

Executive Summary

Motivational and Volitional Processes of Human Integration: Philosophical and Psychological Approaches to Human Flourishing

“Can researchers discover what personalities are achieving heaven while on earth?” (Templeton 2000, 134)

This question posed by Sir John Templeton is at its very core a version of the question to the consistence of a good human life. Our project will seek an answer not by developing a normative theory of the good – *eudaimonic* – life, but rather by demarcating the necessities of a personality which can lead to human flourishing.

The proposed project explores the idea of a dynamic and organismic concept of the self at the interface of philosophy and experimental psychology. We argue that human self-realization is a goal-oriented process leading from less integrated to more integrated states.

Although Harry Frankfurt and others have explored the idea of integration as a central characteristic of human life, we argue that those models lack complexity mainly because they do not sufficiently acknowledge the findings of empirical research in psychology. In addition to this, we draw from the philosophical tradition ranging from Scotus to Frankfurt, and consider the volitional system to be the core of the human person. An understanding of this system is grounded in three factors: (1) implicit, unconscious motives and (2) explicit, propositional motives are integrated and regulated by (3) meta-motivational attitudes.

Exploring this process is relevant to our scientific understanding of human nature and to practices of leading a meaningful life.

Our approach features research from Post-Docs and PhDs both in theoretical and experimental fields, empirical studies, colloquia, workshops, and finally two conferences in tandem with summer schools for junior scholars.

Located at Munich School of Philosophy and Technische Universität München (TUM, currently ranked the number one German university), the project offers a unique opportunity to bring together researchers from diverse fields and create a true interdisciplinary environment.

We plan to make our findings available to the general public by: TV-features, an educational film, a documentary for national TV, and short interviews for social media.

Motivational and Volitional Integration:

The philosophical model is historically rooted in Whiteheadian process philosophy and contemporary analytic metaphysics (Derek Parfit among others), whereas the psychological model is historically rooted in contemporary research on motivation that goes back to Maslow, McClelland and the more recent self-determination theory of motivation, which is a descendant of the humanistic or phenomenological tradition in psychology.

These traditions have a lot in common. Carl Rogers's "On Becoming a Person" shares significant characteristics with Whitehead's philosophy: the primacy of the experienced phenomenon, the emphasis on process and becoming, the relevance of integrating and internalizing different experiences, all of this is present in both theoretical frameworks.

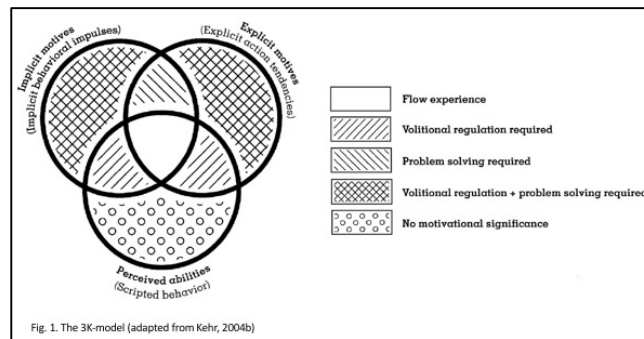
For Whitehead, the self is not an enduring substance, but rather a sequence of temporally ordered experiences. The present is a unifying moment, the past must be integrated, the future has to be aimed at. Persons did not come into existence because animals were endowed with some special substance, but rather through the emergence of a specific hierarchical order of experiences. The process of hierarchical integration and self-constitution is the process of becoming a person. Whitehead calls his theory an organismic theory because it is based on the idea of self-realizing entities with an inner tendency toward growth and fulfillment and the resolution of inner inconsistencies. The psychological model is also organismic in this sense. It is opposed to social and cognitive models of motivation which work on a stimulus-response model, where people are motivated by attainable results in the social environment. The social-cognitive approach construes the organism as adapting to the environment. According to the organismic model an organism is internally regulated. It has an internal tendency towards integration and growth. The more complex the organism becomes, the more relevant the task of internal integration becomes. Internal diversification and integration must work in synchrony to sustain the individual as self, as nothing else (substance or soul) will take on the task of preserving individual identity. This process of self-realization is stretched out over time very much in the way Whitehead envisioned it in his metaphysics. It is in principle open-ended, leading from one attempt of integration and self-realization to another.

The concept of authenticity, as we understand it, is closely related to this process. While there is a social and cognitive concept of authenticity – the state of not deceiving others about what one really thinks and feels – the concept of authenticity we are (primarily) interested in describes the process of becoming who one truly is, not the state of being who one truly is. Thus, in a psychological conceptualization, we could reconstruct this philosophical notion as a coherence of implicit motives with behavior. This idea can be found both in philosophy (Kierkegaard) and in psychology (Rogers). There is a double-aspect of this process that needs a distinction. The "true self" which one strives to become is on the one hand something already existing in need of being discovered, and on the other hand something not yet existing in need of being invented. In philosophy, the discovery model was championed by, for example, Rousseau, the invention model by, for example, Nietzsche and Sartre. The psychological model we use clearly shows that both philosophical models are correct and can be integrated in an overarching larger conception of authenticity. The implicit motivational processes are, to a significant extent, not subject to be altered in their individual configuration by the individual themselves, either because they are genetically based or acquired in early childhood. The explicit motivational processes (centered around projects, life goals, values) are to a larger extent changeable and subject to individual choice. The former need to be discovered and nurtured, the latter need to be

invented and developed.

The organismic philosophical model tries to find a middle-ground between a Humean account of human motivation where the conative system trumps the rational faculties (reason alone can never motivate) and a rationalistic account where reason guides the will (in a fully developed mature person reason ultimately dominates the conative system). The reasons why we advocate this balanced model are too complex to develop here, but roughly we think that the notorious problem of “weakness of the will” can best be addressed by finding a middle-ground between the Humean and the rationalist extremes. The psychological model, again, mirrors perfectly the philosophical theory. In the 3K-model, as well as in the SDT model (Ryan/Deci) it is clear that in the case of intrinsic motivation (integrated regulation, overlap of affective and cognitive circles) the conative and the rational, cognitive system work in harmony.

As stated by the reviewer, Kehr’s 3K-model, initially, is primarily a self-consistency theory, in that it posits that integration of implicit and explicit motives is advantageous for the person.

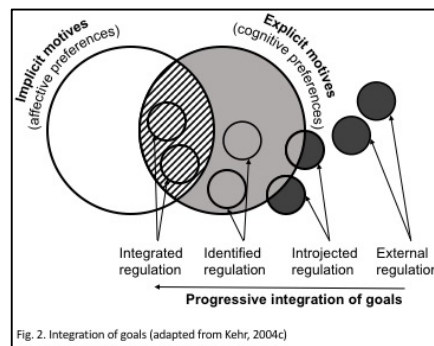


However, by integrating the 3K-model with Brüntrup’s philosophical, organismic approach, this notion is extended. This integration makes it clear that the ultimate aim of the mature adult should not be restricted to achieving maximum integration between implicit and explicit motives, since this endeavor might be subject to the critique of merely advocating regression to childhood. Instead, the mature person should strive to develop a personal vision. The vision is suitable inasmuch as it leads to positive, rather than to negative affective reactions, or to none at all (for explanation, cf. p. 4 of our research proposal). The vision can then be used to build vision-derived goals that have an increased likelihood (when compared to “ordinary”, non-vision-derived goals) of being congruent to one’s implicit motives (Strasser, 2011). Subsequently, pursuing one’s vision-derived goals might then be advanced by aiming to achieve a high degree of conformity with one’s implicit motives (and affective preferences) in order to experience intrinsic motivation and flow more frequently and to reduce the need of volitional action regulation and thus the risk of volitional depletion. From the philosophical perspective this is mirrored in the human capacity to reflect on one’s own life and take a second-order stance towards one’s visions. Within this conceptualization the idea of a good human life, flourishing, might become a regulative ideal for acquisition of visions and their enactment.

Our common research agenda is based on a psychological and a philosophical pillar, for which both the 3K-model and the organismic model of the self provide a basis: the psychological research agenda includes the examination of visions, transformational leadership, flow, and volitional depletion. As the reviewer points out (p. 2, bottom), these research themes seem to be disparate and largely heterogeneous. However, we intend to achieve coherence in two ways: First, both psychological research and philosophical reflection can be grounded in the 3K-model of motivation. We have tried

to show that the 3K-model and the organismic theory are a good match. Second, the 3K-model itself provides a coherent framework for diverse and seemingly disparate research topics (detailed in Kehr, 2004b), especially when the aim is to publish several studies in different outlets. In fact, we are convinced that it is one of the main assets of the 3K-model, despite its apparent simplicity and its sparing use of variables, to provide a broad framework for plentiful research topics and abundant practical uses related to motivation. It also allows researchers to connect different streams of motivation research, such as flow (which results when an activity is supported by all three components) and volitional depletion (which results when an activity is not supported either by implicit or by explicit motives).

But where do we need the organismic model of the self and, more broadly, the philosophical stance? In the case of motivational integration, motivation for action seems unproblematic. The cases of external, introjected and identified regulation, however, are more questionable. Especially in the cases of introjected and identified regulation it seems that the rational system alone can motivate, even if implicit motives are absent.



This rationalist claim, however, is not true from our perspective. If implicit motives are absent, willpower has to be mustered to bridge the gap from insight to action. Does this mean that Hume was right after all? Not necessarily, because it is *reason* that activates willpower to overcome the motivational deficit. Again, the philosophical model based on recent discussion of weakness of the will (Mele, Holton, and others) fits perfectly with the psychological model by Ryan/Deci and Kehr.

Human Flourishing:

Questions concerning the progressive integration of goals lead us to the second area of integration of philosophical and psychological research. In psychology, *flourishing* is a multifaceted latent variable that describes *subjective optimal functioning* and has process character (Fredrickson, 2004). Its key facets include a sense of mastery and purpose, subjective well-being, optimism, subjective growth, autonomy, individual prosperity (Scheier & Carver, 2003; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Keyes, 2002), and social support (giving and receiving; Diener et al., 2010). Moreover, an important precondition for human flourishing is the fulfillment of individual and social needs (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This conception of flourishing is thus in line with both the organismic model of the self and the 3K-model, which propose that flourishing is a process of motivational and volitional integration that results in the key facets mentioned above. For example, both Kehr (2004a) and Rawolle et al. (2016) show how motivational integration is connected to subjective well-being.

This means that the project does not evolve around a concrete “material” concept of how a good

human life should be led. It is not our goal to present a specific descriptive proposal of what it means to lead a good life. Both the philosophical as well as the psychological part of the research agenda will not come to normative claims in this restricted sense. We want to develop an open framework of general conditions that have to be met to facilitate human flourishing, but that leaves open many of the substantive, normative questions to be answered by the individual. This is very much in line with the humanist and organismic tradition. Thus, both research agendas converge on normative questions that concern “the conditions of possibility” for leading a flourishing human life. Whereas a material normative approach would detail *what specific kinds* of intersubjective relations contribute to flourishing, our project might stress the idea that deep, intersubjective relations are *necessary* for flourishing.

Hence, it would be appropriate to describe one goal of the proposed project as follows: Based on a substantial concept of human integration and its relation to subjective well-being, we aim to detail the necessary conditions for flourishing, not its sufficient conditions. The project is, therefore, normative in the sense that it delineates the necessary conditions for flourishing, but not normative in the sense that it describes the material, sufficient conditions.

The two research agendas, however, arrive at these questions concerning flourishing from different angles. Where the philosophical research agenda develops from an explicitly meta-ethical, action theoretical point of view, the psychological research agenda is grounded in a descriptive, empirical approach. Typically, psychological research strives to remain agnostic about the moral values of the motives and motivational ends of the individual. As the analysis above has shown, it is not possible to exclude normative questions completely from this kind of psychological research, as the concept of human flourishing needs at least some definition: Psychological research that is lead by the idea of human flourishing is, thus, intrinsically connected to philosophical questions. From this alone, it is obvious that the two “branches” of our project, the philosophical and psychological, are systematically connected. We deem it among the central, promising possibilities of the project’s interdisciplinary nature that philosophers and psychologists will – on the basis of a common ground which describes the motivational and volitional integration of persons – be able to engage this central question concerning the necessary conditions for human flourishing.

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