of the traditional concerns of theoretical psychology.

Empirical studies in philosophy of science also raise methodological questions for theoretical psychology and for the qualitative research community that interfaces with it. This is not least because differing norms seem to attend the use of qualitative methods in empirical philosophy of science contexts. Here I offer observation from personal experience, through participation in conferences and engagement in dialogues featuring empirical philosophy of science projects, as well as activities relating to the review and evaluation of empirical philosophy of science. I can attest on this (admittedly unsystematic) basis empirical philosophy of science community seems to prioritize the question over the ability to describe procedure in meticulous detail. There is more faith in the extemporaneous reasoning of the researcher as befits ethnographic immersion in the context of interest and collection of data in natural practice settings. Nevertheless, normative differences associated with empirical investigation in philosophy and psychology are highly important to fundamental questions posed by theoretical psychology, and at the very least raise new questions concerning the demarcation of empirical and non-empirical questions and the nature and scope of human science.

3. *Gravitational Wave Detection*: Farthest afield for theoretical psychology’s horizontal development and likely to be most controversial in terms of claims to relevance to theoretical psychology are some fascinating, frontier, boundary pushing achievements in theoretical physics. Chief among these is the recent discovery of gravitational waves: “ripples in the fabric of space-time” as they are called, that “open an unprecedented new window onto the cosmos” (LIGO lab press release). They are assumed to originate in a “cataclysmic” and distant event—the collision of two black holes at the very moment of formation of a more massive one. Predicted

by Einstein in an early paper on the general theory of relativity in 1916 (Einstein, 1916), gravitational waves were not detected until 2016, when 100 years of theoretical and technological development made this detection possible, against what appears to be a good deal of skepticism during the first 50 years over whether they were a purely mathematical phenomenon or actually carried energy (Pandit & Dosch, 2013; Sauer, 2004).

Among the reasons gravitational wave detection is important outside of the contexts of theoretical physics and, indeed, why it may have special import for theoretical psychology are the following possibilities:

1. Better understanding of the origins of the universe and the nature of space-time, which *may* have implications for our understanding of consciousness and its potential. I make no specific substantive claims about the nature of these implications, and only note that the question is invited. If we seek an integrated understanding human beings as dynamically interrelated with their environments, attention to new theoretical understandings of these environments and of the conditions of their possibility is required as an eventual task for theoretical psychology.
2. Given the long history of controversy concerning the relations between psychology and physics, new frontier developments in theoretical physics, especially gravitational wave detection, generate important questions that broadly relate to epistemology and empirical methods. First, there are questions concerning the nature of Einstein's extraordinary intuition and what it implies for what is possible for human cognition through full engagement of imaginative and analogical resources. Relatedly, there are questions concerning the nature of the collective processes that followed Einstein's prediction, not only mathematical and technological innovations, but enduring faith and passion exhibited in 100 years of striving toward the demonstration and detection of gravitational waves (Thorne, 1980; Kennefick, 2016). These questions about the power of cognition and the collective process draw attention to enduring mysteries concerning the nature of science, and call for rethinking assumptions theoretical psychologists have been inclined to make about the extent to which science constitutes a reductive, even mechanical intellectual act. It is important to



recognize the extent to which the discovery of gravitational waves represents a discovery that follows a theoretical leap; a discovery that is made possible by, preceded by, determined by theory. The theory itself arises from forms of contact with an unseen reality that defies facile description. There is considerable recent attention in philosophy of science to the role of imagination in scientific problem solving and discovery—renewed appreciation of the extent to which scientific reasoning of the most fruitful nature involves whole person embodied activity that includes visualization (e.g., Stuart, 2018). Against these efforts, theoretical psychologists have a charge to better understand the *forms of reasoning* that make revolutionary science possible in both its personal and collective aspects, and to explore the extent to which these forms of reasoning cross boundaries between the historically constituted realms of art and science. In my view exploration of these interfaces of art and science is an epistemic priority for psychology, inasmuch as they may represent the only means of understanding how revolutionary solutions to the extraordinary problems confronting human kind in the twenty-first century might become possible.

## Conclusions

The central claim of this paper is that two directions of movement are necessary for the vitality and impact of theoretical psychology, and thus that these directions form the structure of a constructive project for a viable and relevant future. I use the terms “vertical” and “horizontal” loosely and figuratively to make the point that as a scholarly community theoretical psychology must continuously perform two complementary activities: The first is to push beyond its contingent disciplinary boundaries and the contingent disciplinary boundaries of psychology to incorporate new research and theory. The second is to critically examine its own practices in the interests of increasing conceptual rigor. In this way there is a constant inflow of new ideas and new models, but also a push to evaluate, compare, refine, and revise that which is generated.

How the two directions of development I have outlined here relate to specific practices is a matter to be worked out with directed conversation oriented around the values and long-range goals toward which the community of practice is directed. Implied by my description of vertical development is that we should engage psychological science on a conceptual level, not only in metacritique but with specific and directed focus. Also implied is that we should cultivate an environment of friendly disagreement and critical exchange, and strive to separate these activities from those that facilitate personal relationships and a supportive community life. Implied by my description of horizontal development is that we should keep abreast of new research and theory beyond psychology and to bring this work into our theoretical exchanges. Both directions of development require more explicit articulation of personal values and goals germane to the practice of theoretical psychology, and the current volume is an important forum for this articulation. In the interests of making my own view explicit, I suggest that the point of the long range project of theoretical psychology is to make conceptual contribution to the human pool of resources for various kinds of problem solving, and to aid in engendering the wise application of these resources. That which changes for any generation of theoretical psychology is not the underlying structure of vertical and horizontal development but the specific evolving challenges and opportunities presenting themselves to those who think within it.

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# Toward a Metaphysical Empirical Psychology

Gregg Henriques

Take a moment and reflect on the following questions: (1) *What is the world made of?*; (2) *Why is world the way it is?*; (3) *What is the place of humans in the world?* In the language of the current chapter, the answers that emerge in response to these kinds of questions are drawn from what Pepper (1942) called one's "world hypotheses." Here I refer to this as one's "metaphysical system." The goal of this chapter is to show that the metaphysical system being used is as crucial to the enterprise of psychology as empirical investigations—they simply occupy different ends of the spectrum of knowledge. Correspondingly, my re-envisioning the future vision for theoretical and philosophical psychology calls for the analysis of the metaphysical systems that are operative, although often implicit in the field. This chapter makes the case that mainstream psychology move from its current exaggerated emphasis on empiricism to a "Metaphysical

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Book chapter for *Re-Envisioning Theoretical Psychology*

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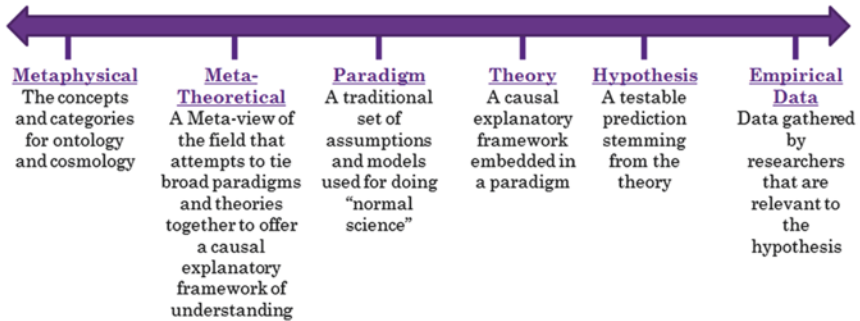
T. Teo (ed.), *Re-envisioning Theoretical Psychology*, Palgrave Studies in the Theory and History of Psychology, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16762-2\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16762-2_9)

Empirical” approach. A Metaphysical Empirical Psychology would be one that attends the entire dimension of analysis that stretches from specific empirical findings all the way to the concepts and categories that define and describe the core subject matter (i.e., behavior, mind and consciousness).

## Defining the Metaphysical and Empirical Domains of Analysis

The Merriam-Webster on line dictionary (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>; retrieved April 23, 2018) defines *metaphysics* as: (1) a division of philosophy that is concerned with the fundamental nature of reality and being that includes ontology, cosmology, and epistemology; and (2) abstract philosophical studies, including what is outside of objective experience. The same dictionary defines *empirical* as: (1) originating in or based on observation or experience; (2) relying on experience or observation alone without due regard for system and theory; and (3) capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment. Mainstream psychology has, by and large, completely neglected metaphysics, and it has adopted a heavy emphasis on the second and third meanings of the word empirical. That is, academic psychologists generally eschew philosophy and big picture thinking and subjective observations (the first definition of empirical), and instead focus on data gathering and experimentation. The vision offered here is that psychologists should be considering the entire dimension that stretches from metaphysics to empirical data collection (Fig. 1).

Because the word metaphysics has a long and complicated history, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the term here. The word is sometimes associated with New Age, alternative, or mystical ways of thinking. In a related vein, the word can be used in a pejorative sense to communicate things that are not very serious or things that are unknowable. For example, if someone were to say, “Now you are just talking metaphysics,” it is likely that the speaker would mean the person was just talking nonsense or was engaged in pure speculation. Using metaphysics in this way stems in large part from the emergence of modern scientific ways of



**Fig. 1** The metaphysical to empirical dimension of analysis

thinking, which emphasized the importance of empirical investigations over pure philosophical inquiry (or speculation or unfounded claims). Although understandable, it is unfortunate that metaphysics came to be ignored by so many because, in its formal sense, metaphysics refers to the most fundamental branch of philosophy.

Inside academic philosophical circles, metaphysics remains an important area of inquiry. Philosophers who work in metaphysics are generally concerned with deep questions about ontology. In this chapter, I will be emphasizing the concept of a “metaphysical system,” which refers to the system of concepts and categories one is using to describe reality. As noted in the Merriam definition, metaphysics deals with the intersection of ontology, cosmology, and epistemology. A metaphysical system, then, is defined here as one’s theory or version of reality, which includes: (1) the picture of the universe as a whole (cosmology); (2) claims about what is real, including the concepts and categories that one uses to map the world (ontology); and (3) one’s knowledge systems about the world and what constitutes justifiable knowledge (epistemology).

Mainstream psychology generally does not deal with these big picture questions; the field is instead generally committed to a narrower empiricism focused on variables of interest that can be measured. This focus is apparent as soon as one enters the discipline. In a highly popular introductory textbook, David Myers and Nathan DeWall define psychology as “the scientific study of behavior and mental processes,” (Myers & DeWall, 2016, p. 7) which is a standard, mainstream definition. The authors



proceed to define behavior as “anything an organism does—any action we can observe and record,” and mental processes as “the internal, subjective experiences we infer from behavior—sensations, perceptions, dreams, thoughts, beliefs and feelings.” One’s a priori definitions are derived from one’s metaphysical system; that is, the concepts and categories that one uses to carve up reality. Thus, Myers and DeWall are operating from a metaphysical system, even if it is implicit.

Yet the textbook authors do not explore their definitions, nor the model of the world from which they were derived. Instead, the focus moves quickly to the primary focus of mainstream psychology, and states “the key word in psychology’s definition is science,” which “is less a set of findings than a way of asking and answering questions” (Myers & DeWall, 2016, p. 7). In other words, psychologists approach their subject matter through the lens and methods of empiricism. The authors central hope is that readers learn “how psychologists play their game,” by which they mean the students will learn how psychological researchers engage in studies, measure constructs, and test hypotheses to evaluate conflicting opinions and ideas about psychological subjects. Similar examples of this kind of perspective on psychology abound.

The technical term for the position that Myers and DeWall take is called *methodological behaviorism*. This refers to the notion that because science must deal in measurement and general, third person observation, data must come from behaviors. In 1956, Bergman wrote, “Virtually every American psychologist, whether he knows it or not, is nowadays a methodological behaviorist” (p. 270). It is as true of the cognitive psychologists as of the more traditional behaviorists. George Mandler put it this way:

[N]o cognitive psychologist worth his salt today thinks of subjective experience as a datum. It’s a construct.... Your private experience is a theoretical construct to me. I have no direct access to your private experience. I do have direct access to your behavior. In that sense, I’m a behaviorist. In that sense, everybody is a behaviorist today. (Mandler in Baars, 1986, p. 256)

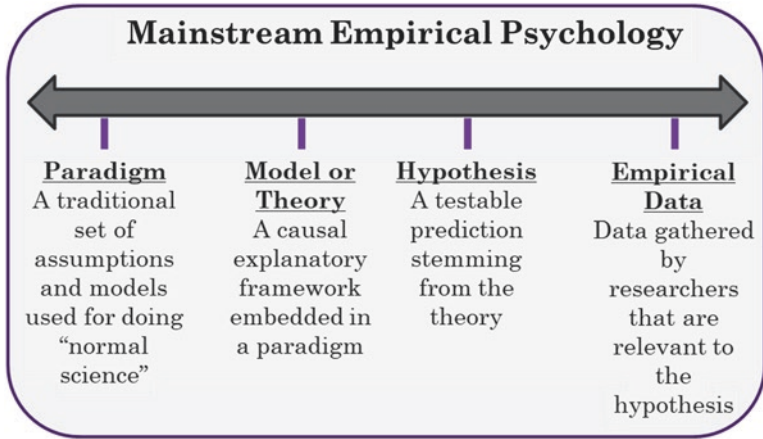
The idea has permeated the whole discipline and is deeply embedded in the institution. Moore (2012) put it this way:

methodological behaviorism currently underlies mainstream research programs in psychology as well as professional socialization in that discipline. It underlies courses in research methods, experimental design, and statistics in most psychology departments at colleges and universities. It underlies such standardized tests in the discipline as the Graduate Record Examination. Research and psychological explanations that are not consistent with these features are given less weight, if any weight at all, in the scientific community, for example, as reflected in the editorial practices of journals and research support from granting agencies.

In short, mainstream psychology rests on an (often implicit) methodological behaviorism. The goal of this chapter is to explain why this is not sufficient and lay out why attention on the broader metaphysical system is necessary for psychology to reach its full potential. This is where much attention from theoretical psychologists should be focused.

Before proceeding, I need to avoid a strawman characterization of empirical psychology. It is, of course, the case that no one operates on empirical data alone. Rather, empirical data are always interpreted in relationship to some model or theory, which in turn is embedded in a larger paradigm or shared understanding of the way the world works. Common psychological paradigms include social cognitive, behavioral, psychodynamic, humanistic, evolutionary and cultural or indigenous approaches. In short, we need to acknowledge that mainstream psychology is already operating on more than just empirical data, and that there are many conceptual frameworks and models that have been offered as maps for organizing data. Figure 2 captures the levels of analysis in mainstream empirical psychology.

Both mainstream and theoretical psychologists are aware of this layering. In their proposal for formally defining the sub-discipline of theoretical psychology, Slife and Williams (1997) acknowledge that “theories” have always been a part of the field. Theories have ranged in scope from specific models that connect variables (e.g., social support relates to human happiness) to grand theorizing by the field’s luminaries, such as William James, Sigmund Freud and John Watson. Consistent with the current critique, these authors point out that broad theorizing has largely diminished, and the primary focus and activity of the discipline has narrowed to models tied directly to empirical data. They write (p. 118):



**Fig. 2** Mainstream psychology ranges from paradigms to empirical data

[T]here has been a general disaffection with theory in psychology. The discipline has moved away from grand, subsuming theories in the traditional sense and moved toward models, techniques, and micro theories in the more modern sense. Most experimentally oriented psychologists, for example, focus on models. ...Models are typically delimited explanations that involve only a circumscribed field of endeavor, such as visual memory or neurotransmitters. These models are rarely expanded to full-blown theories. And yet such models rest on a host of broader theoretical assumptions that are often never recognized and almost never examined.

Slife and Williams (1997) proceeded to argue that mainstream psychology has evolved toward the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte, who had a vision of science that moved from theory into statements and claims directly supported by empirical evidence. However, Slife and Williams point out that positivism is itself a philosophy and conceptual position that is not empirically supported per se, but rather supported by argument and assumptions, many of which are highly dubious. These authors proceed to make the case for why we need theoretical psychologists who examine the underlining assumptions of the paradigms and methodologies that drive the discipline. They buttress that argument by point-

ing out the highly fragmented state of psychological knowledge and the many competing paradigms that are overlapping but also contradictory, resulting in a rather chaotic state of knowledge. Such conceptual confusion cannot be solved via empirical research alone. As such, the field needs individuals who can engage in a meta-theoretical perspective, and who can evaluate the assumptions of various theories and serve as a consultant and commentator at this higher and more abstract level of analysis.

The current proposal for re-envisioning theoretical and philosophical psychology is to extend the picture offered by Slife and Williams (1997) in a constructive manner. Slife and Williams note that much work in theoretical psychology has offered critical philosophical analyses of the current field or pointed toward alternative directions to the mainstream. However, they also emphasized that the role of the theoretical psychologist is to view the field as a whole, and the need to explore ways of conceiving that whole. It is here that the current proposal advances a new vision for the field. Specifically, by emphasizing the left side of the continuum, the call is for theoretical and philosophical psychologists to offer both critical and constructive analyses of the metaphysical systems, as well as explore meta-theoretical perspectives that examine the paradigms and their interrelations (see Fig. 3).

The current chapter thus advocates for theoretical and philosophical psychology to stake out this aspect of the field and to embolden psy-

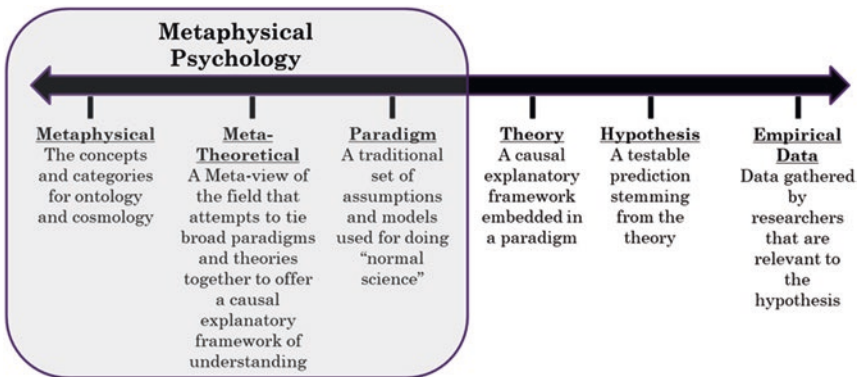


Fig. 3 Theoretical and philosophical psychology focuses on the left side of the continuum

chologists to insist that attention to this aspect of the continuum is crucial for the field as a science. In addition, this chapter outlines what a proposal for a Metaphysical Empirical Psychology can look like. However, prior to articulating some of the features of that system, we need to understand first why psychology has been plagued by metaphysical problems since its inception.

## Understanding Psychology's Metaphysical Problems

In *How to Think Straight About Psychology*, Keith Stanovich (2012) notes that many students are “disappointed because psychology contains not one grand theory but many different theories, each covering a limited aspect of behavior” (p. 4). These students have a sense regarding the importance of coherently organized knowledge, and we should heed their disappointment. Empathizing with these students begins to allow for the recognition of the “problem of psychology” (Henriques, 2008). The problem of psychology is illuminated by considering the story of Sigmund Koch. Koch was charged by the American Psychological Association to conduct a “study of the science” in the late 1950s, with the goal of clearly defining the discipline. After years of study, he concluded that the field of psychology was not a conceptually coherent entity and, more than that, he concluded *it could not be one*. Instead, his conclusion was the thing we called psychology was really a loosely overlapping “confederation of sub-disciplines” that were concerned with different subject matters from different perspectives and advocated different methods of investigation (Koch, 1993).

The nature of psychology's conceptual problems become clearer when we look at the history of psychology and see that it was founded by pioneers who focused on different subject matters. The birth of the discipline is often dated to 1879, which corresponds to the opening of the first scientific laboratory for the empirical investigation of psychological phenomena by Wilhelm Wundt in Germany. Wundt defined psychology as the science of human consciousness, and he studied human perceptual

experiences in the lab. The American William James, in contrast, thought of psychology as the study of mental life and mental functions. The primary focus for him was on how people (and other animals) functionally adapted to their environment. Sigmund Freud focused on “unconscious” mental forces as the key drivers of human behavior.

In contrast to each of these positions, John B. Watson proclaimed strongly that concepts like consciousness or unconsciousness were not scientifically viable and that the subject matter of psychology had to be “behavior” (which essentially includes all animal actions) if it was to be a real natural science like physics. These fundamentally different formulations begin to get at the heart of the problem. The debates about the essential subject matter of psychology show that we are not just talking about differences of opinion at the level of research, findings or even theory (i.e., causal explanations for why things happen). Rather, the problem goes deeper than that. It is fundamentally about the subject matter and the concepts and categories that one uses to talk about it. That is what makes it a “metaphysical” problem.

Why did psychology have such a problem with its subject matter and the concepts and categories that scholars used to describe it? The reason has to do with the worldviews scholars had about the world and consciousness and behavior, animals and persons, and the scientific investigations of such phenomena when the discipline first emerged. Psychology was officially born as a discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century, during the flowering of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment thinkers valued the power of reason, and leading intellectuals argued that the natural world could be understood using logic, math, and the empirical method. Although the Enlightenment is formally dated to begin 1715, the roots of it date even back further, and the work of early scientists like Galileo and Descartes laid key parts of the foundation. Some argue that the Enlightenment should begin with the publication of Isaac Newton’s “Principia” (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy) in 1687, which is arguably the single most important scientific publication in history. What did Newton do in *Principia*? He developed a mathematical framework that described matter in motion (sometimes called “classical mechanics”). He did this so well and so completely that his mathematical theory of matter in motion that was the foundation of

physical science for almost 225 years, up until the development of modern physics that occurred in the beginning part of the twentieth Century.

Newtonian physics was so powerful that it began to give rise to a completely new worldview. Prior to Newton's work, virtually every prominent Western intellectual held a Christian worldview. However, although Newton himself was deeply Christian, many scholars who emerged later during the Enlightenment began to adopt a purely "physical" worldview grounded in Newtonian physics. Thus, at the time of the birth of psychology there were two great metaphysical systems; the Christian view and the Physicalist view (Koons & Pickavance, 2014). The key metaphysical differences in these two worldviews can be seen in how they respond to these three questions: (1) *What is the world made of?*; (2) *Why is world the way it is?*; (3) *What is the place of humans in the world?*

The Christian metaphysical worldview dominated Europe and the United States for centuries. It offers the following basic answers to these three questions:

1. The World consists of God and all that He made. Everything exists because of God and exists because God chose it to exist. God created both the material world of things and the spiritual world of the human soul and angels and other supernatural forces.
2. God has always existed and He has to exist because the world exists and the logic of the world exists because of God. In this sense, God exists in much the same way that  $2 + 2 = 4$  exists; it is a logical consequence of the world as we find it. Although God has to exist, all other things could have not existed if God chosen not to create them.
3. Human Beings were created by God to love and serve him forever. He infused in them the power of the Spirit, which allows them to be connected to God, if they chose to embrace this calling. In the same way that the heart is designed to pump blood, human beings are meant to serve God and their lives are a testament to the extent to which they do so. The course of human history is nothing less than a record of the extent to which humans have chosen to do what they were made to do (i.e., love God and serve him or turn away from Him toward sin).

Although the Christian worldview was dominant for centuries, as the Age of the Enlightenment progressed, more and more intellectuals found the power of a Newtonian worldview of matter in motion to be sufficient to explain the world around them. The Enlightenment intellectual Pierre-Simon Laplace is an example of an advocate of the new *physicalist* worldview. He believed everything was completely determined by the laws of matter in motion. With this backdrop, we can now list how a nineteenth century Physicalist worldview answers the three metaphysical questions:

1. The World consists of matter in motion, and there is nothing but matter. Matter obeys strict laws and everything is determined by these laws.
2. Matter has always existed and can never be created or destroyed, only its form can change. Because matter has always existed, there is no higher reason for the World to be. It just is and always has been and always will be.
3. Human beings are just complex arrangements of matter, and they exist because they just happen to be how matter is organized right now. Also, because all material things obey strict laws, there is no such thing as free will or the freedom to choose. Human lives have no meaning other than what they construct for themselves, and when they die they simply become different arrangements of matter.

There are deep and profound tensions between the Christian and Physicalist metaphysical worldviews, and we can still see these views as competing in politics and other social domains in modern times (Ambrosio & Lanzialo, 2013).

What does this have to do with psychology? These were the two dominant worldviews that were operating when the science of psychology emerged. Thus, psychology gets started as a discipline when its founders had to basically choose between either the first or second worldview. Because it was defined as a science and the science of the time was the lawful, physical determination of matter in motion, most psychological scientists adopted the second worldview, that of a Newtonian physicalism (Gantt & Williams, 2014). Indeed, this perspective united views that were otherwise very much in competition. For example, Sigmund Freud's



psychoanalysis and John Watson's behaviorism were both reductive, atheistic physicalist worldviews. Both assumed a classical, deterministic, matter-in-motion view of the universe, and believed that, at bottom, people were *just* complicated arrangements of matter.

The problem is that neither of these two worldviews is adequate for modern psychology, as they do not provide us a framework for the concepts and categories of behavior, mind, and human consciousness that are up to the task of a modern psychological science. The reason the Christian worldview is not a good framework for scientific psychology is the same reason that has been given since the Enlightenment. The concept of God does not work in the "language game" (or metaphysics) of science (Henriques, 2005). The reductive physicalist worldview like that adopted by Laplace is also not an adequate metaphysical worldview for the field of psychology. There are many reasons, and I will briefly list five major ones here.

One key change that has taken place in the foundations of science over the past 100 years is that the concept of energy now shares with matter "foundational status" in the sense that both energy and matter are fundamental concepts in physics. Indeed, most physicists now would likely view energy as the more fundamental concept. This shift from matter to energy changes the central conception of the universe from an "object view" to a "process view" (Smolin, 2001), meaning that the long view of physics focuses on change processes over time as a fundamental frame with which to view the universe.

A second major change is that modern cosmology (i.e., the science of the universe as a whole) now offers a picture of the universe that has a beginning point of emergence called the Big Bang. This is the idea that the universe transformed from a singular point into an "energy-matter-space-time" grid about 13.8 billion years ago. This is important because it suggests that the universe has a beginning and a documentable history, which is a different model of cosmology than offered by Newton.

A third change to the Newtonian matter-in-motion worldview is that complexity evolves and has increased over time via natural processes. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was central to this realization, but now modern scholars talk even more broadly of a cosmic evolution

(Chaisson, 2001), which refers to the emergence of complexity from the singular beginning point and growing to first include particles and forces, then stars and galaxies, then complex elements and planets, and finally increasingly complex forms of life. It is only by taking a broad, cosmic evolutionary view that we will be able to have a picture of the necessary concepts and categories that define behavior, mind, and consciousness.

The fourth big change involves the developments in modern physics in the early portion of the twentieth century that blew up the strict deterministic picture that people like Laplace had of how matter (and energy) actually behaves. It is now largely understood that the fundamental character of the most basic elements of the universe (i.e., particles) has a random (or statistical) character. That is, there are unknowable random variations that play a role in what happens in the future, and this means that the kind of determinism that Laplace argued for is impossible.

The fifth big change involves the rise of information science that happened in the middle of the twentieth century, largely on the seminal contributions of Claude Shannon. The science of information has provided a new perspective on causation. Rather than causation being purely mechanistic in terms of exchange of forces, there are many systems whose causal properties are described in informational terms of inputs, computational processes, and outputs. Cells, brains, human language, computers and so forth must be understood in the language of information processing, which is not reducible to the language of Newtonian matter in motion.

Many other changes have occurred since the time of Newton, in both science and philosophy. Mainstream psychology, with its focus on empiricism, has not evolved in a way that can effectively address these issues. Instead, as a discipline, psychology has focused mostly on generating findings grounded in the empirical method rather than on building broad conceptual systems that can effectively frame our understanding and give rise to cumulative knowledge. However, a proposal to solve psychology's metaphysical problems has been offered, one that can assimilate and integrate its paradigms, and align empirical investigations into a coherent whole.

## The Tree of Knowledge System: An Example of a Metaphysical Empirical System for Psychology

The Tree of Knowledge System (Henriques, 2003, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2013) offers a new big picture view of the universe that sets the stage for the kind of proposal that can solve psychology's metaphysical problems. The reader is referred to early publications for details and its graphic depiction. The crucial point here is that the ToK System provides a metaphysical map of behavioral complexity that delineates four separable dimensions of Matter, Life, Mind, and Culture. In their textbook introducing the subject, Koons and Pickavance (2014, p. 13) that state that metaphysics is about understanding:

the fundamental structure of reality as a whole. How do things fit together in the world? Plato describes this task of philosophy as "carving nature at the joints," comparing metaphysics to a skillful and knowledgeable act of dissection. Here are four relations that seem to be among the fundamental relations of this worldly structure: the relation between things and their properties, between wholes and parts, between causes and effects, and things related to each other in space and in time.

This reads as an excellent description of what the Tree of Knowledge System attempts to accomplish. It provides a new way to carve nature at its joints and gives rise to a new definitional picture regarding things and their properties, wholes and parts, causes and effects, and the interrelationship between dimensions of behavioral complexity in space and time. Consider the following answers to the three big questions: (1) *What is the world is made of?*; (2) *Why the world is the way it is?*; (3) *What is the place of the human in the world?*

1. The universe is an unfolding wave of Energy-Matter-Information that can be described in behavioral terms of objects, fields and change and exist that exist in both levels (parts, wholes, groups) and in four different dimensions of behavioral complexity, Matter, Life, Mind and Culture. These are separable dimensions of complexity because the

behaviors that take place at the levels above Matter are mediated by systems of information processing; specifically, genetic (Life), neuronal (Mind) and linguistic (Culture) systems.

2. The universe came into being approximately 13.8 billion years ago. There was a “moment of creation” in which a chain reaction in a “pure energy singularity” that created a massive inflation and gave rise to the four fundamental forces (i.e., electromagnetic, strong, weak and gravity) and the elementary particles (e.g., bosons, quarks, leptons). These forces and particles formed into atoms, stars and galaxies. Because of differential concentrations of energy and matter, there has been a flow of energy across various sections of the universe, and this energy flow has resulted in the emergence of different forms of complexity. Energy flow on the surface of planet earth resulted in the emergence of self-organizing, self-replicating systems that we call life.
3. People exist on the fourth dimension of behavioral complexity. Human beings are a kind of primate, and thus are mental creatures that exhibit complicated actions and have experiential consciousness. Unlike other primates, humans then developed full, open language capacities, which resulted in them exhibiting qualitatively unique behavior patterns and having unique capacities for self-reflective knowledge and for generating and sharing explicit knowledge about the world. That process turned our primate ancestors into modern people who are deliberative actors who can justify their actions on the social stage. Processes of justification, coupled with agriculture and the rise of the nation state, gave rise to large-scale systems of justification and to modern peoples who are deliberative actors on a cultural stage. In addition, such patterns justification gave rise to modern knowledge systems like science.

## **From Methodological Behaviorism to a Metaphysical, Universal Behaviorism**

The ToK System provides a new tool for theoretical and philosophical psychologists. Specifically, it allows these psychologists to start with an enormously broad, scientifically consistent depiction of the relationship

between Matter, Life, Mind and Culture, each defined as emergent dimensions of behavioral complexity. The remainder of the chapter outlines some key ideas regarding how the system addresses psychology's definitional problems and how it sets the stage for connecting across the major paradigms in psychotherapy.

As mentioned previously, the standard approach in mainstream psychology is to frame behavior via a methodological behaviorist position. Methodological behaviorism makes sense from the vantage point of scientific empiricism. If we are going to anchor our knowledge on public observation and data collection, which is what science does, then we cannot use subjective experience as data *per se* because an individual's subjective experience is not publicly accessible. Rather what we might use are overt self-reports of subjective experience. Nevertheless, methodological behaviorism is not sufficient for defining the subject matter of psychology. This point can be clarified if we take a step back and ask: *What, exactly, do we mean by the term behavior?* When we do that we can see we have a serious problem.

Methodological behaviorism is a feature of empirical science *in general*, and it does nothing to specify the specific kinds of behavior various scientists are interested in. In contrast, the ToK functions as a metaphysical system that maps behavior in all its forms. It points out that there are different kinds of behavior, material/physical, bio/organic, neuro/psychological and socio/linguistic (Henriques, 2003). If a cat falls out of a tree, it behaves as an object with mass and a shape. However, although both a dead cat and a living cat behave as falling objects, the latter also behaves very differently. The dead cat behaves *only* as a function of gravity (physical behavior). The living cat behaves as a function of gravity *and* its active bio-physiology *and* its neuropsychology. That it lands on its feet and takes off is not a function of gravity, but it represents an entirely different kind of behavior pattern.

The kinds of behaviors that animals exhibit that are not simply physical movements are characterized by the ToK as *mental behaviors*. The point here is that to get an effective conception of behavior, one must keep in mind the relationship between the behavior of objects relative to organisms relative to animals relative to people. Or, to put it slightly differently, we need to start from the most basic forms of behavior and

work our way up the dimensions of behavioral complexity, characterizing how each emergent dimension is both continuous with and different from the dimension prior to it. By mapping behavior metaphysically, we can move toward solving the problem of psychology and developing a shared definitional system that is up to the task.

## Solving the Problem of Psychology

Psychology's failure to be defined has not been simply a matter of inevitable fuzzy boundaries. Rather, scholars disagree about the fundamental nature of what psychology is about. Specifically, there are three major domains of contention, which are debates about whether or not psychology is primarily: (a) about minds or behaviors; (b) about animals in general, some animals but not others, or only humans; and (c) a natural science, a human science, or a profession focused on fostering psychological health. The ToK System affords a new meta-perspective on this issue, and the explicit definition of psychology that emerges from analyses derived from the ToK System is as follows (Henriques, 2011):

*Psychology is the science of mental behavior and the human mind, and the professional application of such knowledge toward the greater good.*

Based on the map afforded by the ToK System, psychology should be divided into three broad domains (Henriques, 2004; Fig. 4). The first domain is “basic psychology,” a natural science discipline that has the behavior of animals in general as its subject matter. Animal behavior is characterized in the ToK System as *mental behavior*, defined as the behav-

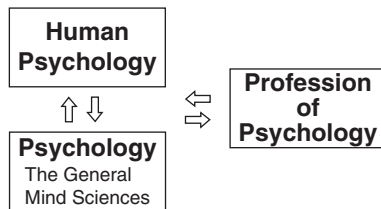


Fig. 4 The three domains of psychology

ior of the animal-as-a-whole mediated by the nervous system. Such behaviors can be overt or covert. Overt mental behaviors are observable by others and take place between the animal and the environment. Hunting, mating, and defending a territory are exemplars of overt mental behaviors. Perceptions, feelings, imaginings, and even nonconscious cognitive processes are also considered mental behaviors; they simply take place within the animal and thus are covert. In slight contrast to the meaning of Mind, which is the third dimension of behavioral complexity and consists of the entire set of mental behaviors, 'the mind' refers to the architecture of the neuro-information processing system, which includes the information instantiated within and processed by that system. In short, the ToK System affords scholars a new vocabulary for mind, experiential consciousness, and animal behavior.

The second domain has human behavior at the individual level as its proper subject matter and includes an emphasis on the human mind and human self-consciousness. This division is necessary because the behavior of persons is fundamentally different from the behavior of other animals. Human persons are deliberative actors who have the capacity to self-consciously justify their actions on the social stage (Ossorio, 2006). This capacity for self-conscious justification changes the behavioral equation dramatically. Not only does it open up a wide variety of higher thought processes and reasoning capacities, but it also means human persons develop cultural systems of justification that coordinate human activity and evolve over time. Thus, Culture and human self-consciousness have transformed humans from primates into persons. It is this fact that makes human science so different from the natural sciences. One of the major differences between these two domains can be seen by considering the problem of the double hermeneutic. According to Giddens (1987, p. 19), this refers to the fact that "the concepts and theories invented by social scientists circulate in and out of the social world they are coined to analyze." In other words, the justifications generated by social scientists to explain some human behavioral phenomenon are digested by human actors with genuine causal consequences. The philosophical problem this creates becomes more apparent when one considers that the most successful descriptions of human behavior are precisely those that will receive

the most attention. As such, one cannot have a comprehensive theory of human behavior and also expect that human behavior will remain unaffected by this very theory. Freud's theories, for example, changed people.

Finally, the ToK System points to their being a fundamental difference between the science and the profession because one has as its primary goal the description and explanation of animal and human mental behavior and the other has the improvement of human well-being (Henriques & Sternberg, 2004). The profession thus must include an explicit evaluative dimension of the good and how to move humans toward that (Henriques, Kleinman, & Asselin, 2014). In sum, at the institutional level, the current proposal argues for dividing psychology into the following three great branches: (1) basic psychology which focuses on mental behavior; (2) human psychology which focuses on the human mind and individual human behavior; and (3) professional psychology which focuses on the professional application of psychological knowledge for the greater good.

In the current formulation, a metaphysical system refers to the system of concepts and categories that one uses to define foundational terms. In this view, the problem of psychology is diagnostic of the field having a profound need for a new metaphysical system. However, there are many other key terms that require definitional and conceptual analysis. Perhaps the most central terms are behavior, mind, consciousness, well-being, and personhood. The ToK System provides theoretical and philosophical psychologists new ways to work out definitions of these terms (Henriques, 2011; Henriques et al., 2014). In addition to metaphysical or conceptual analyses of key terms and their interrelations, the ToK System also serves as a framework that can address issues pertaining to meta-theory. As Anchin (2008, p. 814) put it:

The bridges that can thus be erected between the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities through the unifying metatheory of the ToK System and its foundations of ontological pluralism and epistemological dialecticism shimmer with heuristic potency, creating endless opportunities for the disciplines to integrate their vast pools of knowledge.



## Addressing the Problem of Meta-theoretical Integration: The Example of Character Adaptation Systems Theory

Meta-theory is a theory about theories, and the unified theory of psychology is proposed as a system that can assimilate and integrate key ideas from the dominant paradigms into a coherent whole. Here I review Character Adaptation Systems Theory, which is an outgrowth of the unified framework that has been developed to the bridge between personality and psychotherapy (Henriques, 2017). Via the metaphysical and metatheoretical view afforded by the ToK System, CAST reinterprets the key insights and emphases of the four primary paradigms in individual psychotherapy, which are behavioral, experiential, psychodynamic and cognitive approaches, as being models of “character adaptation.”

It was the trait researchers Costa and McCrae (1994) who first introduced the term “characteristic adaptations” in the context of their Five Factor Trait Theory. Character adaptations were different from personality traits. They refer to the unique ways the individuals learn to adapt and adjust to context and stressors. They can be thought of as the (mental behavioral) repertoires that people develop to handle situations. McAdams and Pals (2006, p. 208) included character adaptations as a key “level” of personality. They defined it as the dimension of personality as consisting of units that “include motives, goals, plans, strivings, strategies, values, virtues, schemas, self-images, mental representations of significant others, developmental tasks, and many other aspects of human individuality that speak to motivational, social–cognitive, and developmental concerns.”

The concepts of adaptation and adaptive versus maladaptive mental behavioral processes cut across the major paradigms. Indeed, psychotherapy can be considered “as a formal relationship established with a professional trained in the values, knowledge base and skills in applying methods grounded in the science of human psychology with the purpose of assisting the client toward more valued and *adaptive* states of being.” Along these lines, each major psychotherapy paradigm offered a frame that explained how people adapted to their environment, how maladaptive patterns could develop, and the kinds of interventions that were required to shift maladaptive patterns into more to adaptive ways of being.

The ToK metatheory allows for the reinterpretation of the paradigms as systems of adaptation. The CAST framework is depicted in Fig. 5. It depicts three contexts (the biophysical, learning and developmental, and socio-cultural) and five systems of adaptation. The five systems of character adaptation delineated by CAST emerged as a function of applying the ideas that made up the unified theory toward bridging modern personality theory and psychotherapy. Each of these systems and to how they are connected to the key insights of the major paradigms in individual psychotherapy is discussed below. The point here is to demonstrate how an extension of the ToK System can be used to foster meta-theoretical integration of the paradigms.

### Behavioral Therapy Aligns with the Habit System

In CAST, the habit system is the most basic system of character adaptation. It consists of sensori-motor patterns and reflexes, fixed action patterns, and procedural memories that operate automatically and without any conscious awareness. The habit system of adaptation assimilates and integrates key insights from the behavioral tradition. The general emphasis in behavior therapy is not on one’s inner experience or, traditionally, even one’s thought processes. Rather, the focus is on action and the environment and how the individual responds to stimuli (in associative conditioning) or is rewarded or punished for certain actions. These ele-

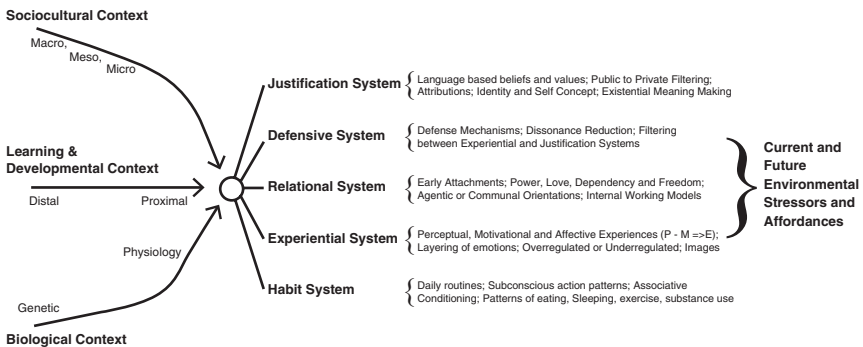


Fig. 5 Character Adaptation Systems Theory

ments line up directly with habit formation. As reviewed by Duhigg (2012), habitual responses can usefully be divided up into three elements that form a loop. First there is a stimulus or cue which is followed by an enacted procedure or response, and finally there is a rewarding consequence. This is called the habit loop.

## **Emotion Focused Therapy Aligns with the Experiential System**

Consistent with work in affective neuroscience (Panksepp, 1998), the experiential system corresponds to the nonverbal perceptions, motives and drives, and emotional feelings states that make up mental life. This domain of adaptation corresponds well with Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT; Greenberg, 2002). Central to EFT is a focus on understanding the way emotions organize experiential consciousness and the process by which such emotional processing is generally adaptive or maladaptive. If an individual is attuned to those needs and arrives at those feeling states and integrates what the feeling is communicating into their higher self-consciousness, then one is in a much better place to achieve mental and relational harmony. However, if the primary adaptive emotional response is blocked because it is deemed threatening or confusing or unacceptable and either ignored or replaced with a secondary feeling (e.g., rather than feeling hurt about being rejected, the individual becomes angry at the unfairness of it and says he does not care), then there will be significant disharmony and misalignment between the core needs and emotional expression. In EFT, therapists work to coach clients to understand how to connect to their primary adaptive feelings and work through unfinished emotional business, in which they historically were not able to process their primary feelings.

## **Modern Psychodynamic Therapy Aligns with the Relational and Defensive Systems**

Modern psychodynamic approaches correspond with the relational and defensive systems of character adaptation. As Magnavita (2008) notes,

modern psychodynamic theory emphasizes, that we are relational beings who are guided and shaped by the exchanges we encounter. This fact corresponds to the relational system, which is conceptualized as an extension of the experiential system that emerges both as mentation becomes more complicated (i.e., as animals evolve with increasing cortical functioning) and as animals become more social. The relational system refers to the social motivations and feelings states, along with intuitive internal working models and self-in-relation-to-other schema that guide social mammals in general and people in particular in their social exchanges and relationships. It is important to note, then, that the relational system as considered here is not dependent upon verbal processing, although, of course, in humans verbal processing can dramatically influence the operations of the relational system.

The second key insight of modern psychodynamic theory pertains to the organization of consciousness and the nature of defense mechanisms (Magnavita, 2008). The fourth system of character adaptation is the defensive system, and it refers to the ways in which individuals manage their actions, feelings, and thoughts, and specifically the way individual's shift the focus of conscious attention to maintain a state of psychic equilibrium in times of threat or insecurity. The defensive system is the most diffuse of the character adaptation systems; however, it can nevertheless be specified by examining how images, impulses, cravings, and desires from the nonverbal systems (i.e., habit, experiential, relational) are integrated (or not) with the individual's self-conscious justifications for being (for a recent review of psychological defense consistent with the current formulation, see Hart, 2014).

These two key areas of emphasis, which correspond to the relational and defensive systems of character adaptation, are effectively represented in the two "triangles" developed by David Malan. One is the Triangle of Persons, which represents the interpersonal matrix in psychotherapy as defined by three "points": (a) past important relationships that laid the developmental ground work for a person's relational schemas; (b) current relationships in which needs and conflicts are being played out; and (c) the therapist relationship, which attempts to provide a new and healing context for working through maladaptive relational problems.

The second is the Malan Triangle of Conflict. It provides a simple map for understanding human defensive processes. It too consists of three points: (a) images, impulses and affects triggered by current or past situations; (b) signal anxiety activated in response to those emerging feelings; and (c) defenses that attempt to avoid the threat and return to a state of equilibrium. The idea is that disturbing or problematic images, impulses or affects trigger a “signal anxiety” because they are dangerous. This anxiety triggers a defensive response that attempts to avoid the danger and restore what might be called a justifiable state of being. The Malan Triangle of Conflict explains why some material is readily accessible to self-consciousness, whereas other material, especially that which is threatening to one’s real or perceived status or identity, is often avoided, repressed or filtered out. In class, I would often use the example of a 15-year-old boy who starts to experience homosexual impulses to illustrate these processes of relational navigation and defense. It is not hard to envision how, upon starting to experience homosexual urges, an individual would experience signal anxiety and attempt to avoid or repress them. Such individuals may have strong memories of his father affirming masculinity in boys and thus attempt to identify with this aspect of his relational world and seek out relationships or activities that attempt to affirm that he is secure and valued because he is masculine.

Consistent with these claims, the modern psychodynamic therapist generally seeks to enter the patient’s relational system and restructure it through a corrective emotional experience and through insight achieved via interpretations the therapist makes. Therapy is structured on gaining insight into those processes and fostering adaptive correction of attachments and associated feelings in the context of a healing therapeutic relationship. Through such interpretations, previously unconscious relational schema and defenses become conscious and that allows the client much more freedom to make informed choices which in turn fosters adaptive living.

## **Cognitive Therapy Aligns with the Justification System**

The justification system is the fifth system of character adaptation, and it represents the seat of verbally mediated thought and symbolic reasoning.

It is organized into language-based systems of beliefs and values that an individual uses to determine which actions and claims are legitimate and which are not, to give reasons for one's behavior, and ultimately to develop a meaningful worldview. Although individuals can learn how to engage in analytic reasoning via the justification system, the formulation provided by the unified approach is that the justification system is first and foremost a motivated reasoning system (Kunda, 1990), one that is guided by (although not necessarily dictated by) nonverbal drives, goals, and intuitive frames, and is functionally organized as a reason giving system, rather than a purely analytical reasoning system. The justification systems corresponds to the key insights of cognitive therapy. For example, traditional Beckian cognitive therapy works by teaching individuals how verbal interpretations and self-talk feedback on feeling states and subsequent actions. Beliefs (i.e., which are characterized as justifications in the current framework) such as, "I will likely fail at this" or "She will never like me" activate feelings of failure and defeat and tend to lead to behavioral avoidance and contribute to maladaptive cycles. The focus of cognitive therapy is to develop awareness of one's justification system and to determine the validity and adaptiveness of various beliefs. For example, it is common in cognitive therapy to teach patients to conceive of their verbal cognitive system as consisting of three levels: (a) automatic thoughts, (b) intermediate reasoning, and (c) core beliefs. Patients are then taught to link the content of their beliefs at those levels to feelings and actions, and then to develop systematic ways, via collaborative empiricism, to determine which justifications are accurate and helpful and which are not.

## **Constructing a Metaphysical System for Psychology's Future**

This proposal has a number of implications for theoretical and philosophical psychologists. First, the majority of work in the past several decades in theoretical psychology has focused on critical theory and deconstructing lines of power and privilege that underlie mainstream

assumptive models. Although this is a crucial aspect of theoretical psychology, equally important is the emphasis on constructing theories that address the field's big picture issues. The current chapter offers grist for the constructive theoretical mill. Specifically, it offers awareness of the metaphysical—empirical continuum and the claim that all scientific enterprises need work on both conceptual and experimental ends of that continuum. Second, it offers a novel metaphysical proposal for the concept of behavior and advocates for a shift from methodological behaviorism to a universal behaviorism, characterized by four different dimensions of behavioral complexity (Matter, Life, Mind and Culture). This system offers novel philosophical ways to approach mind and matter and define the field of psychology. In addition, via CAST the system bridges the metatheoretical formulation with key insights in psychotherapy, reframing the major paradigms as models of character adaptation. The insights and analyses of theoretical psychologists are needed to evaluate this proposal, compare it with the few other approaches for unifying the field, and explore the advantages and disadvantages of each relative to the current fragmented pluralistic state of empirical psychology.

This proposal could be made concrete via imagining a new way to conceive of the field. Consider, for example, a Psychology 101 text book that begins with the idea of worldviews and introduces the worldview of the ToK. From that, the text defines psychology into the three branches of basic, human and professional. Part one of the book focuses on the key issues pertinent to basic psychology, such as neuroscience, sensation and perception, motivation and emotion, and learning. The subject matter here is animal behavior in general. Then Part II explicitly transitions from natural science epistemology into human science epistemology because the behavior of people is qualitatively different from the behavior of animals. Language, reasoning, and human social and cultural dynamics emerge as central. Finally, the profession of psychology, as a health service discipline is introduced. Its mission is to reduce suffering and improve psychological well-being. Theoretical and philosophical analyses are needed to explore the validity of this branching arrangement, the societal implications of it, and the reception such a vision might receive from students.

## Conclusion: Toward a Metaphysical Empirical Psychology

The central point of this chapter is to highlight the fact that there is a continuum of analysis, stretching from empirical data and information on one end, through hypotheses, models and theories, paradigms into meta-theoretical and finally metaphysical questions on other end of the spectrum. It is the role of the theoretical and philosophical psychologists to attend to the latter portion and to examine the interrelations between claims across the various points of the spectrum.

The problem of defining psychology emerged from the absence of an adequate metaphysical system that could effectively answer some of the field's most difficult conceptual problems. These include disentangling mentalist versus behaviorist accounts of psychological phenomena, delineating the ways in which persons are both continuous and discontinuous with other animals, and clarifying whether the discipline is primarily a natural science, a social/human science or an applied profession. The ToK System is a new metaphysical empirical system that is consistent with developments in modern science and affords theoretical and philosophical psychologists a new tool to view the whole of the discipline. From this system, a number of conceptual and meta-theoretical proposals have been developed. This chapter ended with a review of CAST as a meta-theoretical integration that can build bridges between different paradigms in psychotherapy. As such, the example was provided as to how theoretical and philosophical psychologists might constructively operate from the metaphysical and meta-theoretical ends of the spectrum to build systems and integrate the paradigms and allow for more cumulative psychological knowledge.

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# A New Wave of Thinking in Psychology: Relationality Versus Abstractionism

Brent D. Slife and Eric A. Ghelfi

There is a new wave of thinking cresting in the discipline of psychology. Put simply, it is termed “relationality” or “strong relationality,” but in philosophy and social theory it goes by the name “ontological hermeneutics.” Whatever the label, there is a growing appreciation for how fundamental it is to human experience, the way the world works, and practical life and living. Unfortunately, many psychologists will not recognize or understand this new wave. Its rival conception, “abstractionism” or “ontological abstractionism,” has dominated psychology for over a century in ways that are rarely identified or examined. Indeed, when psychologists have sensed the need for strong relationality in their profession or research, abstractionism’s hold is such that it spawns faux relational conceptions. These conceptions never really satisfy, but they seem like the best we can do.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it is imperative that psychologists get a grip on the limits of abstractionism and the harm it is currently doing as the discipline’s dominant ontology. There is no ques-

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tion abstractionism has served psychology well in many respects, but its hidden dominance has led to many overlooked problems. As we will see, too many conceptual blind spots, intellectual dead ends, self-defeating patterns of living, and even relationship problems owe their existence to this relatively unrecognized conception. The second purpose of this chapter is to clarify the new wave. Clarification is necessary because those who feel they understand strong relationality frequently do not. Too often what passes for relationality contains abstractionist assumptions. Though not bad in themselves, these faux relational conceptions can rob psychology of genuinely new ideas and make it appear as if the new wave has already occurred.

We begin the chapter by introducing the new wave and its more influential rival. However, these two ontologies rarely appear in their pure forms in practice, so we first describe important challenges in differentiating them as well as appreciating the relational wave. The bulk of the chapter, then, explains important distinctions between the two. These comparisons attempt to describe some of the hidden influences of abstractionism in psychology and Western culture in order to clear a conceptual space for relationality. To do so, we divide the abstractionist framework into overlapping characteristics and then contrast each characteristic with its relational alternative, including where this alternative is developed more fully in psychology's theoretical community.

## Hidden Ontological Challenges

We use the term “ontological” somewhat loosely to mean assumptions about what is most real or fundamental in the world. In this sense, the main distinction between these two ontologies can be introduced in a deceptively simple way (though, as we will see, there are many complex nuances). *Ontological abstractionism*<sup>1</sup> assumes that the objects and events of the world are most real or fundamental when they are understood as

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<sup>1</sup>We would contend that this ontology is the larger category of many familiar ontologies such as materialism, atomism, essentialism, mechanism, and even individualism. All of these more conventional ontologies are philosophical abstractions of the lived reality of the world. Indeed, until relatively recently (e.g. Wittgenstein, 1953) philosophy itself has been captured by this abstractionist enterprise.

abstracted or separated from their contexts (e.g., the laboratory tradition), while *ontological relationality* (or ontological hermeneutics) assumes that the objects and events of the world are most real or fundamental when they are understood as having an inextricable relationship with particular contexts.

A simple hammer, for example, is best understood from an abstractionist perspective in terms of itself (e.g., its shape, weight, etc.). No reference to its social or historical context is considered necessary. Indeed, the hammer is thought to be essentially the same, regardless of its context. The relationist, by contrast, assumes that reference to context is required for even a basic understanding of the hammer, because its identity can change from context to context—a nail-pounder in one situation, a paperweight in the next. The shape of the hammer, for instance, is crucial for the first context but not for the second. These two ontologies are as ancient as the ideas of Parmenides and Heraclitus, and currently reside in psychology in their modern rationalist and hermeneutic forms (Slife, 2004).

As mentioned, however, their conceptual differences are challenging to distinguish in practice. Indeed, we would hold that even their concepts or meanings are intimately related to one another. We realize that an intimacy relation usually implies characteristics in common to the Western mind, but here we mean *intimacy of differences* almost exclusively, as we will later explain. The point is that this intimacy facilitates the two ontologies appearing together in all sorts of practical guises and mixtures. Perhaps most problematic in this regard is how often they are mistaken for one another. For example, many psychologists view themselves as relationists because they value relationships in their therapy and/or take contexts into account in their research. Yet, with the comparisons we offer below, we hope to show that this relationality is often a weak or even a faux relationality, because psychologists often value relationships and take contexts into account in an abstractionist manner, with abstractionist assumptions (Slife & Wiggins, 2009).

The comparisons we offer, then, are intended to clarify these issues. Too often, the confusion between these fundamental assumptions has been abstractionism's gain. With abstractionism favored by the powerful in the discipline (e.g., journal editors, grant reviewers), ostensibly

relational ideas and practices have frequently been covered over with abstractionist assumptions. In this sense, the soil of ontological relationality has rarely been allowed to fertilize and facilitate disciplinary fruit.

This is not to say that important relational sprouts have not already occurred in the history of psychology. Indeed, the work of Kurt Lewin (2013), Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1968), Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979), among and Kenneth Gergen (2009) others, has already led to considerable contemporary fruit through relational feminism (e.g., Schwartzman, 2006), relational psychoanalysis (e.g. Mitchell & Aron, 1999), systems theory (e.g., Broderick, 1993), ecology (e.g., Garbarino, 1999), and sociological practice theory (e.g., Schatzki, Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001). However, even these conceptual seedlings have not always taken advantage of relationality's *fully* fertile grounding. It is our hope that the distinctions we offer here will provide not only a better knowledge of relationality's potential for psychology but also a better understanding of abstractionism's conceptual tentacles in nearly all aspects of psychology's enterprise.

## Ontological Distinctions

With this brief introduction, we move now to understand the two ontologies in greater depth and illustration by making pivotal conceptual and practical distinctions. As we do, we attempt to note important new wave or relational work that is ongoing in the theoretical community of psychology. Indeed, the unity of this work has been relatively overlooked, so one of the purposes of this chapter is to bring greater connectivity and coherence to this new wave of scholarship. It is also hoped that a more connected community of strong relationists will bring greater recognition from the larger body of psychological researchers and practitioners, furthering important innovation and application.

Five overlapping characteristics of abstractionism are presented—separability, similarity, simplicity, idealization, and top-downness—along with differentiating characteristics of relationality. It perhaps goes without saying that these characteristics are themselves abstractions. Even our mode of conveying these characteristics, language, is often considered inherently reductive and abstractive (Jones, 2017). Nevertheless, our use

of such conventional modes of communication, important as they are, is not an implicit endorsement of abstractionism. The relationist would merely note that such words and characteristics are not the most real and fundamental realities of the world; they are merely descriptions of what is real. The real are the concrete and particular relationships themselves. Indeed, the fact that this abstractive mode is “conventional” is simply another sign of the dominance of abstractionism in our academic culture, a dominance this paper accedes to in making these comparisons.

### Comparison 1: Separability

*Abstractionism.* As mentioned, the most general way to understand the abstractionist position is that things are best understood apart from their contexts. One of the most obvious implications of this position is the laboratory tradition, where the objects of science are thought to be better studied when divorced from their natural contexts. However, this position and tradition also assume a more specific characteristic of abstractionism: separability. For objects of study to be meaningfully detached from their natural contexts, we have to assume they *can* be separated in this fashion—that the object of study retains its basic qualities when divorced from the context in which it appears. This assumption of separability is so fundamental to Western culture that Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan (2001) contend that Western thought itself can be defined with this characteristic: “the detachment of the object from its context” (p. 293).

This characteristic is also seen in the individualism of the West, where persons are thought to be best understood as if their selves are only related secondarily to their current context. The personality theory tradition of psychology (e.g., Freud, Rogers, Skinner) is closely related, because persons are often viewed as if their personalities are contained within the boundaries of their skin (e.g., ego, self, reinforcement history). With this separability characteristic, the fundamental units of community are individual persons who are separated not only from each other but also from the community as a whole. The individual, in this sense, does not bow to the morality of the community; the individual has ultimate moral

sovereignty and autonomy, which is part of the reason personal “freedom from,” a kind of separateness itself, is often championed (Slife, O’Grady, & Kosits, 2017). People should be protected or free from the morality of others and moral traditions of the past. Indeed, communities such as governments and marriages are viewed primarily as instruments of the individual—to facilitate their freedom, autonomy, and happiness.

This characteristic of separability does not just apply to people. Another crucial part of the Western tradition is its dualisms—its assumption that ideas such mind and body, fact and value, and subjectivity and objectivity can be independent of one another. We are aware that some would contend that neuroscience has wholly discredited the separability of the mind and body (Slife, Reber, & Faulconer, 2012), but many psychological researchers still presume the separability of fact and value, subjectivity and objectivity. Indeed, any review of psychological texts on method shows that one of the most important goals of psychological research is objectivity, where the researcher’s subjective biases, assumptions, and values are thought to be separable from the objective and pristine state of nature. Consider the method text from Schweigert (2011) as an example: “Scientists look for independent evidence of their claim: objective evidence that does not depend on the scientist’s theory or personal viewpoint” (p. 2).

*Relationality.* Ontological or strong relationality, by contrast, postulates relationship or “betweenness” as the most real or fundamental. From this perspective, contexts and things are not ultimately separable. The real is less like a self-contained object, which requires the elimination of “extraneous variables” to fully comprehend it, and more like a textual meaning, which requires its relation to context (e.g., environment, body, past, culture) to understand it fundamentally. The relational tradition, for this reason, would have predicted the culmination of the lab tradition where “ecological validity” was eventually required. This does not mean that lab findings are irrelevant to the relationist; it just means that the context *of the lab itself* needs to be considered in truly and fully understanding laboratory findings. The reason, from the viewpoint of the relationist, is that the context of the lab, as with all contexts, materially contributes to the findings.



Persons and their contexts are similarly thought to mutually constitute one another. This shared being does not necessarily mean that persons “interact” with their environments, because many types of interactions can assume the persons or things interacting are ontologically separable in the first place. Instead, a person’s very identity or personality is considered inseparable with the person’s culture and environment. Billy, for example, is the “smart one” in his high school, at least until he goes away to an Ivy League university, where other “smart ones” lead him to a different identity. Because individuals are inextricably part of, rather than apart from, their cultures and communities, the moral traditions and current values of these communities are part of their moral being, sometimes in spite of individual decisions to the contrary. From this relational perspective, important individualist ideas such as individual autonomy are themselves cultural ideas, not facts, as is often asserted.

Dualism too is challenged in a relational ontology. A relational framework would have long ago predicted the downfall of the separability of mind and body, but it also predicts the eventual failure of other dualisms, such as facts and values or subjectivity and objectivity in psychological research. Subjective values, for example, are and always will be present in psychological studies in the sense of researcher choice points for formulating and conducting studies—choice of topic, research design, operationalization, hypotheses to test, statistical analyses, and data interpretation, to name just a few. And these subjective factors say nothing about the many undisclosed assumptions made about topics considered important as well as method and statistical assumptions. Instead of attempting to hide these “subjective” choice points and assumptions—however well-accepted they may be—the relationist would advocate taking them into account when understanding research as well as examining alternative assumptions.

*Theoretical Community.* Many members of the theoretical community in psychology have developed these relational challenges to the abstractionist characteristic of separability, though these ontological meanings and labels are rarely used. For example, Sugarman (2015) and Wachtel (2017) have critiqued the radical individualism of contemporary Western culture. They have argued that this sort of understanding is both unwise and harmful compared to more relational understandings where people

are seen, ontologically, as “deeply dependent on social relatedness and . . . participation in culture” (Fowers, 2005, p. 93; Fowers, Richardson, & Slife, 2017; Richardson, Bishop, & Garcia-Joslin, 2018). Clegg and Moissinac (2005) even advocate a concept of consciousness that rejects the fragmented, dualistic norm in favor of a relational concept of consciousness that views individuals as holistic, integrated wholes. Others, such as Freeman (2015) and Teo (2008), have questioned the dualistic veracity of the “separation of ‘is’ and ‘ought,’” (Teo, 2008, p. 47) and between subject and object (Freeman, 2015; Frie, 2015; Slife et al., 2012). Similarly, Alan Tjeltveit (1999, 2006) and Stephen Yanchar (Yanchar, 2018; Yanchar & Slife, 2017; Yanchar, Slife, & Warne, 2008) have long pointed to the integral nature of values and the “subjective” in the “objective” enterprise of psychology. Gone and Trimble (2012) also provide an important example of a relational approach to clinical practice with his notion of indigenous knowledge in the treatment of substance abuse disorders in American Indians and Alaskan Natives.

These articles and books are just a small sample from the larger theoretical literature, but they should exemplify how some theorists are consciously and perhaps unconsciously challenging the abstractionist feature of separability and appearing to move toward a more strongly relational understanding of psychological phenomena.

## Comparison 2: Similarity

*Abstractionism.* If all things are fundamentally separable, then how do we account for the connections we experience among them, including categories, kinds, and even interpersonal compatibility? To form such conceptions in the West, it is often assumed they occur “by abstracting out what is common to a variety of instances” (Blackburn, 2005, p. 3). In other words, we must look exclusively at *relations of similarity*. To form a conception or category of cumquats, we attend to similarities among the particulars of the fruit, while de-emphasizing their differences. Isaac Newton, as another example, undoubtedly downplayed the differences among his practical measurements to formulate his laws of motion. In fact, it was Euler who later realized that Newton’s laws were applied to

objects which were idealized or abstracted as single point masses, minimizing the differences in the deformability and rigidity of real bodies in motion (Becchi, Corradi, Foce, & Pedemonte, 2012). This downplaying of differences also helps us to understand psychology's classical penchant for postulating abstract and universal theories, such as the personality tradition of Freud, Rogers, and Skinner. Differing contexts cannot matter essentially (i.e., allow change that disallows the constancy of universality) for these types of abstractions to be the highest forms of knowledge.

It follows, then, that the human capacity to create such abstractions should be celebrated, which is part of the tradition of Western philosophy (Whitehead, 1969).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one of the parents of modern philosophy, Rene Descartes, is renowned for contending that our capacity to abstract is the basis of our identities. His "cogito ergo sum" could just as easily be interpreted as "I abstract; therefore, I am," with abstractions viewed as the highest form of thinking. As a case in point, consider the attraction of scientists to the lawfulness of the world. It may be surprising to think of natural laws as abstractions, especially physical laws, but these laws are never really observed. We can, for instance, observe our footprints in the sand or our weight on the scale, but we never observe the law of gravity. Natural laws are inferred (abstracted from relations of similarity), not observed. Yet, seemingly contrary to their loyalty to systematic observation in modern science, many natural scientists consider these abstractions the ultimate reality (because of the scientists' ontology).

This abstractionist emphasis on similarity also extends more broadly to human relationships in our Western culture, as evidenced by the websites [eharmony.com](http://eharmony.com) and [match.com](http://match.com). When people are dating, it is not unusual for them to be concerned about their "compatibility," which they typically take to mean similarity of values, styles, and personalities. Likewise, they frequently view differences and conflicts as unwanted complications, if not threats, to this compatibility. Differences, as Jonathan Sacks (2002) notes, are considered "deeply threatening" in our abstractionist culture (p. 51). And this emphasis on similarity is carried into many human

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<sup>2</sup> This proclivity toward abstractions is part of the reason the authors favor the term "abstractionism" over "reductionism" (or some other term) in describing this complicated ontology. The term reductionism does not lend itself quite so readily to the import of abstractions in Western culture, nor the cultural propensity to abstract objects of study out of the situational and contextual.

organizations and groups, where common abstractions often define group identity. The group unity, its relational bonding, is cast in terms of similar abstractions, such as beliefs, values, and philosophies. Many religious communities, for instance, presume that the commonality of their theological beliefs and values provides them unity.<sup>3</sup> Political organizations often view their commonality of political theory or principle, such as “better programs” or “smaller government,” as the source of relational bonds. There is surely little doubt about the widespread belief that similarity of abstractions provides the tie that binds, whether the abstractions are ethical codes, worldviews, or simple values.

*Relationality.* Strong relationality, on the other hand, affirms all types of relationships, whether relations of similarity, relations of difference, or some combination of the two. Abstractions are viewed as helpful, to be sure. Indeed, as mentioned, it is difficult to understand human language and thinking without the ability to form abstractions. Nevertheless, the relationist would hold that abstractions should not be presumed automatically to be the highest form of thinking or knowledge, and abstractions such as physical laws or diagnostic categories should rarely be reified as if they are some ultimate reality. Relations of difference are just as important, interpersonally and intra-personally, as Carl Jung (1955) and many others have contended. In fact, Kahnemann and Tversky (1983) have repeatedly noted the consistent human error of thinking in terms of abstracted stereotypes. Marilyn Robinson’s (2016) wonderful book, *The Givenness of Things*, also describes how rarely we take our experiences for what they are. We instead derive, as she terms it, “tendentiously inhuman” “models of reality” and then apply them perniciously (p. 221). As

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<sup>3</sup> This is very prominent among religious or political groups who assume that it is their beliefs which unite them. For example (editorial by Molly Roberts at Washington Post, mid-October, 2017), Rep. Tim Murphy was famously against abortion as a political abstraction, but when this abstraction was connected to the particularity of his life—an unwanted extramarital pregnancy threatening his marriage, political career, and future plans—he found himself in favor of it. This example is meant to be not a statement about pro-life advocates, because pro-abortion advocates are just as liable to affirm similar abstractions. Instead, this realization might help us: (1) not to assume that our abstract beliefs form our identities, and (2) to soften the hardness of our positions, given that they have rarely been tested with hard particularities. As Molly Roberts notes, you do not know what you would do until you actually experience it. Could this type of insight allow us to be less condemning of another’s beliefs?

the relationist Wittgenstein (1953) puts a similar warning: "...don't think, but look!" (p. 144).

This relational emphasis on both similarities and differences makes many abstractions, particularly universals, automatically suspect. This is not to say that some abstractions and universals are not valid. However, the Western propensity to emphasize relations of similarity, and thus deemphasize relations of difference, should cause us to pause in forming abstractions that can so easily become stereotypes. Indeed, a host of keen observers of cultural violence—Rene Girard (1979), Jean-Francois Lyotard (1990), Emmanuel Levinas (1987), Richard Rohr (2016a), and Jonathan Sacks (2002)—have all touted the brutality of our Western emphasis on sameness. This violence is not necessarily physical, though physicality can be the ultimate result. The violence they all seem to point to, though they differ on so many other issues, is an abstracted understanding of the subject or person that stereotypes them through the omission of real and sometimes subtle differences that deeper understanding requires. Yet, as mentioned, this abstractionist emphasis on similarity has infiltrated human relationships in the West as *the* tie that binds.

The strong relationist, by contrast, assumes that relations of difference—what some might call diversity, richness, thickness, pluralism—are just as vital to vibrant communities. It is not unusual, for example, for long married couples to tout their differences, even conflicts, as the “spice” of their marriage and the “secret” of a successful relationship (e.g., Slife, 2017). John Inazu (2014), as another case in point, asks us to consider how a “confident pluralism” better embraces the reality of a larger community. Instead of the elusive American goal of *E pluribus unum*, his notion of confident pluralism suggests a more modest possibility—that we can live together in our “many-ness.” Analogously, John Duprè in his book *The Disorder of Things* (1996) cites cogent evidence for the “disunity” of the natural sciences, where unreplicated singularities and uniquenesses are just as prized as laws and principles. William James makes a similar case for the social sciences in his *A Pluralistic Universe* (1977). Duprè and James both deny the simple ascendancy of the similar, and instead provide powerful reasons to include the many-ness inherent in the world.

*Theoretical Community.* This valuing of differences has spawned such significant conferences as David Goodman’s “Psychology and the Other,” not to mention the sterling contributions to this dialogue of Freeman (2014), Morrissey (2018), Slaney (2018a; 2018b), and Teo (2010). Consider also Gantt and Reber (1999), among others, who point to Levinas’s particularity of the face as opposed to abstracting of the person. Ilyes (2018) echoes this argument when she writes that human beings should be “seen and felt as ... flesh and not as abstraction” (para. 1). Jim Lamiell’s recent post (2017, personal communication) to the list serve of the Society of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology also illustrates the move away from an exclusive emphasis on relations of similarity and the move toward greater emphasis on relations of difference, including personal uniqueness. In his post, Lamiell describes a main tenet of his “personalistic thinking,” writing that “persons must be regarded—scrupulously—as persons and not as instances of person categories.” Again, these samples from the theoretical literature exemplify a trend away from the mere abstractness of thinking and thus simple relations of similarity. They represent a growing recognition of the new wave’s inclusion of relations of difference as part of the very identity of people and things.

### Comparison 3: Simplicity

*Abstractionism.* Abstractionism has also led Western culture to favor the simple over the complex. Indeed, one of the more important uses of abstractions is to bring out simple and often subtle patterns from complicated practical phenomena. Even so, our abstractionist culture has sometimes gone a step farther—a step that signals the culture’s perhaps unknowing embrace of an abstractionist ontology—in its assumption that the simpler (abstraction) is inherently better or more profound than the complex. This age-old notion was made famous by the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides, among others, who counseled that we should always look for the principle, the changeless permanence of the real, behind the transient appearances of our experiences (Viney, 1993). As Fowers et al. (2017) describe in a recent book, even our everyday experience of “complications” is typically that of disappointment or frustration.

Somehow, we expect the less complicated to be better than the more complicated. The simpler is perceived as less messy, more predictable, more controllable, and more understandable.

This negative view of complications also seems to extend beyond the everyday. Many scientists, for example, consider the simpler or the “parsimonious” to be the inherently better experimental finding or theory. As the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fitzpatrick, n.d.) puts it, the simpler “has been widely advocated in the history of science and philosophy, and it remains widely held by modern scientists and philosophers of science” (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/simplici/>). This favoritism often goes by the name of “Ockham’s Razor” and apparently prompted the noted physicist Edward Teller to write, “The main purpose of science is simplicity...” (Teller, Teller, & Talley, 1991, p. 2). Perhaps surprisingly, this tendency to extol the simple is also shared by many in the humanities. Artists and poets, for instance, have frequently equated the beautiful with the simple. Consider this statement from Longfellow and Gordon (1849): “In character, in manner, in style, in all things, the supreme excellence is simplicity” (p. 60). Walt Whitman (1855), too, seems to have favored simplicity: “Simplicity is the glory of expression” (p. 11).

Much like separability and similarity (the abstractionist characteristics above), preference for the simple has led our culture, whether lay or professional, not only to deride the complicated but perhaps more importantly to become less sensitive to the complications of changing contexts. Indeed, as Tim Hartford (2016) describes in his book, *Messy*, we experience the richness of context as a kind of “messiness,” and messiness is typically considered bad. This “tendency to tidy-mindedness,” to use Hartford’s terms, is a close relative of simplicity. Both assumptions have led to important practices in the discipline of psychology, including standardization, manualization, and quantification. And indicative of the hidden dominance of abstractionism, such practices are promoted or provided without justification or defense.

*Relationality.* Relationality not only recognizes the potential import of the complicated, it also tries to avoid dualizing (separating) the simple and the complicated. Much like similarities and differences, the two ways of thinking complement one another, and need to be understood together for a robust understanding of either. We do not live in abstractland, the world

of the simple and uncomplicated, contrary to the abstractionist interpretation of the world. Father Rohr (2017) warns, for example, that many understandings of religion have attempted to avoid the complexity and thickness of living: “Most of religion gives answers too quickly, dismisses pain too easily, and seeks to be distracted—to maintain some ideal order. So we must resist the instant fix” (para. 6). Marilyn Robinson (2016) probably makes the relational point more positively: “In all circumstances, complex ... thinking is called for.... Scientific reductionism, good in its place, is very often used to evade the great fact of complexity” (p. 75).

But should even scientific reductionism—“good in its place,” as Robinson correctly notes—be given a pass in science? Should such abstractionism be the only or even primary tool of scientific thinking? Do psychological researchers consider reduction to the simpler as a mere “tool,” or is it, rather, understood in many prominent corners of psychology as *the* way in which science is conducted, including parsimony, quantification, and standardization? Recall in the similarity section how leading lights in the natural and social sciences, such as Duprè and James, have long contended that such reification risks researchers underestimating, if not ignoring, truths that are inherently complex. Albert Einstein was quick to catch on to this point in his own work: “Matters of elegance ought to be left to the tailor” (1915/2015, p. xiv). If anything, noted historians of science have extolled the importance of the complicated *over* the simple in the progress of science. Paul Feyerabend (1993) is perhaps most famous of these historians for his demonstration, one example after another, of significant scientific discoveries that occurred not through the simple application of the scientific method, but through bald mistakes, unforeseen complexities, and serendipitously derived insights. His advice in light of this history is clear: do not even attempt to avoid the messiness of science. Embrace its inherent disorganization and anarchism if you want to obtain truly significant findings.

This advice is echoed in Hartford’s book on messiness. Instead of imposing simplistic order from the “outside,” expect and even encourage the mess in everyday life. Instead of some “rigorous” application of a system, logic, or method, he describes the “Master of Messy,” Irwin Rommel, the brilliant World War II general who, for lack of appropriate resources, would have likely won the war for Germany because of his unconventional tactics and strategies. What if a similar model of messiness were held



up for psychotherapy students to emulate? Would they be better prepared for the widely recognized messiness of particular client care? Prior to practical supervision, many such students must rely on the abstractions of classical psychological theories, where the richness and messiness of real people are abstracted away. The relationist would undoubtedly advocate for some edification in messiness, perhaps some messiness skills akin to the practical wisdom of Aristotle. Aristotle was completely aware that important judgments require the deliberate weighing of particular contexts rather than the filtering out of these particulars for fear of endangering favored abstractions.

*Theoretical Community.* It should not be a surprise, then, that members of the theoretical community in psychology have voiced their concern about these very issues. Consider Rieken and Gelo (2015), for example, who believe that “the radical simplification of natural conditions” has led to a state where the “inscrutable wealth of subjective impressions [is] replaced by a world of simpler and eternal laws” (p. 70). They lament that psychology has aimed to model itself after the methods of physical experimentation, methods that they hold “oversimplif[y]” psychological phenomena (p. 74). Louchakova-Schwartz (2018) argues that even some qualitative researchers fall into this trap of prioritizing the simpler. Others, such as Fowers et al. (2017) devote an entire chapter to the importance of complexity in lived experience and human relationships. Clegg (2010) criticizes the psychology community for its discomfort with uncertainty, which he ties to its drive for simple, eternal truths. And still others, such as Sugarman (2007) and Sundararajan (2005), have pointed to movements within psychology (e.g., positive psychology) that are simplistic or blind to the level of complexity and richness involved in their subject matter. These books and articles point clearly to a movement that recognizes and seeks to understand, without simplifying or reducing, the thick and complex phenomena that psychology encompasses.

#### Comparison 4: Idealization

*Abstractionism.* One way to approach the fourth comparison is to ask an ontological question about the messiness described in the previous section: is messiness *inherent* in the real and fundamental? In other words, is

messiness unavoidable in a practical sense, or is it possible, however unlikely, for mere humans to overcome messiness and achieve some ideal—our fourth characteristic? Here abstractionism must affirm, however implicitly or explicitly, the possibility of practically reaching the ideal. After all, some abstractions *have* to be real for ontological abstractionism to be valid. The real, in this sense, does not *have* to include error, dysfunction, or imperfection; we can easily imagine mistake-free idealizations of just about anything. After all, popular conceptions of natural laws—themselves abstractions from observations—supposedly involve no dysfunction, imperfection, or error. These laws do what they do without mistake or exception.

Even from the perspective of abstractionism, our ability to form such ideals is surely both a blessing and a curse. Ideals are blessings because these abstractions can help us to improve, grow, and reach higher in all kinds of endeavors. Still, they are curses because the belief that such ideals are truly real and thus reachable, with just enough effort or skill, can lead to some bedeviling expectations. Committee meetings, for instance, have long bedeviled the senior author in just this sense. His ability to form abstractions allows him to easily imagine committee meetings that are much more fun, productive, and efficient, leading him to lament the way in which most (all?) such meetings actually proceed. On the other hand, these same abstractions have helped him to lead better meetings, because a vision of the ideal helps him to improve them. The ontological issue here, then, is expectational. It is not whether ideals are possible or even good in some situations. The issue is whether we should believe that such ideals are truly reachable, because if they are, we will rightly experience some momentous expectations, and thus deep frustration with many big and small activities of our lives.

These abstractionist idealizations can also involve whole cultures. Wendy Farley (1990), for example, sees Western culture as subject to “secular myths of progress, the worship of technology, and dreams of personal success” (p. 11). If Farley is correct, such cultural idealizations are surely subject to the same blessing/curse dynamic we just described—a blessing because people will know and strive to make progress, a curse because people will be frustrated when culture does not. The culture of science, though more probabilistic, is really little different in this regard.

When truth and knowledge are fundamentally contextless, then the ideal of eventual certainty of knowledge is possible and should be sought. As Sherwood Belangia (2010) explains, this was Plato's project for the West—overcoming *doxa*, the messiness of the “lower soul”—and Plato's project has continued into the present. Even Western religion reflects this idealization theme. It frequently assumes a similar form of absolute Truth—even though, as theologian Timothy Keller (2016) describes, this absolutizing may not be consonant with its own scripture. And, as mentioned, these abstractionist idealizations have influenced the tradition of theorizing in psychology, where it has long been classically understood that if one theorizes, one theorizes in terms of universals, another form of idealization.

*Relationality.* Strong relationality, by contrast, understands that human ideals and absolutes can often be unrealistic, misleading, and even potentially harmful. Messiness—whether error, exception, or dysfunction—is fundamentally and inherently *part of* the real, not some interloper that distorts our view of reality.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, many experienced scientists reflect this relational understanding. Consider Albert Einstein (1921/1972) again, someone who thought a good bit about the idealization of certainty: “As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality” (para. 3). And if science, mathematics no less, can be understood as relationally messy in this regard, what then about the inherent messiness of Western culture and everyday living? Needless to say, the expectational issue is quite different in a relational perspective, because ideals, though helpful in many ways, are inherently unreachable. With more space, we would probably distinguish between goals that are reachable and ideals that are not. The point here is that people like the senior author should understand ideals differently, perhaps allowing him more satisfaction when committee meetings go reasonably well.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Such a view would quite obviously change many statistical models in psychology, where “error variance” is frequently partitioned outside of the supposedly real variance (Kazdin, 2003).

<sup>5</sup>As of this writing, Ohio State is up 41-7 AT THE HALF against Maryland (football game, 10/7/17). However, all the announcers can seem to do is criticize OSU, which feels like the result of idealized abstractions (expectations) from arm-chair quarterbacks. There is apparently no inherent messiness in football, according to these announcers. Political and religious leaders also seem

Christopher Lasch (1980), in his book *The Culture of Narcissism*, also documents our cultural ideals regarding power and control. They frequently lead, in his view, to heedless and destructive excesses as we seek ideals of power and control that are not truly realizable. Too often, he argues, we have settled for the abstraction of “endless improvement,” leaving us unable to cope with fundamental and perhaps even ontological human limitations. As a case in point, positive psychology’s conceptions of human flourishing have frequently been informed by such ideals, where ultimate happiness and well-being are viewed as reachable (Gable, Profile, Gable, & Haidt, 2005; Keyes, 2002). But what if human limitations and human messiness are inherent in such attempts? Fowers et al. (2017) show how human frailty, fragility, and dependence are part of, rather than apart from, human flourishing. Even our attempts to cope with human suffering have often succumbed to the abstractionism of unrealistic and unhelpful conceptions. Farley (1990), for instance, describes how the abstractionist tradition of Christian theodicy has stretched the potential purpose and meaningfulness of suffering to too many situations. Some suffering may have no meaning or purpose, other than our outrage at its occurrence.

The relationist would want to champion ontological humility in this regard. To believe that we can potentially attain such ideals is to partake of a kind of arrogance that can lead to many negative consequences. As William James (1912) pleads, “cannot we at least use our sense of our own blindness to make us more cautious” (p. 53). And the advancement of knowledge does not necessarily require these idealized goals. Josh Clegg (2017) rightly declares that “an uncertain, fallible, socially embedded science ... can make smart phones just fine” (p. 6). To borrow Mark Freeman’s (2015) term, good science calls not for the pretense of certainty, but for “hermeneutic humility” (p. 8). Lived reality, in this relational sense, is what Belangia (2014) calls a “defective reading,” (para. 1) where defects are not factors to be eliminated but inherent in reality itself. We need to move, according to Belangia, from the premature closure of abstractionism to a noetic openness. The abstractionist conception of

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subject to the same unfair standards and comparisons (to the ideal). It is one of the parts of Western abstractionist culture that can make us very uncharitable toward one another.

Truth is either too thin to hold everyday meaning or too irrelevant to matter. The relationist thus endorses the hermeneutic understanding of humans as possessing no final or complete knowledge of the truth, with even *this* understanding open to debate.

*Theoretical Community.* Once again, relational flesh is put on these skeletal bones elsewhere. Indeed, several scholars working within the theoretical branch of psychology have argued that limitations and suffering are perhaps essential to the human experience (e.g., Fowers et al., 2017). Instead of justifying or explaining away suffering, Bishop, Richardson, Freeman, and Slife have explored the notion of Farley's "tragic vision," where tragedy is not outside of our lives but inherent within them (Richardson & Bishop, 2004; Slife, 2004). Similarly, Lasch (1991) advocates a "wisdom of limits," which is necessary to any viable conception of redemptive suffering. In fact, Richardson and Slaney (2018) explore how this wisdom of limits can address some of the difficulties created by idealizations such as "equality" and "diversity." And as Richardson has described (e.g., Richardson & Guignon, 2008), Woodruff (1997) provides a helpful analysis of the virtue of "reverence," which appreciates aspects of the human condition that are beyond our control. Other writers in the theoretical community have directly critiqued the transhumanist movement, specifically the idea that science can lead to endless progress resulting in human perfection and immortality (Grant, 2018; Mitchell, 2018). These authors, along with many others, have been implicitly and sometimes explicitly working to help us properly understand our relationship to idealizations.

## Comparison 5: Top-Downness

*Abstractionism.* The final characteristic of ontological abstractionism is the presumed direction of knowledge, application, and truth (or Truth). This direction is from the top of the "ladder of abstraction" to the bottom. The "top" means the most abstract, and the "bottom" means the least abstract. As we learned from the previous characteristics, abstractions such as natural laws and ethical principles are often considered the ultimate forms of knowledge and truth. It follows, then, that the impor-

tant aspects of our lives proceed from these abstractions, whether codes, techniques, or formulas. Consider, for example, how the senior author has historically been Dr. Theory, or even Dr. Abstraction, for many of our university's counseling and clinical doctoral students over the years. This informal title is typically meant in jest, but it does betray his colleagues' understanding that faculty should first teach students a collection of theoretical abstractions (i.e., personality/psychotherapy theory), which they then should apply in the concreteness and particularity of therapy—from the top of psychological theory to the bottom of therapeutic intervention. As Merleau-Ponty (1964) would put it, psychologists tend to look at particulars “from above,” and think of them as “object[s] in general” (p. 160).

With the dominance of abstractionism, the top-down direction of knowledge and truth does not just pertain to the supposed relation of theory and application. This directionality is pivotal to all types of taken-for-granted thinking, from science and business to ethics and religion. The natural laws of science, for example, are popularly viewed as emanating their power from the top down. The laws themselves, which are frequently understood as the most universal of entities, are considered to unite and govern all the relevant concrete and particular events of the world. This top-down governing is one of the origins of determinism, the notion that such laws determine their concrete events, and thus disallow “free will and personal responsibility” (Rychlak, 1979). The laws work from the abstract to the concrete, which may have historically inspired psychological methodologists, who frequently depict the conducting of scientific investigation as an application of higher-order method logic, such as different types of research design. In this top-down abstractionist sense, the scientific method is often seen as the testing of abstractions (hypotheses, theories). And this process is itself considered an orderly, systematic procedure with clear principles for its concrete application in discerning the abstractions of natural laws and principles (Barlow, Nock, & Hersen, 2008; Kazdin, 2003).

Many non-science activities proceed with a similar directionality in the West. Many organizations, for example, assume that ethical abstractions, in the form of propositions and principles, are best for governing the concrete moral actions of their members. And many corporations under-

stand power in this same top-down manner (Mintz & Schwartz, 1985; Mullins & Schoar, 2016). The classical organizational hierarchy, for example, exhibits this directionality, as the power of CEOs supposedly moves down to concrete applications among the “lower” employees. Consider also how many religious groups presume a similar directionality, with divine power and even sacredness operating from the top down, from God on high down to the people here below (Rohr, 2016b).

*Relationality.* Strong relationality, on the other hand, embraces the importance of bottom-up as well as top-down thinking and direction. Bottom-up thinking is moving from the concretely particular or “bottom” of a situation “up” to thoughts and abstractions about those particulars. Many parents experience their child-rearing as an especially salient example of this bottom-up situation. Particular activities of children occur, and decisions about how to deal with these activities are needed—parenting. The apparently bottom-up nature of parenting is partly why so many parents find this task so daunting. Our abstractionist top-down oriented culture does not prepare parents well. For example, psychological books on parenting are almost invariably of this top-down variety as they offer “parenting principles” that are vaguely helpful, but never seem to fit the parenting situation. Child-rearing is such a moving-target as children mature and sibling dynamics change seemingly moment by moment. Nevertheless, top-down strategies are so prevalent in Western training models that many “parenting experts” would likely be hard-pressed to know how to go about such training any other way.

It is also important from the perspective of a relational ontology not to dualize or separate bottom-up and top-down approaches. The relationist assumes that the particulars of the bottom and the abstractions of the top are inextricably related and cannot be understood in any complete way without taking the other into account. This inseparability (Characteristic 1) means not only that no bottom-up or top-down approach *should* occur without taking account of the other, but that no such approach ever *does* occur without the other. Whatever approach is not foregrounded is implicit. All fledgling therapists, for instance, are necessarily informed by the bottom particulars of their cases, despite their primarily theoretical education, just as all parents are necessarily informed by the top. In fact, parents are often surprised by the tacit abstractions they have formed about parenting from their own childhood.

From this non-dualist viewpoint, the abstract patterns of natural laws matter greatly, of course, but these patterns do not have to be interpreted as “governing” the bottom, and thus determining relevant concrete natural events. The concrete events themselves matter to these laws from a relational perspective. Indeed, this point was one of the significant implications of Einstein’s theories of relativity, where Newton’s laws of motion—formulated as working in a top-down manner—need to take into account the *particular* observer’s inertial frame of reference (Einstein, 1915/2015). The economic law of supply and demand is another example. This law is popularly interpreted as governing consumer behaviors, as if the law itself determines the economic actions of consumers (Ball & Seidman, 2012). Yet this abstractionist understanding of the law is, at best, misleading. There is little doubt that this “law” is an important abstraction of consumer choice patterns in light of supply and demand conditions, but the mere patterning of these choices does not make them governed from the top. The bottom—particular consumers themselves—help to determine the conditions of supply and demand as the consumers decide to buy or not buy.

Another relational problem with the abstractionist top-down interpretation of these behavioral patterns is that the principles, patterns, or rules of the top do not contain instructions for their application as they move “down” to the concrete. The therapy theories of novice therapists as well as the ethical principles of organizational members are frequently experienced at the bottom as thin, vague, and just plain too general—at best only part of the answer. Something like Aristotle’s conception of practical wisdom, where particular context is always and necessarily involved, is needed to navigate any issue of judgment. Still other relationists criticize abstractionist understandings of power. Bourdieu (2005; Bourdieu, Thompson, Raymond, & Adamson, 1991), for instance, describes poignantly how the seemingly powerless can still foil leaders at the top. And Father Rohr (2003) explains his interpretation of Christianity as “bias from the bottom.” Rather than God’s power always emanating “downward,” the sacredness and power of divinity is found in the ordinary—in art, music, and even menial practices—echoing Taylor’s “affirmation of the ordinary” (Taylor, 1989).



*Theoretical Community.* These relational understandings have informed the research of many psychological theorists, including Morrissey (2011), Osbeck, Nersessian, Malone, and Newstetter (2010), and Wachtel (2017), as well as Taylor's (1983) notion of social theory as practice, which Westerman (2004) and Yanchar have often championed. Westerman, for example, advocates an approach to conducting psychological research and theorizing that takes concrete practices, not methodologies or rules, as its starting point. Yanchar et al. (2008) suggest that the model of critical thinking in which psychology has long educated students and researchers is less effective because it overemphasizes the "rule-following" criticism of methods and procedures. Indeed, they suggest that critical thinking in psychology should itself be considered a practice—one that "incorporate[s] relational values such as dialogue, care, and respect"—rather than a method (p. 265). Hohn (2018) and Grice (2018) highlight recent controversies within psychology, such as the replication crisis, that exemplify methodological issues resulting from a too-strict adherence to the rules and customs of psychological methods and principles of measurement. They suggest, as do others (e.g., Slaney, 2018b), that psychology can improve as a science by moving beyond these rules and attending in greater detail to the nature of phenomena being studied and adjusting methods based on that nature. In these examples and others, the shift away from abstractionist, top-down thinking has been underway in psychology's theoretical community for some time.

## Conclusion

With this too-brief introduction, we hope some of the major players and important aspects of a new wave of psychological thinking are a little clearer. Presenting the relationship between the two ontologies was not merely a device of clarification. The new wave is not just an openness to the perspective of ontological relationality; it is also a sensitivity to the many aspects of Western culture, science, and professionalism, that are dominated by ontological abstractionism. Indeed, the depth and breadth of this ontological framework may be surprising. Consider how the laboratory tradition, individualism, and dualism all owe their existence, at

least in part, to implicit ideas that assume the separability of events, things, and people. And separability is merely the first characteristic of abstractionism. Consider how much of our culture is thought to depend on our capacity to formulate abstractions—relations of similarity—which supposedly describe our thinking and rationality as well as our derivation of scientific and ethical principles. The significance of similarity relations even extends to everyday human relations, where the pivotal bonds of marriage and community are presumed to be strengthened through similarity of abstractions, such as belief, value, and philosophy, and weakened through differences, conflicts, and otherness.

Strong relationality offers a fresh perspective on these and other themes of culture and professional understanding. In fact, the influences of this relational perspective have already begun to show themselves with the advent of qualitative research in psychology and the growing recognition that context is just as important as specific objects of study. We also cite important scholarship that points to vital questions and criticism of subject/object dualism in science and liberal individualism in culture. Subjectivity is not really minimized in science, and individualism is not necessarily the best path to the good life. Acknowledgement of these kinds of ontological connections among such widely divergent cultural themes allows us to understand and question the big ideas that are behind and enlivening them. Is it possible, for example, that things, people, and events are only separable in theory and not ontologically separable in reality? And the second characteristic of abstractionism, similarity, raises an analogous question. Strong relationists would question the elevation of relations of similarity, because relations of difference are just as important for understanding our world. Human relationships are probably where this question is most readily realized. Strong relationality would assume that real “compatibility” should include complementary differences as well as similarities, and that vibrant communities and marriages should be rich with creative tensions as well as commonalities.

Still another characteristic of abstractionism, simplicity, is also a pervasive cultural and professional norm. The popular understanding of “complications” nearly always assumes they are somehow negative, and the goodness of simplicity is explicitly praised in such widely varying spheres of endeavor as natural science, poetry, and religion. Messiness, in this

same sense, is typically viewed pejoratively but thought to be surmountable with the right effort and skill. Non-messy idealizations are not only possible, from this abstractionist perspective, but implicitly understood as the most real or fundamental modes of being. The problem with this understanding for the relationist, however, is that such expectations can balloon out of proportion to reality. These unreasonable expectations can lead not only to stress and frustration but also to dangerous stereotyping and unreasonable collective abstractions, such as the need for perpetual happiness and endless progress. The relationist would hold, instead, that human limits, fragility, and frailty are part of, not apart from human flourishing.

Abstractionism is also quite evident in the supposed flow of knowledge in Western culture, from abstractions at the “top” to concreteness at the “bottom.” The best knowledge is widely thought to be abstractions of the world, whether principles, formulas, or strategies, that are then applied to the concrete particulars of that world. Researchers apply experimental hypotheses, research designs, and statistics, while practitioners apply diagnostic categories, intervention techniques, and ethical codes. Even natural laws and corporate power are often understood to work from the top down. Natural laws supposedly govern from the top of the law, itself an abstraction from concrete observations, down to its particular sphere of determination. Business power is likewise frequently viewed as moving from management to labor. Yet, as the relationist notes, this abstractionist view of directional flow underestimates, and perhaps even ignores in many instances, the power of particulars. Examples were provided about important powers emanating from “below,” whether in human, divine, or natural systems. Indeed, this power of the particular *must* exist because the abstractions at the top give no instructions for the inevitable tailoring and adjusting that must occur for their use in the concrete world. The power of the particular is what makes these adjustments possible.

The new wave, for all these reasons, is the dialectical relation between these two ontologies. Their intimate relationship is part of our justification for not assuming that the practical manifestation of either ontology necessarily means its influence in some pure form. These two sets of ontological ideas *imply* one another dialectically, and so they can easily occur in many amalgams and mixtures. Our meaning of dominance, then, is

that abstractionism is more influential in more particular practices, not that it is exclusively influential. Indeed, if relationality is *actually* ontologically real, then it has always been present, and thus intuited, in the reality of the world all along. It has just been covered over with influential abstractions and historical interpretations of that world. Even so, we believe that the groundswell of relational work occurring in the theoretical community of psychology indicates that the time has come to identify and understand *both* of these ontological philosophies.

Our re-envisioning of theoretical psychology, in this sense, is not so much fostering different research as it is making explicit the ontological connections that many diverse theorists are currently overlooking. These connections would provide vital common language for contrasting abstractionism and relationality as well as facilitate recognition of the conceptual unity that is already present in their work. Perhaps most importantly, such “big ideas” would incite interest and invite other thinkers to explore ontological relationality as a viable interpretive framework. As we have argued, this framework would not only illuminate new, more relational avenues of inquiry in fields where abstractionism has dominated; its contrast with this dominance would enable researchers and practitioners to better understand how and to what degree abstractionism has influenced their methods, theories, and practices.

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# Beyond Reflexivity in Theoretical Psychology: From Philosophy to the Psychological Humanities

Thomas Teo

The relationship between theoretical and philosophical psychology—united in the name of Division 24 of the American Psychological Association as well as in the title of its journal—is not spelled out clearly by insiders or outsiders. My suggestion is to conceptualize theoretical psychology as broader than the latter, descriptively and prescriptively, thus encompassing theories and metatheories not only from the psychological sciences, but also from the psychological humanities, of which philosophical psychology is just one part. This does not mean discounting philosophical psychology, which still holds a significant place in this subdiscipline; for example, my own work follows traditional-philosophical distinctions (Teo, 2018a), even recognizing how untenable some of these classical divisions are, if we take recent work into account. These distinctions serve organizational purposes, as heuristics for presenting material, but they do not do justice to the complexity of the problems under investigation.

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The psychological humanities used in theoretical psychology provide (meta)theoretical opportunities for rethinking and re-envisioning the psychological subject matter and its methodology. For instance, Barad's (2006) feminist work should be mentioned as an instantiation for expanding the boundaries of theoretical work. Her ideas about onto-epistemology, agential realism, or intra-action have relevance not only to metatheory, but even to psychology proper, when considering investigations on subjectivity (Marn, 2018). Similarly, the work of the feminist theoretician Braidotti (2013) expands our understanding of subjectivity in the posthuman condition, with consequences, for instance, for studies on ability/disability (Goodley, Lawthom, & Cole, 2014).

Even while Barad or Braidotti could be considered "theoretical" in a broad sense of the meaning, they have contributed to re-conceptualizing the psychological subject matter, and, thus, can be appropriated as part of the psychological humanities. Theoretical psychology, including reflections from the psychological humanities, is broader than the discipline of philosophy, and allows psychologists to draw on historiography, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, postcolonial and indigenous theories, the arts, social work, education, and so on, in order to think about the psychological and its conditions (Teo, 2017). Should the disciplines from the concept-driven humanities, social sciences and arts address the psychological subject matter, and move beyond deconstruction and reconstruction, the term psychological humanities as an umbrella term makes sense, referring to a series of knowledge practices outside of the natural sciences.

## Tradition and Beyond

The broadening of theoretical psychology does not mean the abandonment of the traditional tasks of philosophical psychology. These tasks identify the conditions for the possibility of psychology as a discipline and practice, by analyzing their ontological, epistemological, ethical and aesthetic foundations; by challenging them; by proposing alternatives; or by identifying the hidden assumptions or the intellectual aporias that guide psychology (see also Slife, Reber, & Richardson, 2005). Such

metatheory is still required for a critical assessment of psychology. Theoretical psychology can be deconstructive (critical) and reconstructive (e.g., historical), but its possible expansion into the psychological humanities means constructively contributing to theories of human mental life. A theory of mental life needs to go beyond the subdivisions of the psychological that have captivated psychology for over a hundred years in the psychological sciences and must focus on forms of theoretical generality or generalizability in psychology. The logic of the psychological humanities is not hypothesis-testing but rather entails providing basic general answers to the comprehensive conceptualization of human subjectivity.

*Tradition* means drawing on classical topics of philosophical reflection and providing them with new meaning. For example, I have distinguished between socio-subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and intra-subjectivity, and their nexus, in order to understand human mental life (Teo, 2017). For socio-subjectivity, I can ask myself whether my mental life would be the same as it is now if I were born in twelfth century Japan. The term socio-subjectivity attempts to account for the fact that our own subjectivity is embedded in history, culture, and society, and that we would not have the same first person-standpoint as we have now if we were born in a different century and culture with the same genetic makeup. We also know that growing up with different parents, step-parents, siblings, peers, or teachers, means experiencing different subjectivities. Intersubjectivity, indeed a classical philosophical term, refers to the fact of the relational constitution of a first-person perspective, beginning in infancy (parent-child relations) and affecting us throughout our lives (family, friends, colleagues, texts, mass media, etc.). Intra-subjectivity may include personal factors, psychodynamic processes, subjective idiosyncrasies, or biological constraints. For instance, I would *suture* myself differently into the world if I were to consume heavy drugs on a daily basis or if I were to sustain a brain injury.

Of course, a continuation of these reflections shows that these three dimensions of subjectivity are interrelated, and privileging one over the others would be epistemologically problematic. It is also evident that conceptualizing subjectivity in this way, that is, a constructive act of theorizing human subjectivity, needs to go far beyond the psychological

sciences and draw on the psychological humanities that have provided ample material on the meaning and practices of subjectivity. Because the three forms of subjectivity are connected, it would be scientifically problematic to privilege only intra-subjective phenomena. Accordingly, theoretical work needs to be inherently inter- and transdisciplinary. I suggest that a reconceptualization of intentionality would make sense under the assumption of this nexus. Extending Brentano (1874/1995), I propose that every mental phenomenon makes reference to objects that always have socio-historical meanings. I call this socio-intentionality; for example, agency is always directed towards material or immaterial objects and events in society, culture, and history. If we did not partake in this socio-intentionality, we would not be able to live in societies, let alone in advanced societies.

Theoretical psychology needs not only to address interaction (relations), but also labor and the self that includes not only the mind but also the body. Indeed, beings based on a *private-individual* or *interaction-only* model would not be able to conduct their lives in concrete societies. Mainstream psychology and significant parts of philosophical psychology are based on a homunculus (Holzkamp, 1983) that engages with the self and with others in dialogue and conversations, an entity that may even be constituted by cultural history, but a subject that does not participate or work in society. Labor and associated categories such as money, debt, income inequality, dispossession, economic privilege, class, production, and so on, hardly appear in reflections on psychological subjectivity. Theoretical psychology needs to propose a framework for subjectivity where labor is accounted for. Theoretical psychology also needs to understand the degree to which subjectivity is the outcome of processes of subjectification, responsabilization, governmentality, or psychologization, consistent with the idea that psychologists need to move beyond the natural sciences in order to understand human mental life.

When philosophical psychologists talk about being-in-the-world they neglect a thorough analysis of what this world looks like and how it can be explained and perhaps even changed. This means that a constructive theoretical psychology needs to address the nexus between embodied mental life, neoliberalism, and technology (genetic testing, social media, robots), which can be answered quantitatively (psychological sciences),

qualitatively (psychological humanities), and meta-theoretically in order to make sense of the enormous complexity that has been accumulated in history. Describing the world as neoliberal means interrogating forms of subjectivity to which individuals stitch themselves into (Teo, 2018b). This does not mean that theoretical psychology, based on such new horizons, should not be challenged; rather, theoretical psychology needs to be challenged, which is the goal of reflexivity and interference.

## Reflexivity and Beyond

The task of a reflexive deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction in psychology is based on the idea that psychology needs to become a self-reflexive discipline that is aware of its own history, limitations, and problems, on the background of psychology's historical and conceptual record of problem-making (instead of problem-solving) and its onto-epistemological short-comings (Teo, 2018a). Indeed, the problems of psychology are not only rooted in epistemology but in its societal function. Yet, reflexivity has a long and conflictual tradition (Burman, 2006; Finlay & Gough, 2003). Beyond the various definitions of reflexivity and questions about its accomplishments, the main problem from the perspective of the psychological humanities is the degree to which reflexivity is able to escape the borders of a given horizon. Clearly this reflexivity cannot be conducted alone in a monologue but requires engagement with the *Other* and horizons that are radically different from one's own. Asking questions about the psyche can be nurtured by philosophers and other human scientists (e.g., historians or even artists).

Ontological questions about psychology may target the unique character of psychology, the reasons for its fragmentation, the meaning of *being human* that underlies explicitly and implicitly the (research) practices of psychology, and the nature of psychological objects and concepts (see Teo, 2018a). From an epistemological perspective, theoretical psychologists ask about the consequences of positivism in psychology, about the role that social characteristics play in the process of knowledge making, and about the degree to which culture and history contribute to psychological knowledge. It is legitimate to ask why a certain methodology and



not another is used, how and why psychologists interpret results, and what are the practical consequences that they have envisioned. Ethical reflexivity includes questions about the role of psychology in the history of oppression, the degree to which the discipline and practices have contributed to (in)justice, and more generally, the role of power and financial interests in shaping the discipline.

Theoretical psychology needs to be meta-reflexive and must ask about the historically constituted reasons for the call for reflexivity. While one could side with the sociologist Elias (1978) who saw the reflexive inward turn as part of a civilizing process in the West, and it is arguably better to be reflexive than to act out psychological processes, Foucault (1978) can be seen as the skeptic who drew attention to the possibility of reflexivity (as confession) as a mechanism of power. Reflexivity is exposed to the double threat of an internalized form of power or of being trapped in one's own categorial schemata. Reflexivity as dialogue with the *Other* as persons, disciplines, cultures, or practices is necessary but not sufficient for theoretical psychology as a constructive project.

Reflexivity's companion is *interference*, a feminist concept that also draws on physics (see Geerts & van der Tuin, 2013), and is based on the insight that discourse needs materiality. In my usage of the term, interference means that interventions may amplify or cancel each other, but are necessary for praxis. One could argue that interference undergoes similar criticisms as reflexivity, when we understand interference as dialectical praxis. Praxis in my view has been defined too narrowly (only radical societal change counts) or too broadly (every tiny small-scale contribution or even thinking is praxis), whereas interference refers in my usage to small-scale, large-scale or even individual changes that may come together spontaneously when the time and the context is right.

Academic interference includes challenging texts that may be sexist, racist, or classist and connecting with persons who share similar analyses on the background that there exists receptivity for this type of analysis. Such interference includes speaking out against something, writing a critical review, commenting on social media, or making a documentary that addresses issues of power and justice. Critical scholarship needs to acknowledge the many activities, including education activities, that have had an emancipatory relevance, even if the material realities have not

been overturned. Of course, the possibility to overturn existing societies, materially and not only symbolically, cannot be dismissed either as a form of interference. Yet, interference tells us that the conditions need to be right to achieve radical change in the realm of production, in the communication sphere, as well as in the world of the self, considering, for instance, strategies against subjectification through art. Theoretical psychology needs to draw as much on interference as it does on reflexivity.

Barad (2006), who uses *interference* and *diffraction* interchangeably, keeps close to the phenomena of wave physics. Given the history of importing concepts from physics into psychology, a certain degree of caution is required when arguing that one can translate particle physics meaningfully into psychology. I believe that interference is also a “standpoint” that accepts difference and asks new questions about the psychological. For instance, one can ask whether our understandings of what it means to be human is limited in modernistic terms and argue that the psychological humanities help us in understanding the posthuman. Braidotti (2013) deconstructs such existing terms, while at the same time she enables us to think about life beyond the self, the species, and death.

Interference in epistemology means considering qualitative psychology, which has occurred in the recent years albeit only at the margins of the discipline. In rethinking generality or the general, it could mean the inclusion of disability studies, queer and race theory, cultural studies and decolonial reflections in psychology in order to rethink generalizability. A rethinking could include the development of new ideas, concepts and even methods that are equipped to address something that has been neglected or that has not been captured adequately by mainstream psychology. For example, we could consider the uses and abuses of anecdotal evidence in psychology, which could mean understanding a single experimental study itself, as long as it is not replicated, as a scientific form of anecdotal evidence. Yet, biographical information, although anecdotal, may contribute more knowledge about the subjectivity of an individual than traditional experiments.

In ethical terms a rethinking could mean developing new ideas about the diagnosis of mental illness, as was done recently by the Section on Clinical Psychology in the British Psychological Society (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Making sense of the psychological world, and more

importantly, of being-in-the-world, needs thought and action, and more than academic psychology. Theoretical psychology will continue to have an important role in concept, theory, and method construction, using existing research in psychology or using research from the psychological humanities. Yet, there is no need for psychologists to submit themselves to the masterminds of the humanities; they can draw on the humanities, but still develop their own interfering ideas and practices when it comes to human subjectivity.

My point is that in order to move to reflexivity, interference, and beyond, psychologists do not need to limit themselves to philosophical psychology. The conditions for the possibility of reflexivity and interference can be found in the concept-driven social sciences, in the arts, as well as in disciplines that cross the natural and social sciences such as anthropology or Science and Technology Studies (STS). The psychological humanities are not identical with the concept or the hermeneutic idea of psychology as a human science and are not a parallel project to the medical humanities. Both programs would be considered too narrow in scope for what the psychological humanities attempt to do, which is an understanding of human mental life in its full complexity and content.

There is a reason that the first-person vocabulary of psychoanalysis has maintained a cultural popularity to a greater degree than some of the technical language of psychological sciences. Subjectivity can relate to this first-person network of concepts. Yet, history has taught us that psychoanalysis itself is embedded in a particular cultural context that needs to be reflected upon and interfered with, and that psychoanalysis has not much use for understanding the nexus of the psychological with society, socio-intentionality, and the material. These dimensions of the psychological, along with the uniqueness in the mental, as well as the objectifications of mental life (e.g., art or industry) cannot be excluded from the psychological humanities. If content has primacy (see also Holzkamp, 1983), then any methodology that promotes an understanding of mental life is possible, whether that methodology be quantitative or qualitative, a case study, discourse analysis, or action research.

## Challenges to the Psychological Humanities

There are several challenges to the project of the psychological humanities as a content-oriented, constructive practice, and not as a meta-theoretical, deconstructive or reconstructive project. On an intellectual level the most significant challenge derives from the poststructuralist or posthuman argument that rejects the concept of individual subjectivity. Yet, subjectification can not only be accommodated within the psychological humanities but demonstrates that thinking outside the natural sciences about the psychological has relevance to how one conceptualizes and what one knows about the human subject. It is exactly this type of critical reflection that justifies the necessity for the psychological humanities. The thoughtful critique of the enlightenment project (see Horkheimer & Adorno, 1982; Foucault, 1997) is itself part of the Enlightenment. Psychologists can learn from this practice of critical thinking, without being totalizing or all-encompassing. It is not an abandonment of the critical function of the psychological humanities but rather an extension of this function. Critical thinking cannot be reduced to scientific thinking, but it requires the traditions of the humanities and social sciences to make them relevant and indispensable for scholarly work.

Given the recent critiques of the humanities, the question emerges as to whether it is a smart move to align psychology with the humanities. My point is not to idealize the humanities, the arts, or the social sciences. Indeed, many studies in these areas are highly particular, often possessing an aesthetic value, sometimes more than an epistemic one. The intellectual task for theoretical psychologists is to identify the relevance of particular studies for a theory of subjectivity or mental life. Despite the fact that general theories have fallen out of favour, it remains a task for theoretical psychology to identify the general in human psychology. This cannot be accomplished by induction or by studies that show the limitations of the general (eliminative induction), but rather by rethinking theoretical work. For example, one could make the argument that all mental life is historical or that we cannot conceive of subjectivity outside of socio-historical contexts that do not determine but set the conditions for the possibility of individuality.

I have made the distinction between drawing on the psychological humanities as a deconstructive, reconstructive, and constructive project. However, sophisticated critiques and extensive reflections of mainstream methodology (including critiques of null hypothesis testing) and the practice of psychology have not had lasting impacts and it would be fair to argue that theoretical psychology has had only a minor effect on the field. Indeed, abstract reflexivity and context-less interference is insufficient if it is not embodied in practice. I suggest that rather than lamenting this state of affairs—the fact that better arguments have not prevailed, or that social reality is not structured in an ideal way—theoretical psychologists should not abandon the critical task of theoretical psychology. Rather, they should demonstrate what they contribute to a better understanding of human mental life, drawing on the psychological humanities.

This may require a general theory of mental life, which is not necessarily dependent on the assumption that psychology needs the integration of fragmented bits and pieces of academic psychology. Although integration has been a longstanding task of theoretical and general psychology, the choice of terms (unification, integration, concinnity, unity, coherence, etc. vs. fragmentation, pluralism, disunity, etc.) determines the problem solution. Despite a century-long literature of problem solutions, reaching from exclusionary to inclusionary programs, there is no evidence that would allow us to consider psychology as integrated. From a theoretical perspective, instead of making even more theoretical proposals on how integration could be reached, we need to answer the question of why integration has not happened, the answer of which cannot be found in the internal but rather the external dynamics of science.

A general theory of the psychological, which is not necessarily based on theory integration, may be exposed to the same dynamics as integration proposals. The humanities and social sciences, particularly the history, philosophy, and sociology of science, as well as STS, may provide better answers for success and failure in science, or for understanding that science is not simply a rational but also a social project. Ideas on what makes a research project successful need to be debated not independently from but in concert with the implementation of a conceptual and empirical program such as the psychological humanities. In my understanding of the psychological humanities, I view them as requiring the contributions

of more than a single person, but rather the contributions of a community that can show the deconstructive and constructive strengths of this project.

We know from Kuhn (1962) that a research program can disappear with the death of its leader, and that politics, organizational structure, group dynamics, competition, loyalty, practicality, and so on, have a large role to play in the success of a project, more so than the logic of the better argument. Since Kuhn, academia and society have changed significantly, and economic, sociological, and political elements have become more significant in a neoliberal context. An updated understanding of the dynamics of scientific / intellectual movements (SIMs) since Kuhn, which recognizes the similarities of SIMs and social movements, was provided by Frickel and Gross (2005), who identified descriptive and prescriptive criteria for success.

Frickel and Gross (2005) argue that SIMs evolve around the production and diffusion of knowledge and that “SIMs have a more or less coherent program for scientific or intellectual change or advance” (p. 206). Applied to the psychological humanities, the emphasis would be *less coherent*, as they are much more dispersed, and the idea of using the humanities for producing knowledge about the psychological remains abstract. Coherence lies in the idea that we can use the humanities to understand mental life, which is a formal argument but not a coherent program of change or advance by itself. More importantly, the psychological humanities operate with “intellectual practices that are contentious relative to normative expectations within a given scientific or intellectual domain” (p. 207). This description not only applies to the psychological humanities within the discipline, but even more so to the work conducted outside, where studies could be considered normative and not contentious, but are not recognized as psychological by the gatekeepers in the discipline.

Frickel and Gross (2005) argue that “because the intellectual practices recommended by SIMs are contentious, SIMs are inherently political” (p. 207). It is clear that changing the discipline of psychology is political, as is the defense of the status quo. The irony is that psychologists committed to the psychological sciences pretend that psychology is not political, but would not hesitate to attach this label to the proponents of the

psychological humanities. One could even suggest that claiming the humanities rather than the natural sciences is a political act because it challenges established notions of doing in psychology and because it targets the power and financial status that comes with being recognized as a science. It is clear that it would be immensely difficult to shift a discipline away from the sciences to the humanities, given the status and politics involved.

Such a shift could only be achieved when “scientific/intellectual movements are constituted through organized collective action” (p. 207). This is not only a descriptive, but also a normative statement, and I emphasize the need to organize the psychological humanities as a collective project. Because of the transdisciplinary nature of the psychological humanities and the fact that fields of research are still organized in disciplinary ways, through associations, education, journals, and conferences, it remains difficult to organize communities that are not dominated by a single discipline. Collectives are paradoxically more difficult to establish in the humanities, where the single-authored paper, the subjectivity of the researcher, individual name recognition, and star power have not been abandoned, and thus, supersede collective and collaborative approaches. Finally, the authors remind us that “scientific/intellectual movements are episodic phenomena” (p. 208) with finite periods. If one is not able to bring about collective action, the psychological humanities will not have much traction.

Frickel and Gross (2005) advance several propositions that could make the project of the psychological humanities successful: “a SIM is more likely to emerge when high-status intellectual actors harbor complaints against what they understand to be the central intellectual tendencies of the day” (p. 209). Anecdotally, I have heard high-status intellectuals in the psychological sciences complain about psychology’s status. But these issues have not prevented them from continuing to conduct business as usual or to consider alternatives closer to the humanities. Significant critics and high-profile psychologists such as Koch (1981), Holzkamp (1983), or more recently, Gergen (2001), have had only limited influence on mainstream psychology. Beyond the outspoken individual, the psychological humanities do not enjoy strong structural support, within either academia or the public (with the decline of the humanities), which supports the idea that “SIMs are more likely to be successful when structural conditions provide access to key resources” (p. 213).

Although the psychological humanities have had access to many local contexts, supporting the assumption that “the greater a SIM’s access to various micromobilization contexts, the more likely it is to be successful” (p. 219), the impact of those sporadic contexts remains to be seen. In addition, access to these local contexts does not translate into changing embodied practices. It might be said that what the psychological humanities are doing is interesting but cannot be translated into scientific psychology, which remains the standard. Although “the success of a SIM is contingent upon the work done by movement participants to frame movement ideas in ways that resonate with the concerns of those who inhabit an intellectual field or fields” (p. 221), which seems to be the case, the future is dependent on concrete exemplars of research that can be emulated by a discipline that more often follows recipes than artful new creations. It is perhaps too early to do an accounting for the psychological humanities, but it seems fair to say that given those complexities, making the case for their significance will be difficult in theoretical psychology, let alone in psychology proper.

## Conclusion

Theoretical psychology can work with various other disciplines as it has done so in the past, most notably with philosophy. It can also work with various other subdisciplines in psychology, such as general psychology, by discussing the general but also the limits of the general in psychology. Besides the psychological sciences that will continue to invigorate the discipline and theoretical psychology, enabling psychologists to think about, for instance, the nature of psychological explanation, theoretical psychology can draw on the knowledge of the humanities and arts as long as they contribute to an understanding of mental life. Theoretical psychology can be deconstructive, reconstructive, but also constructive.

A theory of mental life can be based on the critique of the naïve empiricism of psychology that has accumulated millions of psychological studies, the meaning of which has not been clarified. This meaning can be clarified to a certain degree within a theory of human subjectivity that draws on the psychological humanities and psychological sciences. Such



clarification would entail identifying general conditions of human mental life, which in turn requires theoretical work in identifying general principles such as the socio-historical constitution of the mind. Such clarification also means giving up particularities, ending the loyalty to one research program, and being open to ongoing changes in a general theory. It also means understanding that psychology is not just a rational enterprise but also a political one.

Theoretical psychology as a constructive project is part of and draws on the psychological humanities. As part of its constructive role that puts an understanding of the complexity and variety of human mental into the center, focusing on a preliminary theory of subjectivity, theoretical psychology is also reflexive about its own practices and its own historical limitations. Giving the psychological humanities away to psychology will not be easy, given the reality that psychologists believe that science and psychology are superior to the humanities. Of course, the use of scientific methods in psychology does not mean that psychology is a science. Reflexivity and interference are important parts of theoretical psychology. We should not dismiss action and praxis in order to show legitimacy, once we agree that many humanities are guided by a practical interest (Habermas, 1968/1972).

Given the socio-political realities that set the conditions for the possibility of psychology as a science and profession, the path of psychology, or its destination, is not clear. The attachment to the sciences is not based on the logic of the better argument or based on an understanding of science, but rather based on power, financial considerations and political decisions. This is not a moral assessment of psychology but a description that can be used in a constructive way by individuals, organizations, and communities that are committed to justice: in doing justice to the subject matter of psychology (e.g., mental life or subjectivity), in assessing whether methods do justice to the problems, and in doing justice to human beings in their conduct of everyday life. Doing justice requires, ironically in a discipline that celebrates the individual as part of a distribution, to work collaboratively with people in other disciplines.

The psychological humanities need to move from symposia to organizations, and from conferences, journals and books, to representation in departments and universities, if they wish to have impact. They must rely

on leaders, rank-and-file members, volunteers and students. This possible movement needs to be embedded and embodied and enacted in the concrete practices of psychologists in order to be successful. Theoretical psychologists need to talk about phenomena and topics that are not part of the mainstream but that contribute to a better understanding of mental life. Yet, for theoretical psychologists, it is not niche topics that are of interest, but rather a theory of the psychological. This theory requires a move from deconstruction and reconstruction to construction. Theoretical psychology needs to be about adding something new to the debate about the psychological.

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