

# Theory & Psychology

<http://tap.sagepub.com>

---

## **On Critical Engagement with the Mainstream: Introduction**

Michael A. TISSAW and Lisa M. OSBECK

*Theory Psychology* 2007; 17; 155

DOI: 10.1177/0959354307075120

The online version of this article can be found at:  
<http://tap.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/17/2/155>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Theory & Psychology* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://tap.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://tap.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations** <http://tap.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/17/2/155>

# On Critical Engagement *with* the Mainstream

## Introduction

---

**Michael A. Tissaw**

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, COLLEGE AT POTSDAM

**Lisa M. Osbeck**

UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA

**ABSTRACT.** This Special Issue foregrounds a need for critical reflection on the assumptions, biases, goals and effectiveness of the subdiscipline 'theoretical and philosophical psychology.' Pivotal to the Issue is a contrast developed between criticism *of* and critical engagement *with* 'mainstream' psychology. Contributions address a range of evaluative themes relating to theoretical and philosophical psychology's identity, representative breadth, impact, instrumentality, accuracy, fairness and flexibility. Themes include reflection on changes in the mainstream and on theoretical psychology's response. The aim is to offer a variety of perspectives rather than to seek definitive answers to any questions relating to the evaluative themes. Thus both pessimistic and optimistic accounts are given of the potential of theoretical and philosophical psychology to engage mainstream psychology critically. An additional organizing principle of the Issue is the representative inclusion of traditional branches of psychological research: cognitive, clinical, developmental, neuroscience, personality and social psychology. Within this structure, reflections on the status and efficacy of theoretical and philosophical psychology are both prospective and retrospective. Through its range of essays the Issue strives to make clear that 'engagement *with*' is not equivalent to alliance or compliance, and that the relation of theoretical and philosophical psychology to the psychological community at large is a matter for continual and regular reappraisal.

**KEY WORDS:** engagement *with*, fairness, flexibility, historical context, identity question, mainstream, reflexivity, representative breadth

Although the elements of our title—critical, engagement and mainstream—are well-worn and commonplace, the italicized ‘with’ stands as the point of emphasis in our title and for this Special Issue as a whole. The italics are, of course, intended to convey a contrast. But the point or target of contrast and its implications must be developed with great care, albeit succinctly.

We might note, first, a temptation to assume the presence of a thriving subdiscipline of theoretical and philosophical psychology in view of the range of essays published regularly in this journal and others of similar quality and intent. Also, *that* this subdiscipline has made a difference is evident, for example, in the many social psychology doctoral students who can identify the principal tenets of social constructionist critiques and have a working knowledge of Foucauldian applications. Moreover, critical and theoretical approaches to psychology are robust internationally. But it is equally evident that, at least in North America, many psychologists ‘in the main’ continue to lack interest in or remain ignorant of the accomplishments and potential contributions of a theoretical subdiscipline. Who can deny that a great many practitioners of scientific psychology remain chilly to the idea that philosophical inquiry has potential to inform or enhance their endeavors, or that some questions might best be addressed without statistics? Thus it seems to us that despite its thriving presence in some domains of academic psychology, the status, potential and efficacy of a theoretical and philosophical subdiscipline are matters that remain unsettled and unsettling.

Such concerns would not be troubling were the principal goal of theoretical psychology to cohere not into a *subdiscipline*, but rather a distinct discipline with its own methodology and perhaps ontology. But to the extent that the varied efforts of theoretical and philosophical psychology have sought, by virtue of alternative frameworks and methodologies, to raise awareness of psychology’s ongoing conceptual and methodological woes—often to provoke concern and conversion to new paradigms—questions doggedly arise as to the success and even the very purpose of those efforts. Earnest and continual evaluation of the relation of theoretical psychology to the psychological community at large and to the scholarly and research productions of this wider community is essential on both practical and ethical levels. That this assessment should be ongoing is underscored by a shift in emphasis from analysis of role to that of position—discursive and dynamic, ever-shifting and bi-directional, rather than settled and structural (e.g. Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). With this conviction we have proposed and compiled the present volume.

Our own concerns and questions about the status and efficacy of theoretical psychology initially emerged during graduate studies at Georgetown University in the 1990s, when its program in General Psychology included instruction by faculty committed to rigorous philosophical thinking as an essential ingredient to coherent theorizing and research in *all* branches of psychology. These instructors encouraged us to engage critically *the discipline as a whole* via our emerging theoretical/philosophical emphases. However, we

noted their not infrequent expressions of dismay at the reception of their own efforts to effect change on the discipline and, occasionally, pessimism at the eventual reception of our own efforts.

The ideas specifically leading to the proposal of this Special Issue began to take shape after we entered the professional ranks and attended an international conference on theoretical and philosophical applications in psychology. Despite the high quality of presentations and symposia, at the end of each day's events our discussions always turned eventually to concern. It seemed to us that too often the bearing of presentations on their targets was at the same time presumed and seriously in doubt, and often enough those targets were subjected to belittling or adversarial rhetoric. Did these stances signal an undercurrent of zealotry and possibly even arrogance of which we, too, might be guilty? Expanding these concerns to the subdiscipline as a whole, perhaps the frustration and pessimism of our Georgetown professors were justified, but for reasons that had escaped them—and us. Was the mainstream too smug and/or indolent to listen? Or were we 'theoretical and philosophical psychologists' too often engaged *against*—rather than *with*—the mainstream of psychology?

If we could answer the immediately foregoing question with a cautious 'yes *and* no', perhaps it would be worthwhile to embark on a project to examine the subdiscipline's relationship with those forces seeming to be set against it, self-imposed and otherwise, and the implications and effects of this relationship. But such a project would consist of... what? In continuing conversations after the conference between ourselves and with others, we considered a range of questions on the general theme of theoretical and philosophical psychologists critically reflecting upon not only their assumptions, biases and goals, but also their views on the historical and prospective status of theoretical psychology within psychology at large. Although related, this is rather different from—and more fundamental than—exploring the status and function of new theoretical trends in light of problems in 'traditional' theorizing (cf. Gergen & Zielke, 2006).

These questions evolved into the goals of this Special Issue. We summarize them here as several evaluative themes, interrelated but each with its own subplots:

- the identity question;
- historical reflection and representative breadth;
- impact and instrumentality;
- accuracy, fairness and flexibility.

We will elaborate a bit on each of these and then offer a summary of contributions, noting which evaluative themes are addressed most directly by each essay. We conclude with some thoughts on the extent to which we believe our goals for this project have been met and to what extent our questions remain unanswered.

## The Identity Question: Diversity, Contrast and Comparison, Reflexivity

To varying degrees all essays comprising this Special Issue address the question, 'What is theoretical and philosophical psychology?' We acknowledge that the wording of this 'identity question' may be taken as an endorsement to specify a set of characteristics defining *all* theoretical and philosophical productions in psychology. Such an essentialist approach would be not only ill-conceived, but also exclusionary. Moreover, the complexity of the subdiscipline reflects not only its diverse theoretical perspectives but also to some extent the diversity within psychology at large. We can expect at least slightly different answers to the identity question (and its variants) from persons with similar theoretical commitments, much as we can expect different answers from individuals in different camps (social constructionism, critical personalism, phenomenology, critical theory, etc.). We acknowledge, too, that with respect to diversity in approach to the identity question, 'camps' is an oversimplification. We might also distinguish between *proscriptive* and *descriptive* approaches to the identity question; the former roughly consulting the example of theoretical branches of other sciences—particularly theoretical physics with due reference to philosophy of science at large (see Robinson, 2007)—and the latter describing the practices of those identifying themselves as theoretical and philosophical psychologists. A critical theorist, for example, might attempt to address the identity question in one or other of these ways, or even to employ both approaches.

The identity question includes relational considerations, the most basic of these being *contrast and comparison*. Thus, as a counterpart to reflection on the identity question we must also reflect on what theoretical and philosophical psychology *is not*, methodologically and ontologically. Frequently, such considerations have involved recourse to 'the mainstream'; an expression bandied about and assumed meaningful across generations and paradigms. Traditionally, the mainstream has been defined in terms of a conception of psychology-as-science and commitment to experimental methods as the basis of inquiry (see Jost & Jost, 2007). In light of this definition, Koch (1992) held that Wundt's accomplishment principally has been a semantic one, equating 'scientific' and 'experimental' with 'psychology'. However, the boundaries between the methodological mainstream and its alternatives have become obscured, in part, with the evolution of 'mixed method' designs and the increasing visibility and viability of qualitative methods. Of late it is not uncommon to find focus group analysis included in large-scale studies of outcome or decision making for psychologists working in medical settings (e.g. Steinhäuser et al., 2000; Weinfurt et al., 2006), or cognitive scientists engaged in ethnography (see Osbeck, Malone, & Nersessian, 2007). The inclusion of at least some philosophical inquiry is far more pronounced in certain branches of psychological research, or in relation to particular problems, such

as the origin of concepts (e.g. Barsalou, 2005), models of inductive and inferential processing (Sloman & Lagnado, 2005), or the ontology of emotion (Solomon, 2006). Clearly, 'mainstream' psychology entails more than a set of investigative methods, more than the acceptance of traditional dichotomies (e.g. behavioral and cognitive) or the inherited demarcations of research terrain (developmental, personality and social), and more (or less) than the exclusion of certain questions. These are but a few reasons why we must go beyond traditional definitions of 'the mainstream' if and when we mark the territory of theoretical and philosophical psychology.

Two points are important to discuss on identity-by-comparison. First, we should not forget that many philosophically sophisticated psychologists are identified firmly and principally with one or more conventional (or mainstream) areas of research. In addition to others in the social and behavioral sciences (e.g. anthropologists) and humanities (e.g. philosophers), they have made noteworthy contributions to the subdiscipline's corpus. Indeed, it is tempting to envision the identity of theoretical and philosophical psychology along the lines of a Venn diagram, with many overlapping circles of various sizes, some representing interests clearly within the domain of psychology (including the mainstream), others closely related, and still others more or less on the outskirts. Yet there is a second and more interesting (if problematic) point of comparison. Sometimes the subdiscipline represents and maintains dubious presuppositions that are very mainstream indeed. Consider again the traditional conception of psychology-as-science, which in terms of laboratory practice originally was derived from physiology and whose early practitioners (e.g. Wundt and others) modeled their research communities on the highly organized experimental traditions of the natural sciences (see Danziger, 1990, ch. 2). Scores of psychological researchers continue to maintain that their methodologies are quite in keeping with the natural science model, and theoretical psychologists continue to critique this model as a standard. Yet for the most part the actual point of critique has been a mere shadow of that model, or, as Harré (1998) puts it, 'not the real methods of natural science but some imitation of their superficial features' (p. 30). So it may be fair to say that with few exceptions on this fundamental issue, we have failed to revisit and examine adequately our own presuppositions *reflexively*. Incidentally, this extends to our reliance on traditional interpretive scholarship. 'Cartesianism', for example, is not bungled by the mainstream as much as it is bungled for convenience by our lot, advancing fortified rhetoric at the cost of nuanced scholarship.

At the risk of belaboring the point, we suggest that theoretical and philosophical psychology is not so much in need of increased reflexivity as it is in need of more *sustained* reflexivity with respect to *anything* upon which we rely. To put it another way, we need to continually revisit our 'idols': those barriers to precise and effective inquiry posed by personal, social and ideological commitments for which Bacon (1620/1994) optimistically poised

eliminative induction as a corrective. We need not share Bacon's faith in his method to heed his concern about the forces that conspire to keep us in assumptive slumber. For 'the mainstream' (whatever this might be), we suspect that Bacon's conception of science as a corrective to ideological bias has devolved to an idea of science that itself has become an idol. Yet whatever its identity, theoretical and philosophical psychology is prone to its own set of idols. Its position and reputation as informed critic carries its own set of risks, one of which might be a settled view of the mainstream that invites supercilious disengagement on the part of all parties.

To address the identity question, we have encouraged contributors with a variety of interests at least implicitly to give voice to their own views on the nature, purposes, possibilities, limitations, and so on, of theoretical and philosophical psychology. As a result, in the limited space of a single journal issue, we have a respectable range of views that we hope will serve well to promote continuing reflection on what theoretical and philosophical psychology is and might be.

### **Historical Reflection and Representative Breadth**

The identity question cannot be disconnected from the theme of representative breadth. Because there is really no 'mainstream' that exists independent of specific research trajectories, we have sought contributions that relate directly to as many branches of traditional practice in psychology as possible. We were successful in including cognitive, clinical, developmental, neuroscience, personality and social psychology into our range. Of course there are disciplinary overlaps and some essays are as much 'historical' as they are representative of specific branches of traditional practice. But the issue is roughly organized around these traditional branches. Note that for the purposes of the Special Issue, this scheme took precedence over organization around theoretical orientations, which is of course another way to construe representative breadth.

The organization around traditional branches of research practice is inspired loosely by Koch and Leary's (1992) effort to 'promote a searching backward look at the successes and failures of scientific psychology's first century and a creative effort to discern its prospects as it enters its second' (p. 2). An unqualified comparison between the iconic Koch and Leary volume and our project would be laughably presumptuous. To say the least, there are considerable differences in what can be achieved in a book-length collection of essays versus a single journal volume lacking the momentous occasion of the Wundt laboratory centenary. And the target of our assessment and evaluation is not psychology-as-science, but the efforts critical of this science that have intended to inform it and offer alternatives. These and other differences aside, we believe the current Special Issue is, by equal measure, retrospective, positioned in the present, and prospective. Although nearly all contributions

to this volume are, on occasion, 'backwards-looking', there is plenty to digest on suggestions for more improved engagement with the mainstream and prospects for effecting change now and in the future.

### **Impact and Instrumentality**

Central to this project are questions about theoretical psychology's actual and potential influence on psychology at large. Questions concerning impact are those relating to theoretical psychology's effectiveness in raising awareness as to problems in the conception and execution of a scientific psychology. Who has listened and continued to listen, and what are the visible indications of this influence (e.g. trends toward greater tolerance for qualitative methods)? What factors might be promoting or inhibiting the reception not only of critiques, but also of efforts to inform empirical research with philosophical analysis? Questions of instrumentality concern what potential theoretical psychology has in principle, both in general (critiquing frameworks and methodologies) and in particular (addressing conceptual problems in relation to a specific area of empirical research; see Tissaw, 2007). What is the range of roles and positions that are reasonable and desirable for theoretical psychology to assume? These are questions closely related to the identity question, of course, but they are worth distinguishing here for emphasis and clarity.

### **Accuracy, Fairness and Flexibility**

Parallel to questions concerning the impact of theoretical and philosophical productions is a set of questions relating to the accuracy of our own knowledge and interpretation of mainstream efforts. This includes the extent to which theoretical and philosophical psychologists do their 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 or enhance our own theoretical efforts in view of new developments? That is, are *we* listening, and to what effect? This relates to questions about our own arrogance and presumptions about our role as critics. When on either side it is decided in advance that an approach or field of scholarship offers nothing of value or relevance, slogans and umbrella insults are always a risk, engendering standoffs and ultimately compromising scholarship. Here Rabinowitz and Weseen (2001) describe the culture war with specific reference to methodology, but the dangers implied apply more broadly:

Qualitative researchers are often characterized as everything from trendy, left-wing, and politically correct to untrustworthy, soft-headed, hypocritical,

and exhibitionist. They are criticized for a supposed lack of interest in truth, reality, reason, and anything else that stands in the way of advancing their social agenda .... On the other hand, much of the critique of quantitative research rails against 'logical positivism' and 'positivists' even though those terms are rarely defined, poorly understood, and probably not applicable to anyone alive today. (p. 20)

Given the complexities entailed in this set of questions (i.e. how one might remain open yet firm in conviction of a need for critique and change), we deliberately have sought contributions that represent a variety of positions on the question of flexibility. The following summary of contributions indicates that these positions range from pessimism about the flexibility of our subdiscipline *and* the mainstream to optimism about the possibility of our taking on a more complementary role as co-participant in the advance of mainstream theorizing and research.

### Summary of Contributions

Although we endorse complementary and co-participatory engagements with mainstream psychology, for reasons given above it is important to face those obstacles that have and will hinder such efforts. The authors of our two retrospective essays express a strong measure of pessimism on the prospect of a rigorous, effective and respectable subdiscipline of theoretical and philosophical psychology. Jim Lamiell (2007) maintains the worthiness of sustained critical engagement with the mainstream in reflecting upon his own quarter-century effort to critique the 'epistemic tenets' of the traditional individual differences paradigm in the domain of personality psychology. Although his initial efforts to do so gained considerable attention in the 1980s and into the 1990s, responses from his targets revealed surprising misunderstandings as to statistical and measurement issues at the heart of individual differences research. Lamiell had reason to believe that his continuing efforts to specify and correct these misunderstandings would sustain 'the conversation'. But these elicited no substantial responses and the wheels of tradition rolled on. So he embarked on a protracted and fruitful examination of the historical roots that entrenched the thinking he was at pains to undermine, finding friend and foe in William Stern and E.L. Thorndike, respectively. Lamiell acknowledges that the latter has been the indisputable victor and ultimately shows why deep-running historical undercurrents make *initiating* critical discourse with the mainstream rather different from *sustaining* it. This is a lesson likely to ring true to those who have followed a similar course. But Lamiell's account will be just as instructive to those who have found or will find some encouragement in at least a modicum of attention from the mainstream.

Our second retrospective contributor, Dan Robinson (2007), questions the possibility of a 'meta-psychology' in the current climate of multivariate

statistical analysis, faddish preoccupation with cultural relativism, curricular and instructional degradation and the ‘culture of grant-getting’. Is there something amiss—even arrogant—about the very idea of today’s ‘theoretical psychologist’ *engaging* the mainstream; the implication being that worthy theoreticians no longer are to be found *in* the mainstream? In the course of his essay, Robinson addresses some of our own concerns about identity above. If one hallmark of theoretical and philosophical psychology is the questioning and analysis of taken-for-granted presuppositions that are foundational to research and explanation, then surely our own subdiscipline—itsself the product of all that is wrong with the academy—should not pass under the radar. Perhaps the problems of the mainstream are nearly identical to the problems of those who walk its banks. Or perhaps it depends upon the branch of traditional practice. Robinson’s contribution is at the same time the most widely ranging and pessimistic essay in this volume, addressing the themes not only of *identity* but also of *historical context* and *flexibility*.

In contrast to the pessimism of Lamiell and Robinson, philosophers of science Peter Machamer and Justin Sytsma (2007) are optimistic that progress can be made in resolving a debate that continues to pit many in our subdiscipline against the burgeoning field of neuroscience. Reductionistic explanatory formats employed by neuroscientists to make sense of human actions, thoughts, feelings, and so on, need not threaten psychology as a discipline or the efforts of its specialist critics. It is true that simple-minded versions of reductive explanation have been posited by *some* highly vocal neuroscientists. But according to Machamer and Sytsma, *most* neuroscientists understand that, for example, accounting for cognitive ‘events’ via ‘lower-level’ neural mechanisms can bolster and complement—rather than replace—the social psychologist’s project of explaining same via ‘higher-level’ social factors. The air will clear once the true nature and goals of reductionism in neuroscience are understood rightly by all concerned parties, in particular theoretical and philosophical psychologists outside neuroscience. Being a ‘corrective’ on the nature of reductionism in neuroscience, Machamer and Sytsma’s essay represents an effort toward *accuracy, fairness and flexibility* in engaging the mainstream.

Machamer and Sytsma conclude by discussing the promise of research on ‘mirror neurons’ to explain, among other things, how humans and other animals learn by imitation. This is a fortunate coincidence because Michael Tissaw (2007) focuses on ‘imitation’ as it is used in laboratory research on human neonates. His ‘applied’ angle on theoretical and philosophical psychology seeks to demonstrate the *practicability and effectiveness* of conceptual analysis *as a part of* theorizing and empirical research in psychology. Tissaw’s contribution suggests that demonstrating the application of philosophical tools to conceptual issues in concrete cases of empirical research and theorizing, particularly in ways that are *accessible* by researchers, is one way to make theoretical and philosophical psychology more relevant to the mainstream and promote more ‘friendly’ connections between philosophy and psychology.

Similarly optimistic about opportunities for increased dialogue and common ground are Lisa Osbeck, Karen Malone and Nancy Nersessian (2007), who focus on cognitive science and cognitive psychology specifically. Describing the 'doctrine of cognitivism', they review a range of critiques of this doctrine, noting a widespread tendency among critics to equate cognitive science itself with the strong points of doctrine. They suggest, however, that several prominent contemporary lines of research within 'mainstream' cognitive science are founded upon rejections of the central tenets of this very doctrine, and they explicate the aim and execution of this departure with three research examples. Osbeck, Malone and Nersessian argue that because these efforts cannot be held to the classical critiques of cognitivism, they should be considered on their own terms. Thus, as a contribution focused on *accuracy, fairness and flexibility*, their essay recommends increased familiarity with perspectives. It portrays them as a potential resource for theoretical psychology toward the elusive goal of conceptualizing the relation of the embodied individual to the many-tiered collective.

Focusing more specifically on social psychology and also aimed primarily at impact and instrumentality, James Good (2007) outlines the ontological and epistemological contributions of the ecological approach to perception and its instantiation in social psychology. He discusses points of overlap between ecological theory and pragmatism, and describes the 'mutualist' approach to social psychology that draws from both of these traditions. Good reviews the extensive literature incorporating an ecological approach to social knowing but acknowledges a minimal, even perfunctory, influence upon social psychology in the main. He considers barriers to and constraints upon further impact and evidence that the influence of ecological and pragmatist perspectives has been greater on newer developments in cognitive theory, in particular the movements toward an understanding of cognition as embodied and situated. Good's essay thus might be read as offering a moderate or balanced position on questions concerning the possibility and scope of increased engagement with mainstream psychology.

Lawrence Jost and John Jost (2007) similarly broaden the scope of analysis by providing a historical framework for issues considered herein. By considering the influences that moved Marx from a purely philosophical approach to an approach oriented toward the collection of empirical data, their study bears on all of the themes of the issue while raising questions about efforts within psychology that draw upon Marx for inspiration, particularly strains of critical psychology. By examining the course of Marx's intellectual development, Jost and Jost argue that theoretical and empirical work need not be construed as oppositional in their aims, and they relate these claims to examples in contemporary research.

Concluding our Special Issue is a work by Michael Westerman and Edward Steen (2007), who in representing clinical psychology elaborate the 'the theory of interpersonal defense' as an alternative to the dichotomy of internal processes versus external events and behaviors in clinical practice. The 'Cartesian framework',

as they call it, continues to be as pervasive and problematic in clinical theorizing, research and practice as it is elsewhere in psychology. But although some clinicians have rejected this framework, Westerman and Steen suggest that no viable alternative is in the offing. Employing a range of philosophical ideas—from Merleau-Ponty, to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, to John Dewey and others—the theory of interpersonal defense transcends the internal–external dichotomy with a form of ‘participatory account’ in which persons (including psychologists) are engaged in practical activities. The internal processes and external events and behaviors of the Cartesian framework now are shifted from the building blocks of our accounts of human psychology to parts of meaningful, practical activities of whole persons that become the focus of the clinician. Thus, we have a functionalist account that is different from the psychoanalytic approach in significant ways—defense processes in particular—and opens avenues for posing new questions and gaining fresh insight in the clinic.

### Assessment

Again, the general theme of this Special Issue is critical reflection on the assumptions, biases, goals and effectiveness of theoretical and philosophical psychology. For good reasons we have not sought definitive answers to any questions related to our evaluative themes of identity, historical context and representative breadth, impact and instrumentality, or accuracy, fairness and flexibility. These simply and equally have served to guide our contributors and would-be readers; the former in the conceiving and writing of their essays and the latter in benefiting from the project, perhaps assessing its success and considering future, related endeavors. Nor have we sought to define precisely the ‘with’ in ‘critical engagement *with* the mainstream’, preferring to allow its meaning to emerge to some extent in critical reflection *on ourselves* (broadly conceived) and the nature of our productions to enhance the relevance, quality, effectiveness, and so on, of our subdiscipline’s productions and relationship to the mainstream. However, in this introductory essay and the essays that follow, we hope it is clear that ‘engagement *with*’ should not be read as ‘alliance’, ‘enabling’ and especially ‘complaisance’. Rather, it is a matter of *relevance* and *dialectic*. The contributions that identify specific points of overlap or opening can hardly be read as promoting uncritical acceptance.

Of course, we carry bias into our assessment of the extent to which the contributions to this volume—and the volume as a whole—address and abide by our general and evaluative themes. So it is best to leave such assessment to our readers. We do, however, believe that the final product meets our goal of critical reflection in nearly all ways envisioned, limited as they are. To summarize, there is instructive, retrospective insight on the course of dialogue with the mainstream and reflection on how the ills of the academy have influenced psychology at large *and* our subdiscipline. There are calls

for theoretical and philosophical psychologists not to presume adequate understanding of mainstream perspectives and trends, and suggestions that at least in some domains of inquiry, critical/theoretical work can and must inform scientific research. Likewise, there is demonstration of the use of philosophical tools in conjunction with traditional empirical research methodologies. Finally, it is shown that empirical research can support theoretical efforts to eradicate pervasive and problematic ontological presuppositions and evidence is presented that evaluation of our subdiscipline's effectiveness may depend largely on sociocultural context.

Two quite glaring omissions or gaps should be noted before closing. The first is our failure to include a paper specifically focusing on methodologies. Here we believe there would be cause for some optimism, even modest celebration, in terms of evaluating the impact and instrumentality of methodological critiques. Although psychology is far from turning to a rich and subject-honoring human science methodology (Giorgi, 1970), the number of research methodology textbooks which at least introduce students to a range of qualitative methodologies quite clearly has increased, as has the use of mixed methods in even large-scale federally funded research (e.g. Steinhauer et al., 2000; Weinfurt et al., 2006). Another gap in the Special Issue is that very current and visible issue of 'evidence-based practice'. Nowhere at present does a culture war between mainstream and 'alternative' perspectives seem more in play than around the range of conceptions over what can be counted as 'evidence', and nowhere currently do the stakes seem higher (see APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006; Slife, Wiggins, Bradford, & Graham, 2005). We must plead the excuse of limited space in defense of these omissions.

This is merely a general summary, and we should not forget that the authors contributing to this volume focus on no fewer than six clearly identifiable branches of traditional psychology and reflect both pessimistic and optimistic orientations toward improved engagement with the mainstream. This said, it is not merely the pessimistic conclusions of our more experienced and accomplished colleagues that give pause as to positive prospects, but rather that even where opportunities for more productive engagement are identified—as they are in several essays—the character of this engagement remains unclear and, along with it, how communication could, in practice, be enhanced to improve scholarly communication and research on both 'sides'. Perhaps what is most unsatisfying about this volume is that it makes relatively few specific suggestions as to how critical engagement with the mainstream can or should be promoted and achieved, the parameters of such engagement, and how outcomes of engagement might be assessed. Engagement *against* a mainstream trend is more comfortable to envision and to enact, and it is easier to make recourse to incommensurable paradigms. But, then, perhaps these deficiencies point up the case for continual, earnest and focused evaluation of the position and performance of theoretical and philosophical psychology as it evolves.

## References

- APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice. (2006). Evidence-based practice in psychotherapy. *American Psychologist*, *61*, 271–285.
- Bacon, F. (1994). *Novum organum* (P. Urbach & J. Gibson, Trans.). Chicago, IL: Open Court. (Original work published 1620.)
- Barsalou, L. W. (2005). Abstraction as dynamic interpretation in perceptual symbol systems. In L. Gershkoff-Stowe & D. Rakison (Eds.), *Building object categories* (pp. 389–431). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Danziger, K. (1990). *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gergen, K., & Zielke, B. (Eds.). (2006). Theory in action [Special Section]. *Theory & Psychology*, *16*, 299–415.
- Giorgi, A. (1970). *Psychology as a human science*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Good, J.M.M. (2007). The affordances for social psychology of the ecological approach to social knowing. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 265–295.
- Harré, R. (1998). *The singular self: An introduction to the psychology of personhood*. London: Sage.
- Harré, R., & Moghaddam, F. (Eds.). (2003). *The self and others: Positioning individuals and groups in personal, political, and cultural contexts*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Jost, L.J., & Jost, J.T. (2007). Why Marx left philosophy for social science. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 297–322.
- Koch, S. (1992). The nature and limits of psychological knowledge: Lessons of a century *qua* ‘science’. In S. Koch & D.E. Leary (Eds.), *A century of psychology as science* (pp. 75–99). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Koch, S., & Leary, D.E. (Eds.). (1992). *A century of psychology as science*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Lamiell, J.T. (2007). On sustaining critical discourse with mainstream personality investigators: Problems and prospects. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 169–185.
- Machamer, P., & Sytsma, J. (2007). Neuroscience and theoretical psychology: What’s to worry about? *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 199–216.
- Osbeck, L.M., Malone, K.R., & Nersessian, N.J. (2007). Dissenters in the sanctuary: Evolving frameworks in ‘mainstream’ cognitive science. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 243–264.
- Rabinowitz, V., & Weseen, S. (2001). Power, politics, and the qualitative/quantitative debates in psychology. In D. Tolman & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *From subjects to subjectivities* (pp. 12–28). New York: New York University Press.
- Robinson, D.N. (2007). Theoretical psychology: What is it and who needs it? *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 187–198.
- Slife, B., Wiggins, B., Bradford, J., & Graham, J. (2005). Avoiding an EST monopoly: Toward a pluralism of philosophies and methods. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, *35*, 83–97.
- Sloman, S.A., & Lagnado, D.A. (2005). The problem of induction. In K. Holyoak & R. Morrison (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of thinking and reasoning* (pp. 95–116). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Solomon, R.C. (2006). Philosophy as the queen of the sciences; emotion research as her bastard child. In P. Ver Lange (Ed.), *Bridging social psychology: Benefits of transdisciplinary approaches* (pp. 207–211). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

- Steinhauser, K., Christakis, N., Clipp, E., McNeilly, M., McIntyre, L., & Tulsky, J. (2000). Factors considered important at the end of life by patients, family, physicians, and other care providers. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *284*, 2476–2482.
- Tissaw, M.A. (2007). Making sense of neonatal imitation. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 217–242.
- Weinfurt, K., Friedman, J., Alsbrook, J., Dinan, M., Hall, M., & Sugarman, J. (2006). Views of potential research participants on financial conflicts of interest: Barriers and opportunities for effective disclosure. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, *21*, 901–906.
- Westerman, M.A., & Steen, E.M. (2007). Going beyond the internal–external dichotomy in clinical psychology: The theory of interpersonal defense as an example of a participatory model. *Theory & Psychology*, *17*, 323–351.

MICHAEL A. TISSAW is Assistant Professor of Psychology at SUNY Potsdam, where he teaches developmental courses, research methods in psychology, and a course on Wittgenstein. He earned his AB in Philosophy and Ph.D. General Psychology at Duke and Georgetown Universities, respectively. Besides other publications, he is co-author (with Rom Harré) of *Wittgenstein and Psychology: A Practical Guide* (Ashgate, 2005). ADDRESS: SUNY Potsdam, Psychology Department, 44 Pierrepont Ave., Potsdam, NY 13676, USA. [email: tissawma@potdam.edu]

LISA M. OSBECK is Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of West Georgia. Her writings address a wide range of topics broadly relevant to theoretical and philosophical psychology. After obtaining a Ph.D. in General Psychology from Georgetown University, Lisa's interests in the history and philosophy of science led to a fellowship at the Center for Philosophy of Science, University of Pittsburgh, and recent collaboration with a research team at the Georgia Institute of Technology, which uses ethnographic and historical methods to investigate learning and innovation in engineering laboratories. ADDRESS: Department of Psychology, University of West Georgia, Carrollton, GA 30118, USA. [email: losbeck@westga.edu]